

Truth or Consequences
(What You Believe About Jesus Really Matters)
2 John 1-13

Introduction: 1) When Jesus was in the “Upper Room” with His disciples the night before His crucifixion, He made a number of profound and lasting statements. One concerned truth. The other concerned love.

— John 14:6: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

— John 13:35: “By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

2) Truth and love are the twin rails on which Christianity runs. They bring authenticity and balance to our Christian confession and conduct. Yet both are endangered species, especially in a post-modern 21st century world where relativism and sentimentalism reign. Pascal (1623-1662), the brilliant Christian philosopher and mathematician well said of his own day, “Truth is so obscure in these times, and falsehood so established, that unless we love the truth, we cannot know it” (*Pensees*, 864). The apostle Paul echoed this same concern in 2 Thessalonians 2:10 when he wrote of those deceived by “the lawless one” (e.g. “the Antichrist”), “They perish because they did not accept the love of the truth in order to be saved.” The apostle John was so concerned about the issue he penned an entire letter to address the problem. It is called 2 John.

3) 2 John is a tiny and much neglected epistle filled with wisdom and insight. It addresses both the heart and the mind, love and truth. To be so short, it is striking in its comprehensiveness. The letter, though anonymous, was almost certainly penned by the apostle John. It is only 245 words making it the 2nd shortest book in the Bible (3 John is 219 words). It was written, most likely, from Ephesus between A.D. 80-95. The early church historian Eusebius suggests that it and its twin sister, 3 John, was written after John was released from the Island of Patmos where he had been exiled and where he wrote the book of Revelation. If this is correct, 2nd and 3rd John are the last New Testament books to be written. John will be short and to the point in this letter, and he will provide several words of encouragement and instruction for those who care both for truth and love. It is no surprise that both themes are tied to the gospel, particularly to the person of Jesus Christ.

Several key themes and contrasts weave this short epistle into a beautiful tapestry of spiritual significance. First, there are the key words and their repetition. The word truth occurs five times in verses 1-4; the word love occurs four times in verses 1-6; the word commandment occurs four times in verses 4-6; the word walk, which addresses one's entire lifestyle and behavior occurs three times in verses 4-6; and the word teaching (Gr. *didache*) occurs three times in verses 9-10. Second, the letter is linked by three commands: 1) the command to continue to love each other as the Lord had said from the beginning (v. 5-6); 2) the command to be on

the lookout for false teachers (v. 8); and 3) the command to reject false teachers (v. 10). Third, there are several contrasts that tie the epistle together: 1) those who walk in truth (v. 4a) vs. those who deny the truth (v. 7); 2) the command from the beginning (v. 5-6) vs. those who go ahead/beyond (v. 9); 3) deeds worthy of a full reward (v. 8) vs. evil works (v. 11); and 4) those who reject antichrist (v. 10) vs. those who receive antichrist (v. 11). 2 John's major idea appears to be that we must walk in the commandments of Christ as we love the truth of His teaching.

John drives home several important ideas concerning truth in verses 1-2:

- a. Love is to be expressed in the context of truth (cf. Eph. 4:15).
- b. Truth can be known as an objective reality (“know” in verse 1 is in the perfect tense).
- c. Truth can be embraced experientially (“in us”) and continually (“abides” is present tense).
- d. Truth is eternal. It has its source in God (1 John 5:20).

Though truth is not really defined in this letter, it seems clear that John uses the word theologically and practically, not philosophically. He has in mind the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ as God's self-revelation in the incarnation (John 1:14). John's purpose is not to denigrate whatever truths we glean from reason, experience, or tradition. It is the case, however, that John's epistemological

foundation is rooted in Christ and the teachings and testimony of the apostles to that historical manifestation. God has revealed His truth supremely in Christ.

I. We must love the truth

v. 1-3

- The author is simply identified as The Elder (*presbuteros*), an introduction unique to 2 & 3 John. It emphasizes the position and personal relationship he has with the recipients of the letter. Elder carries the idea of an aged man, but also a man of authority and respect by virtue of his experience, character, integrity, moral standing and reputation.
- The recipient is also simply identified as the elect (chosen) lady and her children. This may refer to: 1) a local church and its members (the best view), 2) the church universal (Jerome), or 3) an individual lady and her children. Elect lady is a term of respect, endearment, privilege and protection. God chose this community of faith as His very own. They belong to Him and He cares for them personally and individually. Now, what word does the Lord have for this people near and dear to His heart?

1. Embrace the truth.

v. 1-3

- “I love in the truth” is emphatic (“I, myself, love...”) “Love” also is a present tense verb denoting continuous action. Love and truth, as we noted earlier, dominate this letter in verses 1-6 by virtue of the number of times each word occurs. In the original text “truth” appears 5 times and

“love” occurs 4 times. John expresses his love for this local body of believers in the context of truth, a love grounded in truth which all who know the truth share. Further, this truth abides or remains continually both 1) in us and 2) with us forever.

- The Christian philosopher Arthur Holmes has reminded us that “all truth is God’s truth wherever it is found.” Truth in the biblical sense is:

Essential not optional

Eternal not relative

Consistent not changing

Permanent not perspectival

Flowing from the one who is “the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6), who is Himself “the true God and eternal life” (1 John 5:20), this truth must be embraced as our very own. Indeed we must have a consuming passion for this truth, truth that is bathed in love.

2. Enjoy the truth. v. 3

Truth has wonderful companions who accompany it. Truth also has a definite and exclusive source from which it originates.

- Truth’s companions are 3-fold in our text. They are:
 - 1) Grace – God doing for us what we do not deserve (unmerited favor and divine kindness);

2) Mercy – God not doing to us what we do deserve (God’s compassion, pity, and tenderness); and

3) Peace – personal wholeness (Heb. *shalom*) and well-being in all aspects of life.

Romans 5:1 reminds us, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” And Philippians 4:9 says “The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.”

These 3 Christian graces have a very specific and distinct source, as do love and truth. Grace, mercy, peace, truth and love flow into our lives “from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father” (cf. 1 John 1:3). The repetition of the preposition “from” is significant. It conveys the idea of equality of position while maintaining distinction in person. The Father and Son are equally and fully God and yet there is a true and genuine distinction in person. To make this clear God is identified as Father twice. In terms of the inner relationship within the Godhead Jesus Christ is God, but He is also God the Father’s “Son.” He is the anointed Messiah, the Christ, sent by the Father into this world for the purpose of redeeming sinful humanity. All of this, again, occurs within the context of truth and love. John was well aware of the fact that, “To maintain a healthy and growing community the church must exhibit a fidelity to

the truth that knows no compromise, and they must love one another in a way that knows no boundaries” (Akin, *NAC*, 223).

II. We must live the truth vs. 4-6

Vance Havner (1901-1986) was a wonderful North Carolina evangelist and preacher. He was also a reservoir of wisdom and wit. He often said, “what we live is what we really believe. Everything else is just so much religious talk!” Wow! Ouch!! Jonathan Edwards (1703-58) would add, “The informing of the understanding is all vain, any farther than it affects the heart, or which is the same thing, has influence on the affections.” (Works of *J.E.*, vol. 1 (*Banner of Truth Trust*, 1834, reprt. 1979), 367.)

John was convinced that unless truth reaches and affects the heart, the inner man, it is of no real value, regardless of what it may do in the head. Truth should grab hold of head, heart and hands.

1) Be concerned with what you believe (creed) v. 4

- John extends both a word of joy and encouragement. He “was very glad to find some of your children walking in the truth.” This was “in keeping with a command we have received from the Father.” Verse 5 informs us this command is “that we love one another.”
- When John talks about truth, he is not interested in philosophy. He is focused on the gospel and the transformed life it makes possible. He is

interested in a right understanding of the incarnation (v. 7). He is concerned that we “remain in Christ’s teachings (v. 9). He is focused on that truth of the gospel that extends “grace, mercy and peace” (v. 3) to all who come to God as Father by way of the Son Jesus Christ.

- John knew well the source of His spiritual authority, of his life’s authority. Tragically many today do not and as a result we are awash in spiritual, moral and religious confusion. Bottom-line, there are basically 4 options:

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| 1) <u>Reason</u> – I think | 3) <u>Tradition</u> – We’ve always done |
| 2) <u>Experience</u> – I feel | 4) <u>Revelation</u> – God says |

For John, God had revealed Himself in His Son Jesus Christ and in His Word. The matter is settled. We don’t debate Him or the Word. We proclaim both.

- 2) Be concerned with how you behave (conduct) vs. 5-6

- Wrong thinking inevitably leads to wrong living. If the mind is confused the heart will be corrupted. Right thinking, however, is the right soil from which emerges the fruit of right living. For John, right living is a life of love that is the supernatural response to the love one experiences in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- John now urges this local body of believers in Jesus (called “dear lady”, v. 5) to “love one another.” He says it is not a new command, “but one we have had from the beginning,” that is the beginning of our Christian experience and a command given directly to us by Jesus (see again John 13:34-35). False teachers may have a new, an additional, word for this elect lady and her children (v. 1), this dear lady (v. 5), but not John.

What they heard from the beginning should stay with them to the end.

- In verse 6 John tells us we demonstrate our love for God by not only loving one another (v. 5), but by walking “according to His commands.” This is something we also “heard from the beginning: you must walk in love.”
- Verses 4-6 are so simple. They are almost poetic. Walk in the commandment to love and love the commandments in which you walk. Truth is something we believe. Truth is something we live.

III. We must look for the truth vs. 7-11

- The Church Father Augustine (A.D. 354-430) well said of our God, “You have made us for Yourself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee” (Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 1, Chapter 1). Augustine adds further, “Therefore hold fast love, and set your minds at rest” (Augustine, *On the Epistle of John*, 10.7) “...love God with all thy heart, and with all thy

soul, and with all thy mind...concentrate all your thoughts, your whole life, and your whole intelligence upon Him from whom you derive all that you bring” (Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 1.22).

- My friend Al Mohler says, “Where truth is denied only therapy remains.” The apostle John would add, “Where truth is adjusted heresy will reign.”
- John was confronted with the spiritual, mystical theology of his day, an incipient form of Gnosticism. Gnosticism, which means knowledge in Greek, took many forms as it developed but usually held 2 propositions in common regardless of its form or development:
 - 1) Salvation is by (mystical) knowledge and 2) Matter is evil or inferior. As a result of their worldview, they attacked the reality of the incarnation. The Docetist (meaning to appear) said Jesus only appeared to be human/physical. Another incipient form of the heresy led by Cerenthus said the Christ-spirit came on the man Jesus at His baptism but left Him at the cross.

John knew Christology is the heart of Christianity. If you are wrong here you will be wrong everywhere. John therefore issues a strong warning to be on the lookout for anyone who challenges the full deity, true and perfect humanity, sinless life and completed work of Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father.

- Verse 7 is closely connected to verse 6. We must walk in the truth because many deceivers have gone out to evangelize in the “evil world system.” These spiritual defectors are Satan’s missionaries on assignment. Their gospel is that Jesus is not the Christ coming in the flesh. Their gospel is a denial of the true gospel attacking the truth of the incarnation and the genuine uniting of deity and humanity in the person of Jesus.
- The heart of all false teaching will be a defective view of Jesus; of who He is and what He has done. Such teaching will without exception deny His full deity and reject His perfect work of atonement by His crucifixion and resurrection. Take for example the “Jesus Seminar” who in 1998 released the book *The Acts of Jesus* and arrogantly proclaimed:
 - The resurrection of Jesus did not involve the resuscitation of a corpse.
 - Belief in Jesus’ resurrection did not depend on what happened to his body.
 - The body of Jesus decayed as do other corpses.

- The resurrection was not an event that happened on the first Easter Sunday; it was not an event that could have been recorded by a video camera.
- It is not necessary to believe in the historical veracity of the resurrection narratives.
- To such opinions John fires back: “this is the deceiver and the antichrist.” The word “antichrist” means “against” or “in the place of” Christ. Here “against” is clearly the meaning. The word itself occurs only in 1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3 and here in 2 John 7. Interest in this sinister figure is as popular as ever. *A US News and World Report* survey revealed that 49% of people in America believe he is coming. (12-19-94). John informs us that his minions are here and have been here since the 1st century. New Testament scholar I. Howard Marshall puts this teaching in perspective when he notes, “Apocalyptic thought prophesied the coming of a supremely evil antagonist of God in the last days—the lawless one (2 Thess. 2:1-12) or the beast (Rev. 13). [Actually, there are two beasts in Rev. 13, the first in verses 1-10, from the sea, usually identified with the antichrist both personally and politically, and the second in verses 11-18 from the land, being identified with the false prophet (cf. Rev. 19:20).]

This figure is certainly opposed to Christ and attempts to emulate his power... The elder's point is that the spirit of opposition to Christ is already present in those who oppose the truth about Christ...it [antichrist] is used to characterize people who are radically opposed to the true doctrine about Christ and are thus supremely his opponents, even if they protest that they hold the truth about him and are Christians. The elder says that anybody who denies the truth is a very antichrist, just as we might speak of a supremely evil person as 'the very devil'." (Marshall, p. 71).

The deceivers John says are many and their message destructive. Look and listen carefully for their true colors are revealed in what they say and in the one they oppose: they are enemies of the truth about Jesus.

2. Resist the destructive v. 8

- "Watch yourselves" is a present tense imperative of command. It means to continually be on guard. It is intended to sound a strong warning. Do not be lulled into a spiritual stupor. Why? Your "full reward" is at stake. What does this mean? One option is loss of salvation. The other is loss of reward. The latter seems more likely given the context and that it is a "full reward" that is mentioned.

What we do know is this: John believes perseverance is the proof of possession (cf. 1 John 2:19). As Vance Havner again said, “faith that fizzles before the finish was faulting from the first.”

- There is a theological tension here we must understand. For those who have been born from above by the Spirit of God through faith in Christ, it is certain that you will persevere. It is also essential that you do persevere as well.
- Day in and day out we must be on guard and resist the destructive who deny the truth about Jesus and who would take from us our full reward.
- Such spiritual destroyers will deny:
 1. The complete truthfulness and sufficiency of the Bible.
 2. The person and work of Jesus Christ.
 - a. They deny His full deity and/or perfect humanity.
 - b. They deny His work of atonement on the cross as the perfect sacrifice and satisfaction for our sin.
 3. His sinless life, virgin birth, bodily resurrection and historical coming again in glory.
 4. Salvation as a free gift received by grace alone thru faith alone in Christ alone.

5. Jesus as the only Lord and Savior of mankind.

So, we must recognize the deceptive and resist the destructive.

3. Reprove the destitute v. 9

- “Anyone who does not remain in Christ’s teaching but goes beyond it” offers what I call a Bible plus theology and a Jesus plus theology. They leave the basic, biblical truths about Jesus and claim to offer something new and something better.
- John’s judgment on such persons is quick and to the point: such persons are lost. He “does not have God.” John is clear. There is no ambiguity. When you take Jesus as your Savior you get God as your Father. But, if you say “no” to Jesus you are also saying “no” to the Father who sent Him. The two always go together. They are one and they cannot be separated. Only one road leads to the living and true God. That road, that way, is Jesus.
- What does the theology of the destitute look like? Add literally thousands of cults to the liberal theologies and modern ideologies and you have quite a task put before you and yet... the task is not as complex as it appears. All deceivers, all false teachers practice a very similar “spiritual mathematical strategy.” I am indebted here to my friend James Walker who heads up a fine Christian research and

Apologetics Ministry called “Watchman Fellowship.” Basically they all practice a basic mathematical strategy.

The Mathematics of the Cults

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| Addition (+) | They <u>add</u> an extra-biblical source of authority by <u>prophet</u> , <u>pen</u> or <u>professor</u> . |
| Subtraction (-) | They subtract from the person and work of Jesus Christ the Son of God. They <u>deny His deity and find inadequate His work of redemption</u> . |
| Division (÷) | They <u>divide</u> our allegiance from God through Christ alone to others. |
| Multiplication (x) | They <u>multiply</u> requirements for salvation. All advocate some form of <u>works salvation</u> . |

These 4 simply principles will enable us to spot and expose those spiritual movements that, regardless of their profession, do not know or have God.

4. Reject the dangerous vs.10-11

Anyone is a comprehensive requirement.

Teaching is our doctrine, what we believe and confess concerning the gospel, the person and work of Jesus.

Do not receive is another present imperative of command. We are not to give them a base of operation from our home nor are we to

“welcome” them as friends and fellow laborers for the truth of the gospel. To do so “is to share in his evil deeds.”

- What is John saying? Do not provide support and assistance to these false teachers. Do not help them along in their evil assignment because if you do you go with them (cf. 3 John 8). John is not unloving or unkind. He is pastoral and practical. We cannot pray God’s blessing on those who deny our Lord and reject the teachings of God’s Word.
- What is John not saying? He is not saying that we cannot allow them in our home for a visit whereby we share the gospel of Jesus with them. You might say “I can’t, I’m not equipped.” Let me give you a simple and sure strategy that anyone can use who truly knows Jesus as Lord and Savior.

How do I witness to someone involved in false teaching?

1. Principles to remember
 - a. Always be kind.
 - b. Be a good listener.
 - c. Pray for them.
 - d. Love them.
2. Procedure to follow

- a. Give them 15 minutes uninterrupted asking them to tell you what they believe you must do to be saved and go to heaven when you die.
- b. Require that they give you 15 minutes uninterrupted so that you can tell them how you believe a person can be saved and go to heaven when they die.
- c. Pray with them, and pray evangelistically sharing clearly and completely the gospel in your prayer.
- d. Invite them (and their friends) back to do it again!

IV. We must long for the truth vs. 12-13

John has shared his heart but there is much more that he wants to say. Paper and pen have been sufficient for the immediate situation, but they are a poor substitute for a face to face meeting. In closing John reminds all of us of 2 precious truths never to be taken for granted.

1. Experience the fullness of joy v. 12

“Face to face” is a beautiful Greek idiom which is literally “mouth to mouth.” When believers who love the Lord Jesus and each other come together, there is indeed a fullness of joy (cf. 1 John 1:4) that words cannot express. John loves this people and they love him.

Their soon union was something all looked forward to. It could not happen soon enough.

2. Experience the fellowship of the family. v. 13

The letter closes with a greeting either from the elect lady's sister or more probably a sister church. They stand with John in what he has said. Indeed the truth about Jesus brings together brothers and sisters from every tribe, people, tongue and nation (Rev. 5:9; 7:9). We are one big family with the same Father, Savior and Spirit. Nothing should tear down the walls of sinful bigotry and prejudice like the gospel of Jesus. Love and truth flow freely from Him to us all. Love and truth should flow freely from all of us to one another.

Conclusion:

I was on an airplane some years ago when I looked over and saw a woman reading the *Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (1902) by William James (1842-1910), the American psychologist and philosopher. Being prompted, I believe, of the Lord I sought to engage her in conversation and so I commented on the book, pointing out that there were things in it with which I agreed, but also there were things in it with which I strongly disagreed. She very graciously responded that she had never read anything or met anyone with whom she completely agreed. I responded and told her I had only met one. She asked

“Who?” I told her, “His name is Jesus.” From there we engaged in a calm but intense dialogue for almost an hour. As the conversation moved toward closure, I told her that the bottom-line, the crucial issue of history, is Jesus and His resurrection. If the resurrection is true, it does follow logically and quite clearly:

- a. There is a God.
- b. Jesus is that God.
- c. All of humanity needs to know this God.
- d. This Jesus and the message about Him is the focal point of all history, all knowledge, and all life.

Ravi Zacharias says that former T.V. talk-show host Larry King was once asked who he would like to interview from history. One of the persons he names was Jesus. When questioned as to what he would ask Him he said, “I would like to ask Him if He was indeed virgin born, because the answer to that question would define history” (Ravi Zacharias, *Can Man Live Without God*, Word, 1994, XVIII). I believe Larry King is right. When the virgin birth is wedded to His resurrection, Jesus of Nazareth, the eternal Son of God, does define history. He also defines eternity. We must love this truth. We must live this truth. After all it is Jesus who said, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).