

Truth or Consequences

2 John 1-13

Introduction

1. The brilliant Christian philosopher Alvin Plantinga has well said, “the contemporary intellectual world is a battle or arena in which rages a battle for our souls.” James Dobson of “Focus on the Family” wisely adds, “The heated dispute over values in Western nations is simply a continuation of the age-old struggle between the principles of righteousness and the kingdom of darkness” (*C.T.*, June, 1995).
2. There is indeed a titanic battle that rages between 2 irreconcilable forces in the spiritual realm. There is a struggle, a battle for our souls. There is a struggle for our hearts and our minds, a battle over what we will love and what we will believe.
3.
 - Only 22% of American now believe in absolute truth.
 - A recent Zogby poll (July, 2002) says 73% of American college seniors report that their professors teach there is no such thing as right and wrong in the literal sense, that good and evil are addressed in terms of “individual values and cultural diversity.”
 - 41% of adults who attend church weekly state they are not “born again.”
 - Only 60% of teenagers who claim to be a Christian believe salvation can be earned through good works.
 - 53% of teenagers who claim to be a Christian think Jesus sinned while on earth.
4. There is indeed a clash of worldviews and a “culture war” taking place and the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ is quickly losing the battle. Paul said in 2 Thess. 2:10 that the lost “perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.” Truth is, without question, an endangered species in our secular, relativistic culture. Love, likewise, is in grave danger of devolving into nothing more than shallow sentimentalism because there are so many inferior imitations and inaccurate notions of just what love is.
5. In such a serious situation the tiny and neglected letter of 2 John has words of wisdom and insight, words that address both the heart and the mind, words that address both love and truth. The book is striking in its completeness and also in its balance. This letter is only 245 words (it is the second shortest book of both the New Testament and the Bible, 3 John is 219 words) and was penned by the apostle John probably between A.D. 80-95 from Ephesus. The early church historian Eusebius suggests that it and its sister epistle, 3 John, were written after John was released from the island of Patmos. If so, this would make them the last of the New Testament books to be written. Short and to the point, John delivers 4 words of instruction and encouragement for those who would be guardians of God’s eternal truth.

I. Love the truth. 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 leadership by virtue of the author’s 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. Chosen 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. What word does the Lord have for this people near and dear to His heart?

1. Embrace the truth. 1-3

- I love in truth is emphatic (I, myself, love...) Love is a pre-tense verb truth (5x), love (4x). John expresses his love for this local body of believers in the context of truth, a love in truth which all who know (WAR) the truth share. Further, this truth abides or remains (cont.) both 1) in us and 2) with us forever.
- The Wheaton College 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 perspective

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.

2. Enjoy the truth. 3

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

- Truth’s companions:
 - Grace – God doing for us what we do not deserve (unmerited favor and kindness).
 - Mercy – God not doing to us what we do deserve (compassion, pity, and tenderness).
 - Peace – personal wholeness and well-being in all aspects of life:
Romans 5:1 – “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”
Phil. 4:9 – “The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.”

The order of these 3 companions to truth is significant!

- Truth’s source:
From God who is Father (a perfect Father)
From the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father. The repetition of the prep. “from” is significant. It conveys equality of position and distinction in person. These blessings flow equally from the Father and the Son.
Lord emp. His deity. Jesus (*Heb. Joshua*, “the Lord saves”) emp. His humanity.
Christ affirms He and He alone is God’s anointed one.
- To again make clear the context of these blessings John concludes the greeting as he began: emp. truth and love.
Eph. 4:15 says “speak the truth in love.”
2 John 1-3 says “enjoy the truth in love.”

Blaise Pascal (1623-62) 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.”

Transition: We must love the truth.

II. Live the truth. 4-6

The body of the letter is verses 4-11. They evenly divide into 2 parts: vs. 4-6 and vs. 7-11. Key words such as walk, commandment(s), doctrine, deceivers and antichrist drive John's argument.

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

- John ushers forth a word of encouragement and an expression of personal joy. He has discovered (W.A.R.) this fellowship of believers is walking in truth (cf. 1 John 3:23) as they were commanded by the Father.
- John speaks of truth that is spiritual not philosophical that is rooted and grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ and all that entails. John knew well the source of His spiritual authority. Tragically many today do not and we face a crisis of authority. What are the options? Only 4:

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

 God had spoken and that settled the matter for John. It should also settle the matter for us. What God says we are to believe. Not some of it, not most of it, but all of it!

Transition: Be concerned with what you believe.

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

- For John, truth is not just something you believe. Truth is something you live. Living out the truth revealed to us by God is comprehensive but it is also specific. Truth, true truth, will always make a beeline to love.
- First, we will love one another, a commandment we have had since the beginning of our Christian experience and a commandment given directly by Jesus (cf. John 13:34-35). The heretics may have a new word for the church, but not John. What they heard from the beginning should go with them to the end.
- Second, we will love God by obeying and walking (to walk about / around in a circle) in His commandments which we have also had from the beginning. Walking in truth (object of "it" in verse 6) pleases God. It also demonstrates our love for Him.
- Verses 4 – 6 say it simply and almost poetically: walk in the commandment to love and love the commandments in which you walk.

Truth is something we practice. Truth is something we live.

III. Look for the truth. 7-11

- Truth is not as easy to find as it once was. Indeed it is in short supply, especially when we enter the realm of the spiritual. Atheist Richard Rorty boldly claims "truth is made not found." Deceased atheist Michael Foucault said "all truth claims are constructed to serve those in power." Deconstructionist Jacques Derrida says the author is dead and the text is dead. All meaning is the creation of the reader(s). Neitzche heralded in a previous century "God is dead." Dostoyesky was certainly correct when in *The Brothers Karamazvo* he wrote, "if God is dead everything is permissible." Al Mohler says,

“Where truth is denied only therapy remains.” John would add, “where truth is adjusted heresy will reign.”

- John was confronted with the New Age 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 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 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, perfect humanity, sinless life and completed work of Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father.

1. Recognize the deceptive. 7

- Verse 7 begins with the word “for” showing a connection with verse 6. We must walk in the truth “for” or “because” many deceivers (2x) have gone out to evangelize in the evil world system. These spiritual defectors are Satan’s missionaries on assignment. Their gospel: Jesus is not the Christ coming in the flesh. Their gospel is a denial of the truth 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. Such reaching in our day looks like 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.

Such teaching sounds like former Vanderbilt professor Gerd Lüdemann who self-confidently asserts, “the tomb of Jesus was not empty, but full, and his body did not disappear, but rotted away.”

- To such opinions John fires back: “this is a deceiver and an 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 today as ever. A *US News & World Report* survey revealed that 49% of people in America believe he is coming. (12-19-94). John informs us, his minions are here and have been here since the 1st century. The fine 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. Yet 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.** 8

- Look (pre. imp.) – watch out, be on guard, sounds a strong warning. Do not be lulled into a spiritual stupor. Why? Your full reward is at stake. What does this mean?
2 options:
 - 1) loss of salvation
 - 2) loss of reward in the context of service
- × John believes perseverance is the proof of possession (cf. 1 John 2:19!).
- × Vance Havner said, “faith that fizzles before the finish was faulting from the first.”
- × Paul said in 2 Cor. 13:5, “examine yourself as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.”
- 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 thru faith in Christ alone.
 5. Jesus as the only Lord and Savior of mankind.

Transition: Recognize the deceptive. Resist the destructive.

3. Reprove the destitute. 9

- “Transgresses” is better “goes ahead.” They offer a Bible + and Jesus + theology. They leave the basic, biblical truths about Jesus and claim to offer something new and something better.
- John’s judgment is quick and to the point: such persons are lost. They do 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 2 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.
- Question: What does the theology of the destitute look like? Add 4000 cults to the liberal theologies and New Age 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 mathematical strategy. Let me share it with you. There are no exceptions I assure you. Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Moonies, Children of God, Branch Davidians, Spiritualists or any others... they all practice a basic mathematical strategy.

The Mathematics of the Cults

Addition (+)	They <u>add</u> an extra-biblical source of authority by <u>prophet</u> , <u>pen</u> or <u>professor</u> .
Subtraction (-)	They <u>subtract</u> from the person and work of Jesus Christ the Son of God. They <u>deny His deity</u> and <u>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> .

4. Reject the dangerous. 10-11

Anyone – a comprehensive requirement.

Doctrine – the teaching about Jesus.

Do not receive (pre. imp.) – into your house or greet him. To do so is to share in his evil deeds.

- What is John saying? Ans. – 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? Ans. – He is not saying that we cannot allow them in our home for a visit whereby we can 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 a cult?

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. Long for the truth. 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. 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.

2. Experience the fellowship of the family. 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. 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

1. Ravi Zacharias says that Larry King was once asked, “If you could interview one person in history who would it be and what would you ask them?” Larry’s answer:
I would want to interview Jesus and I would ask Him if He was really virgin born; because the answer to that question would define history. (*Can Man Live Without God*, XVII).
2. Jesus Christ does define history. He also defines eternity. Truth does exist. Truth does matter. We must love the truth. We must live the truth. Jesus said, “You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:32)
3. Do you know the truth? It has a name. His name is Jesus.