

Walking in the Truth

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Preacher: Terry McCutcheon

[0 : 00] We're going to turn to our Bibles. Under consideration today is the letter to John, John's second letter, which you'll find in page 1025 of the Pew Bible.

And we'll read the whole letter together. Let us hear then the Word of God. The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all who know the truth, because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever.

Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son in truth and love. I rejoice greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father.

And now I ask you, dear lady, not as though I were writing to you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning, that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments.

This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it. For many deceivers have gone out into the world. Those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh.

[1 : 24] Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward.

Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.

If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting. For whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.

Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to come to you and talk face to face, so that our joy may be complete.

The children of your elect sister greet you. Amen. And may God add his blessing to this, the reading of his word. Let's take a moment just to pray and ask God's help.

[2 : 23] Father, we thank you for the privilege that we have of being able to set time aside in the middle of this day, in the middle of this week. To gather together, to study your word together.

Father, we pray that in our time together, you would give us ears to hear and understand your word. And wills and hearts to obey your word. We ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Well, our news this past week has been dominated by the awful story of Mikael Kula, that three-year-old boy who went missing.

And then a couple of days later was found dead in woodland. And as the story developed, it became even more sickening that his mother was charged with the death of her son.

It's really sickening, isn't it? It's really out of the ordinary. Because parents, parents are usually and generally very protective of their children.

[3 : 29] It's a natural instinct. Parents will go to any length to ensure the safety of their children. If you've got children, no matter what age they are, then you understand these feelings, these instincts.

Parents are always aware of any possible dangers to their children. And they make sure that their children are not open to any kind of harm. That's the way things are in a healthy family.

A healthy family is a place of great love, great care, and great safety. But to have that place of love, that place of care, that place of safety, it requires protection.

If children are to be loved and cared for, then all those who might harm them must be excluded and rejected. And rejected and excluded really severely.

Because protecting the children is paramount. It is our chief concern. Well, these are the kind of values that we need to hold in mind as we come to the letter of 2 John.

[4 : 33] It's a letter about the church family. It's a letter about how the church family can be a place of love and unity. But only, only if it is protected from those that would seek to come in and destroy the truth that defines the church.

When we see how this letter is addressed, then we realize we are given clues about how we should understand the letter. Look with me at verse 1.

The elder to the elect lady and her children. And then to the last verse, verse 13. The children of your elect sister greet you. It's family language, isn't it?

It sounds as if it was written by an old uncle who's maybe staying with his niece and her children. And he's writing to her sister and their children. But it's highly unlikely that this is a letter between two sisters and their children.

Notice how it's written. To the elect lady. And we learn in verse 1 that not only the elder, but all who love the truth, love this lady and her children.

[5 : 41] She doesn't seem to be a regular person. And then we think of how the Bible is full of examples of the church being referred to as a woman.

The church as the bride of Christ. And the saints, the Christians, as children. Just look across the page to the last verse of 1 John.

Little children, keep yourselves from idols. It's referring to the Christians. So I think that to the elect lady and her children is a metaphorical way of referring to a local church.

And the Christians in that church. I don't want to be too dogmatic about it. But that's what I think. So 2 John is written by the elder. From one local church to another.

Well, who then is the elder? Do we know for sure it's the apostle John? Well, from the second century, people have wondered about this. Who is the elder?

[6 : 44] One writer even suggested that there was a guy called the elder kicking about at the same time as the apostle John. Well, as we look at 2 John and 3 John. Well, we see the elder writes just like the apostle John.

He uses the same language, the same themes, and the same style as the apostle John. And he lived at the same time as the apostle John. He looks like John.

Sounds like John. Lived at the same time as John. And I think it's safe to say that the elder is in fact the apostle John. So 2 John is a letter written in a family style by the apostle John from one church to another.

Okay, so what's it all about then? Well, we learn the key things straight away in verse 1 and 2. Notice how the truth is so important in John's understanding of the church there in those first two verses.

John loves the church in the truth. And also, all of those who know the truth love the church. John and everyone else love the church.

[7 : 50] Why? Because of the truth. The truth that abides, that lives in us, and will be with us forever. The truth then, it's the definition of the church.

And we love the church because it speaks the truth. And the truth is in us. The reason that people in a local church work together, live together, love together, is because they are united in the truth.

The local church is effective and united when everybody acknowledges the truth of Jesus together. United in the truth. Everybody knows what they are doing.

How they should behave. How we should treat each other. What our priorities should be. There are many ways in which we could define something. But John chooses to define the church by what is right at the center of the church.

He defines the church by the truth. Well, what does John mean by the truth? Do we have to agree in absolutely everything if we are to love each other?

[8 : 53] Can we disagree about anything in the Bible? Would John understand that? Would John approve of folks dividing over every minute detail? Would he approve of us dividing with folks that don't hold the same theological position in exactly the same way as us?

Would John say to you, have absolutely nothing to do with them? No, of course he wouldn't. That's not what he means. John in this letter is dealing with the fundamental truths of Jesus Christ.

Nothing less than the fundamental truths of the gospel. If we are to understand what John is talking about, then we need to know two aspects of John's teaching.

That firstly, in verse 1 to 6, the truth unites us in love. The truth unites us in love. And secondly, verse 7 to 13, the truth divides us from lies.

The truth divides us from lies. Well, firstly then, the truth unites us in love. Truth isn't the only key word in this letter. The other key word is love.

[10:01] We see it in the opening verses. The truth in John and all believers makes us love in our local churches. And it causes us to love other churches too that hold to the truth.

This love in the truth is of such importance to John that he spends verse 4 to 6 emphasizing this. That this love is found in the church because of the truth.

Look at verse 4 and verse 6. Verse 4, walking in the truth. And to the end of verse 5. This is the commandment that we have had from the beginning.

That we love one another. So to walk according to his commands, verse 6, is to walk in love.

Walking in truth and walking in love are two aspects of the same thing.

The same obedience to Jesus and the Father. So whether John begins with truth or love, he ends up with the same thing. The same obedience to the Father's commands.

[11:04] Love and truth are so tightly tied together in John's mind. Love and truth go together. They belong together in church unity. And this is an issue within the church, isn't it?

As there are those that would say that all that matters is that we're united in love. That maintaining fellowship, maintaining unity and love is more important than truth or doctrine in church life.

But what is this love? If we said, okay, let's just continue to love one another regardless of the truth. What is that love? Love for John.

For John, love is as we have already seen. Love is defined by truth and obedience to the truth. Love in the church, love between the church is obedience to the truth.

This love for our fellow churches is called out of us by the truth. The truth in us. As John writes, the elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth.

[12:07] And not only I, but also all who know the truth because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever. We love in the truth because of the truth that is in us.

So it's as if the truth in us responds to the truth that is proclaimed and lived out by other churches. We love our fellow churches around the world because of the truth in them and the truth in us.

Truth calls out to truth. That's what John is talking about. The truth in us responds, calls out to the truth we hear and see in our fellow churches.

When we see that another lives and speaks the truth, the truth within us stirs. When we hear of a Christian anywhere in the world, faithfully speaking and living the truth, the truth within us loves them.

We are one with them. But on the other hand, when we hear those who call themselves Christian, denying or betraying the truth, the truth of Jesus Christ, we feel grieved, don't we?

[13:18] We feel grieved that the name and the reputation of the Lord Jesus Christ has suffered loss. The truth unites us in love, in common cause, common life, common purpose.

If there is no truth, then there can't really be any church unity. The more faithfully and clearly and simply the truth is lived and spoken, then the more love and unity the church will enjoy.

The truth unites us in love. But secondly, the truth divides us from lies. Verse 7 to 13. The truth divides us from lies.

We are united by truth and love. But when the truth is rejected, we dare not continue in unity. The truth must divide us from lies. John begins with a warning in verse 7.

In verse 4, he was pleased that so many are walking in the truth and love. But verse 7, they need to be warned about and protected from the deceivers who reject the truth.

[14:25] And again, we need to be careful here. Notice the fundamental character of the deception here. The deceivers, verse 7, do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh.

John's churches were clearly experiencing a fundamental attack on the identity of Jesus. Perhaps the deceivers were teaching that Jesus only appeared to be human.

Or maybe they taught that he was fully human, but he was not the pre-existent divine son. Either way, whether they denied his true humanity or his true deity, they ended up denying the real Jesus. As scripture describes him. A real physical human. Fully man. Who is also the true and living God. The denial of the real authentic Jesus took that form in John's day.

But probably the biggest attack in our day is the uniqueness of Jesus. Jesus presented himself repeatedly as the Lord God, who is the only way, the only truth, the only life for the whole world.

[15:33] This inclusive offer from Jesus, offering free access for everybody to God the Father, this inclusive offer is perceived as being an exclusive, an offensive claim, by those who reject Jesus as

the true and living God.

For those who see Jesus as one of many religious options, well, the real Jesus must be rejected. He cannot be the true and living God come in the flesh. For if he was, then all other religious options are irrelevant or rebellious.

So John's warning about deceivers in the world is always relevant. The identity of Jesus will always be under attack in every generation and in every place.

In fact, there was a couple of meetings that were held back in October here in Glasgow that were doing that very thing. And I picked us up from the Herald.

This was just a couple of weeks before the meetings went ahead. Plans for two Scottish lectures by a controversial American preacher are to be discussed by Church of Scotland figures at a meeting next week.

[16:47] Glasgow Presbytery is expected to seek to address concerns raised by some church figures over the booking of Bishop Jack Spong, an Episcopalian who rejects the idea of a supernatural God and does not believe Christ died for man's sins.

Mr. Spong also rejects the virgin birth and believes the resurrection was not a physical rising. He has attracted admirers and critics alike.

A Church of Scotland spokesman said, no concerns were raised with the presbytery over Mr. Spong's views. Can you believe that? And the public lectures are expected to go ahead as planned. And back in October they did in a church in Mulgay and a church in Giffnock £12 a ticket to listen to Absolute Mince. The identity of Jesus Christ will always be under attack in every generation and in every place.

The specific details of the attack may vary but its character always remains the same. It is against Christ. It is anti-Christ. So what should the church do about this?

[18:04] If we are a family, a family united by the truth and love, what can we do to protect the church family from these deceivers? Just as parents are so careful and protective of their children, so each church must take proper steps to protect the church family.

And verse 8 puts it bluntly, if these anti-Christ deceivers are allowed to harm the church's children, then all the work will be lost. Friends, I know most of you, most of you have only got a stomach for compromise rather than conflict.

But John warns us that compromise over the true identity of Jesus Christ will not bring peace but will bring disaster and ruin to the church.

There is no easy way out here. We have to protect the church from those who attack the fundamental truth of Jesus' identity. John puts the matter in such a clear way in verse 9.

He says, everyone who goes on ahead or who runs ahead and does not abide does not remain in the teaching of Christ, does not have God.

[19:15] Whoever abides, whoever remains in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. Everyone who goes ahead. The deceivers, the deceivers usually think they have found a new truth or a deeper insight or a new way of seeing things that previous generations weren't able to see.

Something that is much more relevant to life today. They speak about going on to maturity. About leaving behind outdated ways of thinking.

You'll never hear them say, tell me the old, old story. Tell me the old, old story of Jesus and his love. No. Their song is, tell me the new, new story. They have gone on ahead to new ways of thinking.

But when we hear that sort of talk, just as John heard it back in the day, then the words of John need to echo in our minds. Anyone like this does not have God.

Far from going on ahead, they have actually lost everything. Falling far behind. But those who steadily and faithfully abide, who remain in the teaching and the truth, have both the Father and the Son.

[20:32] Verse 9. By sticking to the truth through thick and thin, in season and out of season, the church enjoys the very highest and deepest the spiritual world has to offer.

The intimate fellowship of God the Father and God the Son. If we really want to run to go ahead, then we must patiently continue in what was given long ago in the Scriptures.

The faith once delivered to the saints. The truth. The gospel. Well, in verse 10 and 11, John tells us how to protect the church family from the deceivers who reject this ancient and liberating truth.

If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting. For whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.

It's clear, isn't it? Don't give him house room. Remember at the time the church would have met in houses and house churches. So don't let them into the church and give them a platform to flood the church with lies.

[21 : 45] Remember too that John is speaking to those who reject the clear identity of Jesus Christ as presented in the Scriptures and preached by the apostles. We are not here dealing with Christians who hold a different position in things like the second coming or mode of baptism.

We can have differences about these things and still be brothers. John here is dealing with the question of protecting the church family from those who deny the truth of the gospel.

Guys like Mr. Spong that we read of earlier, guys like him should never be allowed anywhere near a Christian church according to the Apostle John. John here is teaching that we must protect the church family just as carefully, just as lovingly, just as robustly as we would protect our own children from danger.

The deceivers, I'm sure, were very polite and sincere people, very charming and very nice. They always are. But their teaching will cause devastating ruin to the church family if we give any kind of approval or authority to them.

But people might think we're being unkind or unchristian to do this. But just think for a moment if you were in the business world. You wouldn't hire a dodgy, fraudulent accountant to deal with your books just because they were a nice, polite and charming person, maybe like Johnny Miss Campbell.

[23 : 19] No, of course you wouldn't. The consequences would be absolutely disastrous and you and your business might never, ever recover from the damage that is done.

So, as you would protect your business, you must protect the church. That's what this is all about. The truth must divide us from lies and those that preach them.

Receiving these deceivers into your house, your church, that is about giving that person approval and authority. And we need to think carefully about our actions so that we don't unintentionally perhaps give approval or authority to a deceiver.

We cannot receive them in any way or else people might listen to what they are saying. People might think, well, if they don't have a problem with them and their teaching, then their teaching can't obviously be that bad.

So then, we need to take great care when inviting folks to speak in the church. Say, for example, in the ladies' fellowship or in the guild or the men's meetings that we have.

[24 : 25] we need to be careful about the hymns that we choose, the hymns that we choose to sing in church. Hymns are full of theology and some hymns are full of bad theology and what we sing affects our thinking and what we believe.

The singing of hymns in church should always be done to support the preaching and teaching of God's word. But in many places and in many cases, the singing of hymns destroys the teaching from the pulpit.

We need to be careful too in our own homes and be careful when, say, watching Sky TV where at the touch of a button our homes can be filled with a teaching of endless amounts of deceivers.

In our world, we might think it's trivial to have someone round for a bite to eat or round for a cup of tea. But it is what perhaps worth remembering the values from the Bible from the time that John is writing.

Sharing table fellowship is of great significance. It conveys approval, acceptance and fellowship. Deceivers cannot be given that kind of approval or authority or any approval or authority.

[25 : 42] We could never allow them to preach in our pulpits. Would it ever be right to share a platform with such a person who calls themselves a Christian but denies the fundamental truths of Jesus?

Could we ever share a platform with such a person? We need to think about all those things, don't we? As we seek to protect the church family, the pillar and buttress of truth.

To understand what John is saying, we must always remember the context of his teaching. John is not waging war with people he disagrees with, but he is desperately trying to protect the church family from serious danger.

If we reject the deceivers because we love the truth and we love the church family, then we are in harmony walking in the truth, the truth that unites us together in love and the truth that divides us from lies.

Let us pray together. Father, we thank you for the Bible, your eternal, timeless word that is relevant in every generation and in every place.

[26 : 55] Thank you for those in previous generations that have stood for the truth and the uniqueness of the Lord Jesus Christ. And because of their stand, the gospel has been preserved and has been handed down and passed on to us.

So we ask, Father, that you would please help us in this, our generation to walk in the truth and to walk in love and to stand up for Jesus.

Grant us your grace, your power and your strength to do this. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.