

That You May Know That You Have Eternal Life

Living in the Truth

2 John 1-4

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Scripture

Last time, we completed the First Letter of John. Today, are going to begin studying the Second Letter of John. And in a few weeks, we will study the Third Letter of John.

By the time John wrote these letters, he was an old man. He had been called by Jesus to serve as one of his apostles and he had a front-row seat to the life and ministry of Jesus. Many years after Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, John served the churches of Ephesus and its surroundings as their pastor. Paul had planted the church in Ephesus and Timothy had also later served as their pastor. And now it was John's turn.

After serving in Ephesus for a while, a group of false teachers infiltrated the churches and denied that Jesus was the Son of God (*cf.* 1 John 2:18-23; 4:1-3). This generated a lot of hostility (*cf.* 1 John 3:4-10). So, John wrote these three letters to do damage control and to assure the Christians of their salvation. John's purpose in writing these letters is given in 1 John 5:13, where he states, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life." Hence, the title for this sermon series: "That You May Know That You Have Eternal Life."

In his First Letter, John dispenses with the regular earmarks of a first-century letter. The letter is in the style of a sermon rather than a letter. Moreover, because there is no linear progression throughout the letter, it is difficult follow. John uses the ancient style of "amplification," which includes cyclical repetition (in this case of moral, social, and doctrinal tests), hyperbole, and stark contrasts.

John's Second and Third Letters bear the earmarks of first-century letters. They begin with a salutation in which the author and recipient is identified, a greeting, and a prayer or wish for the recipient. That is then followed by the body of the letter and a conclusion. The Second and Third Letters are each written on a single sheet of papyrus. They are also the shortest books in the New Testament with 245 Greek words for the Second Letter and 219 Greek words for the Third Letter.

John's Second and Third Letters should be seen as a pair. There are similarities in the two letters, as noted by Daniel Akin:

1. The author describes himself as "the elder" (2 John 1; 3 John 1).
2. The recipients are those whom he "loves in the truth" (2 John 1; 3 John 1).
3. The recipients are the occasion of "great rejoicing" (2 John 4; 3 John 3).
4. The recipients "walk in the truth" (2 John 4; 3 John 3).
5. The elder has received good reports about both (2 John 4; 3 John 3, 5).
6. Both letters contain a warning (2 John 8; 3 John 9).
7. The elder desires to see both face to face (2 John 12; 3 John 14).
8. Others sent their greetings (2 John 13; 3 John 14).¹

But there are also differences in the two letters, as noted by Terry Johnson, "Second John is addressed to the local church and is without personal references. Third John is addressed to Gaius, a leading member of the church (v. 1), and it mentions two other members by name, Diotrephes (v. 9) and

¹ Daniel L. Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*, vol. 38, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 235.

Demetrius (v. 12).”²

John wrote his First Letter to encourage Christians about the assurance of their salvation in the face of false teaching they were receiving from the false teachers. Apparently, the false teachers then left the church but they were still traveling around to the various churches teaching their false doctrine. This was confusing for the churches because there were also traveling teachers going around teaching true doctrine.

So the issue of the Second and Third Letters is similar in that each has to do with *hospitality* shown to traveling teachers, especially itinerant preachers. Johnson summarizes the clear difference between the two letters by noting, “In addition, 2 John is especially concerned about *withholding* hospitality from false teachers (vv. 10, 11), whereas in 3 John, *extending* hospitality to true teachers.”³

As John begins his Second Letter, he stresses the truth.

Let’s read about living in the truth in 2 John 1-4, although since the letter is short, I shall read the entire Second Letter of John:

¹The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all who know the truth, ²because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever:

³Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father’s Son, in truth and love.

⁴I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father. ⁵And now I ask you, dear lady – not as though I were

² Terry L. Johnson, *1, 2, 3 John*, A Mentor Expository Commentary (Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2016), 191–192.

³ Terry L. Johnson, *1, 2, 3 John*, 191–192.

writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning – that we love one another. ⁶ 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. ⁷ For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the anti-christ. ⁸ Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, ¹¹ for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.

¹² 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.

¹³ The children of your elect sister greet you. (2 John 1-4)

Introduction

The concept of truth has been dying a slow death for many years and has become increasingly noticeable in the past two decades.

In the early 2000s, comedian Stephen Colbert picked up on this cultural phenomenon by coining the term “truthiness,” which went on to become Merriam-Webster’s word of the year in 2006.

Similarly, in 2016 in the wake of our presidential election, Brexit, and accusations across the political spectrum about “fake news,” Oxford Dictionaries named “post-truth” as its word of the year.

Shortly thereafter, commenting on the presidential inauguration, Kellyanne Conway famously spoke of “alternative facts.” In response, *Time* blazoned the question “Is Truth Dead?” on its April 3, 2017 cover.

Then in 2018, former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani claimed “truth isn’t truth” during an interview with Chuck Todd on NBC.

Of course let’s not forget Bill Clinton splitting hairs over the definition of “sexual relations” and existentially pondering an attorney’s definition of “is” back in 1998.

“Truthiness” has cut both ways across the aisle in our post-truth age.⁴

The issue regarding truth is as old as the Garden of Eden in which the serpent said to the woman, “Did God actually say...” (Genesis 3:1). The Apostle John wrestled with the issue of truth in dealing with the false teachers as well. John’s Second and Third Letters stress the importance of truth. The Greek word for truth (*aletheia*) appears five times in John’s Second Letter and six times in his Third Letter. John wants his readers to face a world of falsehood and boldly live in the truth.

Lesson

Second John 1-4 teaches us about living in the truth.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. The Truth Unites Christians (1)
2. The Truth Abides in Christians (2)
3. The Truth Blesses Christians (3)
4. The Truth Guides Christians (4)

⁴ See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2018/september/death-of-truth-in-our-culture.html>.

I. The Truth Unites Christians (1)

First, the truth unites Christians.

John begins his Second Letter with these words, **“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”** (1). Some scholars have speculated about the identity of **“the elder.”** One difficulty is that 2 John (and 3 John also) were not frequently quoted in antiquity. However, when they are quoted, the authors attribute both letters to John. Therefore, without spending time on this issue, it seems clear that the author is John. He uses the expression **“the elder”** because those to whom he was writing would know that he was John.

Another debate by scholars is the identity of **“the elect lady.”** Was John writing to an individual lady or was it symbolic language referring to a church? If John wrote this letter to a lady, it seems to be the most natural way to take the words in the letter. But, in support of this letter being written to a church is that the subject matter of the letter seems more appropriate for a church than an individual. Also, the letter lacks the kind of personal details that one would include when writing to an individual person. Thus, most modern scholars believe that John wrote this letter to a church.

John also adds these words, **“and her children”** (1a). John uses the words **“her children”** to refer to the spiritual offspring of the Lord and his church. God called the lady and all her children to be his own. The election of the lady and her children indicates that the initiative of election rests with God. That means that the church with all elect believers enjoys a wonderful and privileged position with God.

It is good to be reminded that we did not choose God. Rather, God chose us. He elected us to be part of his church

and eternal kingdom in eternity past. One result of that is that I can rest in God's goodness and love for me. I don't have to wonder if I followed all the right steps to have a relationship with him. He did everything necessary to bring me into his family. For that, I shall be eternally grateful.

John goes on to say about the Christians in verse 1b, **"...whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all who know the truth."** Two keywords in this letter show up immediately: **love** and **truth**. Commentator Daniel Akin notes, "The neglect of this epistle throughout the history of the church has been unfortunate because no letter more beautifully balances the twin Christian graces of 'love' and 'truth.'"⁵ Truth is the foundation that guides the expression of love. Moreover, it is **truth** that unites all Christians together.

In my previous pastorate, we had to address the issue of Freemasonry. In the space of a few weeks, a large number of families started attending our church and many of the men were either Freemasons or supportive of the Freemasons. After careful comparison of the teaching of Freemasonry with Scripture, we concluded that Freemasonry was incompatible with God's Word. We shared that with the congregation. I remember meeting with one lady who was friends with many of the families who had recently started attending the church. We talked about truth and error. Finally, she said that I was not loving in my insistence that Freemasonry was in error. I could likely have been more kind and gracious. However, it is not right to say that a person is not loving when they advocate for the truth. I often think of the time I got tested for prostate cancer. By telling me the truth (that I had cancer) the doctor was loving me. He would not be loving me if he did not tell

⁵ Daniel L. Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*, vol. 38, 221.

me the truth about my condition. Similarly, truth is the foundation that guides the expression of love.

So, truth unites all Christians.

II. The Truth Abides in Christians (2)

Second, the truth abides in Christians.

John writes in verse 2, **“...because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever.”** In his opening, in which he identifies himself, John stresses the truth, which he uses five times in the first four verses. The truth about how to have a relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ can be known. And it is this **“truth that abides in us,”** that is, all believers, and **“will be with us forever.”**

Christians are people of the truth. In our current culture, we need to be clear that truth is not my subjective view of an issue. Truth is an objective reality. There is no such thing as “my truth” and “your truth.” There is only “the truth.” And the truth is found supremely in the Person and Work of Jesus who said, “I am...the truth” (John 14:6). Therefore, to know the truth, I need to read and embrace all that Jesus taught. And it is that truth that abides in Christians.

III. The Truth Blesses Christians (3)

Third, the truth blesses Christians.

John writes in verse 3, **“Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father’s Son, in truth and love.”** The addition of “mercy” to “grace” and “peace” in the greeting is unusual in the New Testament. The only other letter in which it is found is in Paul’s letters to Timothy. John MacArthur notes, “John’s succession

from grace to mercy and then peace marks the order from the first motion of God to the final satisfaction of man.”⁶ **“Grace”** means “undeserved favor.” **“Mercy”** means “compassion in alleviating suffering, including the forgiveness of sin.” And **“peace”** means “well-being, both in body and soul.” John wishes for these qualities to be **“with us.”** Normally, the writer wishes for these qualities to be “with you.” But John is expressing his solidarity with the readers of his letter. All of us need grace, mercy, and peace. And all of this is in the context of **“truth and love.”**

Just as John’s initial readers need grace, mercy, and peace, so do we. All Christians are bound together in God’s family by the **grace, mercy, and peace** of God. We want these blessings to be increasingly evident in our lives. And as the truth blesses us, we shall testify to a watching world that we belong to another kingdom, the kingdom of our God and the Lord Jesus.

IV. The Truth Guides Christians (4)

And fourth, the truth guides Christians.

John writes in verse 4, **“I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father.”** The reason John wrote his three letters is because of the false teachers that had arisen in the churches for which John was responsible. John **rejoiced greatly to find that some** believers in that church had not accepted the false teaching of the false teachers. Indeed, they were still **walking in the truth.** To walk in the truth is not merely following one of many options. There are basically only

⁶ John MacArthur Jr., ed., *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 1997), 1977.

two choices: truth and error. There are many shades and variations of error. But there is only one truth. The way to know which is the truth is to follow that which was **“commanded by the Father.”**

So many people in our current culture believe that truth is determined by the individual. So there is “your truth” and there is “my truth.” There is no agreement that truth is objective. For a growing number of people in our culture, truth is subjective. That kind of thinking cannot undergird culture. When there is no agreement on what truth is, there will eventually be a collapse of the culture. That is why Christians must stand firmly on the truth that was commanded by the Father. It is the truth that guides Christians.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed 2 John 1-4, let us be sure that we embrace the truth in God’s word.

Let me close with a word from John MacArthur:

This brief letter opens with a ringing call for Christians to live consistently with the truth they believe. The only true basis for unity in the church is the truth of God’s Word that [unites, abides in, blesses, and guides] the lives of individual believers. And it is only those Christians and churches who are firmly planted on the solid foundation of the truth who will be able to withstand the storms of persecution, temptation, and false doctrine that constantly assail them.⁷

May that be true of us. Amen.

⁷ John MacArthur, *1, 2, 3 John*, 220–221.

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The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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