

# **That You May Know That You Have Eternal Life**

**Truth Builds the Church**

*2 John 5-13*

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## Truth Builds the Church

### Scripture

The New Testament of the Holy Bible contains three letters that were written by the Apostle John. A group of false teachers had infiltrated the churches for which John was responsible around Ephesus. They denied that Jesus was the Son of God and also taught that one needed special enlightenment to have a relationship with God. 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."

We have completed our study of the First Letter of John. We are now studying the Second and Third Letters of John. The issue in these two 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."<sup>1</sup>

The Second Letter of John has to do with the way in which truth is applied in our daily lives and, therefore, how it builds the church.

Let's read about how truth builds the church in 2 John 5-13. Since the letter is so short, I shall read the entire Second Letter of John:

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<sup>1</sup> Terry L. Johnson, *1, 2, 3 John*, 191-192.

<sup>1</sup>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, <sup>2</sup>because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever:

<sup>3</sup>Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son, in truth and love.

<sup>4</sup>I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father. <sup>5</sup>**And now I ask you, dear lady – not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning – that we love one another.** <sup>6</sup>**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.** <sup>7</sup>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 antichrist. <sup>8</sup>Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward. <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, <sup>11</sup>for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.

<sup>12</sup>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.

<sup>13</sup>The children of your elect sister greet you. (2 John 5-13)

## Introduction

In the novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, by Garcia

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Marquez, the author describes in his magical but realistic way a village suffering from an insomnia plague. As this plague continues, it gradually causes the loss of memory. To try and salvage memory, Marquez describes how a man named Jose developed an elaborate plan that involved labeling everything: “With an inked brush he marked everything with its name: table, chair, clock, door, wall, bed, pan. He went on to the corral and marked the animals and plants: cow, goat, pig, hen,...banana.”

As their memory continued to fade Jose decided that he needed to be even more explicit. He posted a sign on a cow that read: “This is the cow. She must be milked every morning so that she will produce milk, and the milk must be boiled in order to be mixed with coffee to make coffee and milk.” Thus they were living in a reality that was slipping away, momentarily captured by words but which would escape...when they forgot the values of the written letters. Eventually the village put a placard at the entrance to town that said, “God exists,” as that knowledge too was slipping.<sup>2</sup>

The Apostle John, like all biblical authors, was concerned about truth. The false teachers were traveling around teaching their false doctrine. He wanted to protect believers from false teaching and to apply the truth to their daily lives.

### Lesson

Second John 5-13 teaches us ways in which to apply the truth in our daily lives.

Let’s use the following outline:

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (Harper Perennial Classics, 2006), 46-48.

1. Live for the Truth (5-6)
2. Look for the Truth (7-11)
3. Long for the Truth (12-13)

## I. Live for the Truth (5-6)

The first way to apply the truth in our daily lives is to live for the truth.

John teaches that there are two ways to live for the truth.

The first way to live for the truth is *by loving God*.

John writes in verse 5, **“And now I ask you, dear lady – not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning – that we love one another.”** John does not set down a commandment but sets forth a request. However, in other places, John’s request is given as a commandment. And the request, which is also a commandment, is that believers **love one another**. The love which John requests is more than an emotion. The love that believers are to have for one another is a response to the love of God for us. It is a love that results in action. It is a love that serves. It is a love that seeks the well-being of others.

I struggle to love in the way that John requests. I find that I am selfish. I am self-centered. I seek my own comfort. When I come across a request to **love one another** and I try to imagine what that might look like, I find my mind wandering into the kind of fellowship that I think John envisioned. Imagine if I served others. Imagine if I put the comfort of others before my own comfort. Imagine if I sought the well-being of others. And imagine if others did the same thing! That would be an astonishingly transformative fellowship. But that is exactly what John is calling me to do. It starts with me.

The second way to live for the truth is *by obeying God*.

John writes in verse 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.”** When John says, **“And this is love,”** we expect him to define love. His definition, however, is more a description of practice. He is describing what love looks like in real life. And it is **“that we walk according to his commandments.”** Whose commandments? God’s commandments, of course.

Has someone said to you, “You are just being legalistic”? Or have you perhaps said that to someone else? There is a misunderstanding among people, even Christians, about the nature of legalism. Many people mistakenly think that a call to obey God’s commandments is legalism. Some even go so far as to say that the Law was for the Old Testament administration and now Christians live under the New Testament administration of Grace. That is a grave misunderstanding of legalism (and of the Law and Grace). I would say that legalism is requiring obedience to things that the Bible does *not* command. However, requiring obedience to the moral commandments of the Bible is never legalism. Walking in obedience to the moral commandments of the Law is how believers demonstrate love.

So, the first way to apply the truth in our daily lives is to live for the truth.

## II. Look for the Truth (7-11)

The second way to apply the truth in our daily lives is to look for the truth.

John sets down four ways to look for the truth.

The first way to look for the truth is *by recognizing deception*.

John has been dealing with an early form of Gnosticism

that has crept into the churches around Ephesus for which he was responsible. False teachers were teaching that the spirit of Christ came upon Jesus at his baptism and left him just before his death on the cross. In other words, these false teachers denied that Jesus was fully God and fully man in one Person from the moment of his conception. Thus John writes in verse 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 antichrist.”** The false teachers opposed Christ and they were deceivers.

We no longer have that particular form of Gnostic heresy around today. More common is that people do not believe that Jesus is fully God. They may affirm that Jesus was a great teacher or that he was great moralist. But they deny that Jesus was God in human form. However, believers must affirm that Jesus of Nazareth was fully God and fully man in one Person.

The second way to look for the truth is *by resisting destruction*.

John warns his beloved flock to beware of the false teachers who did not teach the Jesus was fully God and fully man in one Person. So John writes in verse 8, **“Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward.”** John is not saying that the believers will lose their salvation. He is saying that the believers will lose their full reward if they follow the teaching of the false teachers. John and the other true teachers have labored faithfully to teach the truth about the way of salvation and the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. Should believers drift into accepting false teaching, they will not only struggle in their walk with the Lord now but will also lose their full reward.

The Bible teaches that believers are not able to lose their salvation. Once a person has been justified by faith, he is a new

creation in Christ. He has been adopted into the family of God and cannot revert to being in the family of the devil. However, a believer can lose his reward. If he accepts false teaching, he will lose his reward. He will struggle spiritually in this life and he will lose some of his reward in glory. That is why it is so important to worship in a church that adheres faithfully to biblical teaching. It is not enough to belong to any church. One must belong to a church that is faithful to the word of God.

The third way to look for the truth is *by recognizing disciples*.

The false teachers believed that they were the enlightened ones and that their teaching went further than the teaching of Jesus that was given through the apostles. So John writes in verse 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.”** John is clear that going ahead of what was given by Jesus through the apostles has advanced beyond the gospel. John wants his beloved flock to hold fast to the truths that they have been given and not “go on ahead” with strange doctrines. Teaching that is “advanced” and not based on what has been given by God in his Holy Bible is errant.

I sometimes receive visits at my home from Jehovah’s Witnesses. If I have time, I will try to engage them in a conversation. I will ask them who Jesus is. They will tell me that he is *a* son of God but they cannot affirm that he is *the* Son of God, that is, the Second Person of the Trinity. They will try to prove their point from John’s Gospel, particularly John 1:1, which states, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” They will tell me that in the Greek text, the last phrase reads, “and the Word was a god.” I tell them that is because of a rule in Greek known as Colwell’s Rule, which is that “definite predicate nouns which precede the



verb usually lack the article.” In other words, the word “God” in this instance did not need a definite article. Moreover, the Jehovah’s Witnesses Bible known as the *New World Translation* translates the Greek as “God” in verses 6, 12, 13, and 18, and in each of those places, there is no definite article. The point is that we should not go on ahead of the teaching that is given to us in the Word of God.

The fourth way to look for the truth is *by rejecting deceivers*.

John writes in verses 10-11, **“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.”** The ancient world did not have church buildings. The Jews had synagogues but after a while, Christian teaching was not welcomed there. So, in the first century, most Christian worship and teaching took place in homes, especially larger homes. John is not forbidding courtesy and hospitality to opponents of the Christian message. Indeed, even Jesus spent time with detractors. What John is forbidding is giving a platform to false teachers. He does not want to give false teachers an opportunity to spread false teaching.

Several years ago, a man regularly attended the Men’s Bible study. He had an impressive grasp of Bible passages but it was evident that he had some significant doctrinal differences with us. The leader of the Men’s Bible study would allow the man to present his position and then the others in the Bible study would state their disagreement and present the biblical position. Over time, the man became increasingly bold and assertive. It eventually got to the point where I had to tell the man that his views were wrong and we did not appreciate the vehemence with which he was now promoting his views. Moreover, he was no longer allowed to promote his aberrant views in our Bible study. The man stopped attending the Men’s

Bible study. Believers must stand for and promote teaching that is consistent with the Word of God.

So, the first way to apply the truth in our daily lives is to live for the truth. The second way to apply the truth in our daily lives is to look for the truth.

### III. Long for the Truth (12-13)

And the third way to apply the truth in our daily lives is to long for the truth.

John writes in verses 12-13, **“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.”** There is much more that John wants to communicate with the members of the particular church to whom he is writing. However, he prefers talking in person with them rather than writing to them. Perhaps he anticipated an upcoming visit to the congregation at which time he will share with them the things that are on his heart. Moreover, he knows that being able to see each other **“face to face,”** which in Greek is literally “mouth to mouth,” will bring joy to himself and them.

Almost two millennia ago, John was extolling the superiority of in-person meetings rather than written communication. I suppose today John would be grateful for Zoom. One communicates orally and visually with another person at the same time. However, I think that he would still affirm that nothing beats “face to face” interaction. No longer is communication two-dimensional; it is three-dimensional. No longer is only the senses of sight and sound involved in the communication; it now includes the other senses as well. While we are

grateful for modern forms of communication, especially during the current pandemic, we are even more thankful for in-person interactions. And in this way we long for the truth.

So, the first way to apply the truth in our daily lives is to live for the truth. The second way to apply the truth in our daily lives is to look for the truth. And the third way to apply the truth in our daily lives is to long for the truth.

### Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed 2 John 5-13, let us make sure that our lives are built on the foundation of God's truth.

Roy McCloughry interviewed John Stott for *Christianity Today*. McCloughry asked Stott what was most needed in the church today. Stott answered, "The most important gift today...that builds up the church is teaching. Nothing builds up the church like the truth, and we desperately need more Christian teachers all over the world."<sup>3</sup>

The Apostle John wanted Christian teachers. But he wanted them to teach the truth and not error. He also wanted Christians to believe the truth and not error. Our lives can only be built on the foundation of God's truth. The church can only be built on the foundation of God's truth.

So let me urge you to live for the truth, look for the truth, and long for the truth of God in every area of your life. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2005/february/15805.html>.

# Mission Statement

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

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can  
be found at:

1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons).
2. [www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp](http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp).
3. [www.sermonaudio.com/source\\_detail.asp?sourceid=Fred-dyFritz](http://www.sermonaudio.com/source_detail.asp?sourceid=Fred-dyFritz).

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