

April 3, 2016 by Steve Brandon



Love and Truth

2 John

1. Love (verses 4-6)

2. Truth (verses 7-11)

One of the greatest battles in the Christian life is the balance between truth and love.

On the one hand, people can be so focused on being "loving" that truth is literally out the door. That is, it doesn't much matter what one believes or does. What matters is that you love them, regardless of their belief or their actions. This is the call of our modern society -- tolerance and full acceptance of anyone who differs from you. Furthermore, the world today demands your full approval of what they do. All in the name of "love."

Now, on the other hand, people can be so guided by the truth that love is completely out the door. That is, the only important thing to you is that you get it right. And you aim and you work and you strive to convince everybody how right you are, soliciting them to join your cause. It doesn't matter what sort of attitude you have or what grace you show; all that matters is whether or not you are right. This is often the way that religious zealots live.

This is a difficult battle for all Christians. How do you balance these two things? Because we, of all people, have come to know the truth of the gospel. We have clarity regarding life, God, and eternity. We know that we are justified in God's sight through the work of Christ. We want others to know this and believe this. And yet, we, of all people, have the call of Christ up on our lives, that we are to extend our love to a world dying in sin. This is difficult to balance.

So, how do you balance truth and love. In reality, you don't balance them. You embrace them. You don't compromise either of them. But you embrace both of them, fully and 100%! As Randy Alcorn says, "We should never approach truth except in a spirit of grace, or grace except in a spirit of truth. Jesus wasn't 50 percent grace, 50 percent truth, but 100 percent grace, 100 percent truth." [\[1\]](#)

Truth and love were embodied in Jesus Christ. John 1:14 says, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." Never was a man more loving and gracious than the Lord Jesus, Never was a man more full of truth than was the Lord Jesus. He lived them perfectly, not by balancing them, but by embracing them both.

But then again, this is the character of God. "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth" (Exodus 34:6). When the Scripture describes Jesus, it says that he was "full of grace and truth." When the Scriptures describe God, it says that he is "abounding in lovingkindness and truth."

And the Bible calls us to put forth both of these qualities in our lives as well. It's not either-or it is both-and. Again, Randy Alcorn describes it like this:

Countless mistakes in marriage, parenting, ministry, and other relationships are failures to balance grace and truth. Sometimes we neglect both. Often we choose one over the other.

It reminds me of Moses, our Dalmatian.

When one tennis ball is in his mouth, the other's on the floor. When he goes for the second ball, he drops the first. Large dogs can get two balls in their mouth. Not Moses. He manages to get two in his mouth only momentarily. To his distress, one ball or the other spurts out onto the floor.

Similarly, our minds don't seem big enough to hold on to grace and truth at the same time. We go after the grace ball--only to drop the truth ball to make room for it. We need to stretch our undersized minds to hold them both at once. [\[2\]](#)

And that's my hope and prayer for us this morning -- that we as individuals, that we as a church, would be strong in both love and truth. And there's no book of the Bible that clearly calls us to both of these characteristics than the book of 2 John.

The book of 2 John is found near the back of your Bibles, between 1 John and 3 John. By verse-count, it is the shortest book in the Bible. By word-count of the Greek text, it is only beaten out by 3 John (which has only 245 words to the 319 in 2 John) as being the shortest book in the Bible. This means that we can read the entire thing in less than 2 minutes, if we read slowly.

Now, remember, this is a letter that John wrote to a group of believers. And it's so short that some have referred to it as a postcard.

Here we go. The book of 2 John. And as I read, listen for the themes of love and truth.

2 John

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 rejoiced 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 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. 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.

Now, having finished the book of 1 John, I'm sure that many of you recognize many similar themes of the book. They both talk of love (2 John 5-6; 1 John 3). They both talk of truth (2 John 1-4; 1 John 1:6; 2:21; 3:18). They both talk of false teachers (2 John 7; 1 John 4:1). They both talk of the incarnation (2 John 7; 1 John 4:2). They both talk of abiding in the teaching of Christ (2 John 9; 1 John 2:24). They both talk of the new commandment, which is really an old commandment (2 John 5; 1 John 2:7-8). The similarity of themes have given scholars the overwhelming opinion that both of these letters were written by the same author, the apostle John.

Now, it is interesting here in the book of 2 John (and in 1 John), that he nowhere identifies himself by name. Again, because of similarity of style, most have come to recognize these books were written by the same one who wrote the gospel of John. Again, a book where John nowhere identifies himself by name. The closest he gets is by identifying himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved," almost as if John was too humble even to mention his name in the same sentence with Jesus. From the internal clues of the book, we know that it was John who wrote.

And when John identifies himself here in 2 John, he simply calls himself, "the elder." Now, he could have called himself, "the apostle," for that he was. He was one sent out by Jesus himself to spread the gospel far and wide. But, he didn't. He simply called himself, "the elder" (verse 1) Or, as might come across well in our English, "the old man."

It's probably because John was indeed old as he wrote these things. It's also probable that John had no need to appeal to his authority in this postcard. He was known and loved and respected by those to whom he wrote. His influence far outweighed his authority. Truthfully, this is something that every leader should strive to accomplish, where our influence far outweighs our authority.

Well, unlike 1 John, this letter is addressed to a specific group of people.

2 John 1

The elder to the elect lady and her children.

There is wide-spread division as to the identity of this group of people. Some say that this refers to a specific woman, this elect lady, who was gifted of the Lord in evangelism and led many people to Christ. And John writes to her and "her children." Or, as some say, she was gifted in hospitality and took many into her home, perhaps even running an orphanage.

Now, there are others who say that this "elect lady" is a poetic way of referring to a church. After all, Paul described the church as a bride (in Ephesians 5). John used this same metaphor in Revelation 19:6-8, when he spoke about the marriage supper of the lamb, when the church will fully join herself with the Messiah in glorious perfection. Peter certainly refers to a church using a similar language in 1 Peter 5:13, "She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings." If John was writing to a church, then "her children" are the members of the church.

And if I would lean any way, I would tend to the latter interpretation, that John is writing to a church, describing her as an "elect lady," though there is no way to know for sure.

Now, the good news is this: it doesn't matter. Because, in either case, we are talking about a group of believers. Whether they all trace their spiritual heritage to this godly woman, or whether they all find a common bond in the same church family, one thing is clear: John is writing to a group of believers, counseling them on how to live the Christian life. His counsel can be summarized in two words: love and truth.

In fact, this is the title of my message this morning, "Love and Truth." In verses 1 and 2, you can see these things come together.

2 John 1-2

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:

John had come to know this elect lady and her children, and had come to love them. And his experience was not unique. For there were others who knew this elect lady and her children (see verse 1). And they had come to love them. And the reason for this bond of love is "the truth."

This elect lady and her children had embraced the truth. John and his disciples had embraced the truth. And, as a result, there was a bond of love that formed. This is how the Christian life works. You come into contact with others who believe the same thing that you believe, and you have a natural love and affection for them.

For instance, yesterday, I spent the day at Knox College, my alma mater. I went because it was the 30-year reunion of the 1986 baseball team that won the Midwest Conference Championship. And I was on that team. It was great to hear the stories that the players remembered of our season together as a team. And most of these people, I haven't seen for 30 years! And so, it was a good opportunity to connect. It was a good opportunity for the gospel.

And as I spoke about what the Lord has done in my life over these past 30 years, taking me into seminary, and leading me into full-time ministry where I get to tell people where forgiveness of sins is to be found -- in Jesus who died for our sins and rose from the dead. And as I spoke my story, the response of others was interesting. Mostly, I was met with indifference, like they were thinking, "That's good for you, Steve."

I did discover that a few of the guys on our team were involved in their Catholic churches. And so, there was some interest with them. But, there was one guy I talked with who asked a probing question. He said, "Is your church a non-denominational church?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Mine is too. I go to a 'Bible Church.'"

And with that, there was an instant connection that went deeper than my friends who are Catholic. Why? Because we have a common bond in the truth that's not shared by my other teammates. And it leads to a genuine Christian love.

My only regret of my time is that I didn't have the time or opportunity to speak further with him. I would have loved to do so. If I would have had the opportunity to dig a bit further, I know that I would have rejoiced greatly. He told me that he was excited about the new pastor that had come. He said that he is beginning to stir some life into the congregation.

And that's what John is talking about here in verses 1 and 2. There is a common bond of love between all of those who believe and know the truth.

There are some who I connected with, who I will probably not connect with again for another decade. But, I think that I will have a bit more contact with my friend who is attending a like-minded church with ours. When the truth is held in common, there is a natural bond of love.

At the end of this little post card, you can see John's love for these people.

2 John 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.

This is how Christian love works. We want to be with others who share in the truth with us. We want to share our lives with them. And then, our joy will be complete. You can see the connection of love and truth in the greeting in verse 3.

2 John 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.

I love the confidence of John. "Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us" (verse 3). He knows of God's grace. He knows of God's mercy. He knows of God's peace. He knows that they all come from God. He knows that God will bring them into our lives in truth and love.

And it is these final two words that will be the focus of my message this morning. "Truth and Love." Let's first look at ...

1. Love (verses 4-6)

2 John 4-6

I rejoiced 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 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.

John here describes his encountering some of the children of this elect lady. How John came into contact with these people, we don't know. Perhaps they were passing through the region and happened to come upon John somewhat circumstantially. Perhaps they were coming with a message from the elect lady to deliver to John, and now they are going to deliver this message back again to her. We don't know.

But, we do know John's response to these people. It was one of joy. John found great joy in seeing her children "walking in the truth."

Next week, we will look at 3 John 4, which says about the same thing, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth." This is the reality of what God does in the hearts of believers when we see and observe and hear about the behavior of others. If they are going about building the kingdom of God, it brings great joy to our souls knowing that God is accomplishing his work in his way through his people.

For instance, I received an email this morning informing me of a man coming to serve a church in our area. I know what this man's presence will mean to the kingdom of God in the Chicagoland (and Rockford) area. It gave me great joy.

Similarly, John was rejoicing with these people that he met, because they were "walking in the truth." You say, "What truth is he talking about?" Well, John goes on to explain. They were walking in the commandment of the Father (verse 4). And as verses 5 and 6 explain, they were walking in the command of love. Listen again to verses 5 and 6.

2 John 5-6

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. 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.

These words are almost identical to John's words in 1 John 2:7-8. Turn back there and look at them.

1 John 2:7-8

Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.

And these words are almost identical to the words that Jesus spoke to John (and the other disciples) in the upper room on the night before he died. After washing his disciples' feet, after dismissing Judas to do as he pleases, Jesus said this, ...

John 13:34-35

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

The command that Jesus gave to love is really no new commandment. It is the basis of all of the laws of the Old Testament. For Jesus, himself said that the greatest commandment is this:

Matthew 22:37-40

... "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

In other words, do you want to sum up all of the commands of the Old Testament? You can do it with one word: Love. Vertical love to God; horizontal love to others. Everything in the law is simply commentary on what it means to love. What it means to love God. What it means to love your neighbor.

Yet, Jesus called it a "new commandment." And John followed suit (here in 2 John 5-6).

2 John 5-6

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. 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.

I believe that the newness of the command has to do with the example of love that Jesus brought. It's one thing to tell people to do something. It's another thing to actually show them how it is to be done. And Jesus showed us the way of love.

He was patient with his selfish disciples, who wanted to be first. He washed their feet, when they thought that such a task was only for the lowest of servants. His ultimate demonstration of love was when he "laid down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). He demonstrated his love for us by dying in our place upon the cross.

And we are called to the same sort of love, radically sacrificing ourselves for others. This is love. And, according to John, love is the essence of obedience to God.

Did you notice how many times John emphasized the commandment of God? In verses 4, 5, and 6, we see John mentioning the commandment of God some four times!

2 John 4-6

I rejoiced 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 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.

Love is the essence of obedience to God. Sadly, there are those who are so focused upon the truth of God that they miss that the emphasis of the command of God is to love, to love like Jesus. May God give us a heart to love like Jesus loved.

Let's move on out our second point this morning. We have seen Love (verses 4-6). And now, let's focus our attention upon ...

2. Truth (verses 7-11)

2 John 7-11

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. 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.

These verses are all about the truth and how to act in light of it.

Again, like the command to love, many of these words are familiar to us as well, as they appeared in 1 John. In 1 John 4, John explained about the false prophets who were in the world. He said,

1 John 4:1-3

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.

Note the parallel with 2 John 7.

2 John 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.

John is addressing the same issue. He is addressing the fact that there are deceivers in the world who have gone out and are preaching in the name of Jesus, but are preaching a different Jesus.

In John's day, the error was their denial of the incarnation. They did not "confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh." Apparently, they had been influenced by the Greek philosophy of the corruption of the flesh. That it was inconceivable for these teachers for a sinless person to be in the flesh. And so, it was impossible for Jesus to be in the flesh.

Instead, they believed, that Jesus "appeared" to be in the flesh. He "appeared" to be a man. He was a sort of "phantom-man." This is the philosophy called "Docetism," from a Greek word which means "to seem" or "to appear." Jesus merely "appeared" to be in the flesh.

And to this, John says, "No! This is not right!" John said that if you do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, then you are a deceiver (verse 7). Worse than that, you are "the antichrist."

Remember when we were in 1 John, I told you that the term, "antichrist," appears only four times in the Bible. Once in 2 John and 3 times in 1 John (2:18, 22; 4:3), and nowhere in the book of Revelation. And every time, it simply speaks about those who oppose Jesus. Or, to be closer to the word, they are "anti-Messiah." They don't believe Jesus to be the Messiah.

Unlike modern prophesy speakers, who throw around this term like there is only one "antichrist" who will come in the future, leading people to fear. John (the only Biblical writer to use the term) spoke of the present danger of the antichrists who are in the world! "Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so not many antichrists have come" (1 John 2:18). Rather than leading people to fear with this news, John brought comfort with these words. He said, "You have been anointed by the Holy One and you all have knowledge" (1 John 2:20). You know that the antichrist is coming. You know that antichrists are here. When John used the term, he was simply referring to those who were against Jesus" (1 John 2:18). "Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son" (1 John 2:22).

And we find out here in 2 John 7 that the problem of their day was in their denial of the humanity of Christ.

2 John 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.

And in our day, it isn't the humanity of Jesus that is in question. It is the deity of Jesus that false prophets (and deceivers) often deny. This is true of all of our cults today. They deny the deity of Jesus.

Mormons believe that Jesus was born in heaven as the spirit child of Elohim (Heavenly Father) by one of his wives, and Jesus' brother was Lucifer, who became Satan. They believe that Jesus was one of many gods.

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Jesus is a created being, also known as the archangel Michael. They believe that Jesus is a god.

Christian Science believes that Jesus was a man who showed us the way to God.

John's warning to us about these people comes in verse 8, ...

2 John 8

Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward.

The warning here is the warning of apostasy, turning away from the truth. Turning away from everything that we stand for, and losing it all. In other words, if you get sucked into believing in a different Jesus, your new "Jesus" has no power to save.

So, be on the alert. Do not believe in everyone who comes along mentioning the name of Jesus (1 John 4:1). You need to be sure that they are talking about the real Jesus -- the Jesus who has the power to save, the Jesus who is the second member of the Triune God. Any other Jesus has no power to save.

So, what's the problem? Why do people believe these things? Because they go beyond what is written.

2 John 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.

The problem with what the Mormons believe is that they have another book, called "The Book of Mormon." The problem with what the Jehovah's Witnesses believe is that they have another organization, called "The Watchtower Society," which leads them astray. The problem with what the Christian Scientists believe is that they have another book, called "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures."

When John speaks about "going on ahead," he's describing the process of going beyond the gospel, rather than resting in it. My counsel to you would be to abide in the teaching of Jesus. Rest in it. Do you remember the things that Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7)? Rest in the teaching. Do you remember how Jesus told us to lead by example (Mark 10:42-45)? Rest in the teaching. Do you remember the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15)? Rest in the teaching. Do you remember the way that Jesus was compassionate with the woman at the well (John 4)? Rest in his teaching.

We don't need to go beyond. We have what we need. We know what we need to know. We need rest in it.

So, how do you deal with those who bring false teaching? John's counsel comes in verse 10,

2 John 10

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.

Based upon this principle, whenever a Jehovah's Witness or a Mormon comes knocking on my door, I never bring them into my house. I'm glad to talk with them. But, I talk with them right there on the doorstep or on my driveway. It's good that they usually come by when it's warm.

I don't bring them into my house. You never know how they will use this against you. "Your pastor friend up the street invited us into his house. We are having a Bible study. He's really interested in learning what we have to say. I think he's coming around." May such lies never be spread.

The principle here is that you don't want to help their cause. That's the idea of "giving him any greeting." It's not a matter of refusing to say, "Hello." The greeting that John is talking about is similar to the greeting found 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." This greeting is really a blessing.

John is saying, "Don't give any credence to their cause. Don't help them on their way."

2 John 11

for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.

As you support them, you take part in their deception. The principle extends to all who are teaching wrongly. Don't support them. Most televangelists are like this. Don't support them. Support those ministries that you fully embrace.

Now, how is this loving to shun people? It is loving the truth. It is loving the children of God and protecting them from false teaching.

Note who exactly you are shunning. You are shunning those coming to you with a teaching that is preaching of a false Jesus. I am not talking about shunning your neighbor or your unsaved family and friends. But, I am referring to those who teach falsely and lead others astray. Do not embrace and support false teachers, for in doing so, you "take part in their wicked works."

If you are ever confused as to how to do this, look to Jesus. He was perfect at these matters. He extended his love to sinners like tax-collectors and prostitutes. He even received the mocking of being a "friend of sinners" (Matthew 11:19). But when it came to the Pharisees, who brought their teaching against the ways of Christ, he rebuked them strongly (see the "woes" pronounced in Matthew 23). Yet still, he had a tender heart of love for them, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" (Matthew 23:37).

May we all follow the example of Jesus, walking in love and in truth.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on April 3, 2016 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] Randy Alcorn, "Grace and Truth Paradox," p. 16.

[2] *Ibid*, p. 16.