



"Truth: Compelled By Love" - 2 John

by Pastor Tim Dodson
of Jesus Fellowship of Believers
in Menomonie, Wisconsin
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(1) THE ELDER, To the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all those who have known the truth, (2) because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever: (3) Grace, mercy, and peace will be with you from God the Father and from the Lord

Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love. (4) I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father. (5) And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another. (6) This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it. (7) For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. (8) Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward. (9) Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. (10) If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; (11) for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds. (12) Having many things to write to you, I did not wish to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, that our joy may be full. (13) The children of your elect sister greet you. Amen.

"Truth? What is truth?"

- Pontius Pilate, fifth prefect of the Roman province of Judaea, AD 26–36.

After spending 5 chapters in his first letter addressing the issue of Christian *love*, John now writes this second letter almost as an addendum it seems. For as much as the manifest of both vertical and horizontal love is critical to the living out of our faith, *love alone*...especially as defined by our modern culture, is not enough unless mixed with an equal proportion of *truth*.

John begins this short letter with the statement that he was writing to brothers and sisters “whom (he) love(s)... *in truth*.” He felt it important herein to remark that he not only *loved* them, but *how* and perhaps even *why*, was because of the critical element of truth. He was able to love in such a way because “the **truth abides** in us.” (verse 2) Not just redemption, the Holy Spirit, or a truck load of “best intentions,” but also something we call TRUTH. Thus loving according to Christ has more involved in it than gritted teeth and a sweet chocolate exterior.

Were there issues in the implementation of his first letter? Did the manifest expression of their love have a detrimental impact upon the local churches who perhaps expressed *their* version with no insistence upon truth also being readily evident? Did John feel he needed to add a “but” to his prior communiqué? Perhaps. For certainly we see many today who claim to be believers and yet they seem to care very little about the truth aspect of the church in its manifest of love.

Even when offered the evidence pointing to the truth, there often is a quick coping to the three monkeys routine; except herein it is "hear no truth, see no truth and speak no truth." There is a covering of the eyes, the ears and the mouth...because the truth is not always comfortable, expedient, or personally edifying. As it has been said so often, the 'truth can hurt.'

Frankly, we too need to have some clarification on this matter today, which makes this letter as pertinent in *our* current Christian community as it was to John's in his day! Because it seems we have lost the 'truth' aspect of love, and now we apparently no longer need to consider the ramifications of our actions and/or interactions as we attempt to express Christ's love. We need not care about the secondary fallout due to our support of a person or cause, or the impact of our "half-love" and our blind tolerance, (new definition: "acceptance and support"), as long as we have that sticky goopy emotional "feel-good" experience with one another. We apparently no longer need to consider the facts in the case whatsoever as long as we can connect in emotional communion and social embrace. As long as we all have a collective positive experience, we are 'good to go.'

It seems we now value the lack of "ruffled feathers" as the highest reflection that we stand in and live out the faithful Christian reflection of Christ, even if truth is nowhere to be found! But John is going to declare a very different picture. John...the "apostle that Jesus loved...", one of the twelve who walked with Jesus, loved Jesus, and was loved *by* Jesus in a real time tangible way that we can only dream about, says that "**truth** must be walked in" (verse 4) as much as *love*, if we are to know and experience and be able to give out the true reflection of the Son of God. Truth is a big issue with God! In fact, scripture has much to say on the subject.

Jeremiah 9:5 says, "They are skilled at teaching their tongues to lie." Hosea 4:1, the prophet says, "There is no truth in them." Isaiah 59:4 says, "They do not plead for truth." Jeremiah 9:3 says, "They are not valiant for the truth." First Timothy 6:5 says, "They're destitute of truth." Second Timothy 3:8 says, "They resist the truth." Second Timothy 4:4 says, "They turn their ears from the truth." But we who God calls His church are to live starkly different! 1 Timothy 3:15 tells us that "*The church exists in the world to be the pillar and ground of the truth.*" Therefore if the church ever abandons the truth then it ceases to be the church of Jesus Christ.

John writes this letter in obvious warning of those who would take a contrary approach to this matter. These...according to verse 7, appear to be former church attendees that have now left the church (i.e. *gone out into the world* - v. 7; 1 Jn 2:18-19) and are likely trying to convert others to their way of thinking and no doubt doing so at the price of throwing their "ex" brothers and sisters "under the bus."

His address however isn't toward these nay-sayers. He does not write to them in some "back-door," indirect, or "under-the-table" method, but he addresses himself rather to those whom he ought to address, the believers...the family of God who continue to stand strong in the scriptures. There is no venting on social media where we dodge dialogue. He addresses the "*elect lady and her children*"...the **church** and those who are part of it, because it is these who will yet hear him, while the others would at this point be so blinded by pride and obstinate in their angry agenda that they would no longer be able to digest the truth or frankly even willing to taste it even.

John says that in truth and love, ...to these who are willing to embrace both, "*Grace, mercy, and peace will be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father...*" (verse 3) Verse 4 points out that the embrace of truth along with the manifest of love is a "commandment from God." Therefore such is not optional. That is hard for us in our 'buffet line' mentality toward the faith today. We want to build our own version of faith as one builds a sandwich. Personally designed to fit our tastes...our personal world, our chosen level of commitment and varied comfort realm.

But such is not the Bible. God has as much to say in the "how" we live out our faith as He does in the "what." I am reminded of how in the Old Testament the presence of God literally "left the temple." Not because the people were failing to worship, but the perimeters of His design were being altered for the comfort and will of the people. Such was not "OK" with God. In fact, He just *left*.

In verse 5 of our text, John reiterates the preeminence of love lived out in our personal lives and our church communities. He seems to want to be sure that truth did not reject the love which is so needed. Jesus Himself so lived in this manner! He knew the truth to the greatest degree in history, and yet despite our sinful hearts, our fallen state, and our constant tendency to the flesh, He still came, He still loved us, and He still went to the cross, and paid the price for us and gave us an out from the penalty that is sure to come and He says will indeed come.

He never swept the truth under the rug. He did not pretend our state of being was not a fact! Yet there are pastors now coming out saying that there is no such thing as hell. So hey..."don't worry"...it will all be ok! In fact, it seems that the truth of man's state is so intrinsically tied to that love. He could not have loved us so, unless the facts were on the table.

Without the truth, His love would have been merely a shadow...a vapor that would have disappeared in the wind. It is even so today; vertically and horizontally toward each other. We cannot really love God or each other outside of the truth. Being that Satan is the 'father of lies,' John's position is quite consistent with the grand plan of salvation! That is why coming to terms with our sinful state is such a part of the salvation experience!

Who amongst us has not been on the receiving end of such a "love vapor" ...having it disappear once truth was introduced to the scene? There have been many who said that they loved me, but quickly was such rejected on the stage of truth? What was between us was therefore never love, no matter what it looked like. Because love does not only endure in the midst of truth, it thrives and is made stronger! Real and enduring love is only possible when truth exists and there is no fear of what lights are turned on at its hand, and what is therefore illuminated and thus revealed.

John is careful to cover both issues, saying in verse 4 that we need to walk in *truth* and in verse 6 saying we need to walk in *love*. Never does one exclude or reject the other! It's 2 sides of the same coin! But his point herein is that there will always be those who try to have one without the other! John, never one to mince words, calls these folks "deceivers." John never shied away from the truth and while he expressly loves and calls us to love, he was not afraid to call it straight. Even if the label he gives seemed blunt, or if he names names as he does in his third letter.

While these folks come in many forms, these particularly professed a version of Christianity that claimed that Jesus "did not come in the flesh." This is what is known in theologian circles as a form of Gnosticism. Such gnostics appeared, and yet appear today in varied forms, but inevitably they attempt to alter the scriptural and historical accounts of Jesus and introduce a 'mystic,' albeit false revisionist version that strips away foundational aspects of the person of Christ and His implicit instruction. There was and certainly *is* overwhelming evidence contrary to their position, but facts matter little to such folks. They *want* a different story so they simply invent one and claim it as reality.

The fact is people are so nonchalant about this issue today. They so easily come in and out of church, never having a thought that they're interacting with the God of truth who hates deception and lies. They are quick to lie to save face and avoid the uncomfortable aspect of the truth, seeking non-confrontation at any cost. But as the scripture says in 1 Timothy 3:15, The church is to be a monument to the truth. We exist to represent the truth. That is our mission, and that is our purpose.

Our president said this week that "Americans should be very proud," because small acts of courage "slowly made an entire country realize that love is love." Yet truth was not a consideration. But that is the world. I find it hard to get worked up or alarmed at what goes on out there. But let it never be said of the church, or again, scripture says we therefore reject the purpose of our existence and have moved out of our calling and reason to be here. Is such truth uncomfortable? At times it certainly is! Will we suffer for the truth? Absolutely. Real Christians always have...throughout history.

But please remember Christian, we cannot walk in truth at the expense of rejecting love! Never are we called to hate, and as he has expressly covered in the last letter, our love is imperative...mandatory even. So *love*. Love *always*, love *long*, love *without reservation*. I know that John's position and his directive on how to deal with such folks is a little hard to take...at least in the social and cultural aspects of this world we live in. We may very well be rejected by our society for the truth. We may lose relationships with people that we care about. We might be considered as offensive and divisive, even vilified as the enemy. In order to avoid that, we can compromise or even set the truth aside that offends.

But then who are we? Such a stand will not come easy, and will so often fly in the face of the presiding culture around us. John tells us that it will indeed be a matter of work on our part. He tells us not to "lose that which we have worked for." Work! We can factually hate that word and that aspect of our faith life! But never has true Christianity ever been about "going with the flow." This however is why so many start this race with the best of intentions, but somewhere along the way set down the mantle of faith and call, and opt for a more comfortable path. We are always to be the salt of the world, and salt preserves and flavors, but it can also irritate. So *love* Christian...but always love in truth!

This week I received a lovely letter from a sister in the Lord who took the opportunity to express her great thanks and love for me in that I did not give up on her and toss her aside despite repeated rejections of my love and certainly the truth concerning her throughout many years. But she poured out her love and commitment to me for having stood strong on both...love *and* truth. I did so because I have always loved her as a sister despite the pain she caused and the pain she personally endured.

But more than that, I love my God who has called me to such, and I desire to be a part of His greater church that mandates both from me. Today she has found a reality with God that loves her without regret and without apology, and so do I. And living in that truth currently has placed her in an uncomfortable and even painful situation...in many aspects. But it's *real*. God's love for her, and my love for her, and her life as a whole, now is real...it's true, and honest. And in that place...and that place alone, she has come to experience "*Grace, mercy, and peace ...from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.*" (vs 3)

And in that fact, I rejoice. I rejoice in love and truth...