

## II John

### *What Is Truth?*

Over 2000 years ago a Roman procurator named Pontius Pilate stood toe to toe with what appeared to be a falsely accused Jew named Jesus of Nazareth. This Jesus was accused by Jewish leaders of blasphemy against God and treason against Rome.

They said he called himself a king, and the son of God.

So Pilate asked Jesus Him, *"Are You a king then?"* Jesus answered, *"You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."*

Pilate didn't want to be bothered by these Jewish disputes, He was a cynic by nature, so when this Jewish Rabbi started talking about truth, Pilate sneered, "What is truth?"

Isn't that a fascinating question? What is truth? You'd think that would be obvious. The dictionary says, "The quality or state of being true. Conformity to fact or actuality."

Truth is fact. Truth is actuality. You'd think we could say, "Case closed," right there.

But the reality is, philosophers were batting around the "What is truth?" long before Pilate's mom ever gave birth.

In 400 BC Socrates confronted the sophists. And the amazing thing is people are still debating the concept of truth today.

There are absolutists-traditionalists-realists on the one side who hold to "plain, unvarnished objective fact." On the other side there's the relativists-postmodernists-idealists who say, "There are no facts, only interpretations."

They see the dark forces of language, culture, power, gender, class, ideology and desire--all subverting our perceptions of the world, and clouding our judgement with false notions of absolute truth.

The book "Truth (Oxford Readings in Philosophy)" is over 400 pages of philosophers deliberating truth.

Now before you say "who cares about a bunch of philosophers debating in their ivory towers" think about this:

In two national surveys conducted in 2002 by Barna Research people were asked if they believe that there are moral absolutes that are unchanging or that moral truth is relative to the circumstances.

Two thirds of adults said truth is always relative to the person and their situation. It's not absolute. Among teenager 83% said moral truth depends on the circumstances, and only 6% said moral truth is absolute.

Follow this: Sixty percent of people 36 and older embraced moral relativism, 75% of the adults 18 to 35 said there's no absolutes. 83% of teens agreed. Moral relativism is gaining ground.

Barna said, "Substantial numbers of Christians believe that activities such as abortion, gay sex, sexual fantasies, cohabitation, drunkenness and viewing pornography are morally acceptable. Without some firm and compelling basis for suggesting that such acts are inappropriate, people are left with philosophies such as 'if it feels good, do it,' 'everyone else is doing it' or 'as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else, it's permissible.' In fact, the alarmingly fast decline of moral foundations among our young people has culminated in a one-word worldview: 'whatever.' The result is a mentality that esteems pluralism, relativism, tolerance, and diversity without critical reflection of the implications of particular views and actions."

That question, "What is truth?" is a burning issue in our day and it's not just philosophical. It has to do with the way we live our everyday lives.

What is truth and what does it mean to us? To answer that lets turn to what we believe here as the source of truth, the Bible.

### **Turn with me to the little book of 2 John, pg 1085**

The letter we call II John is the shortest book in the Bible. It's only 12 verses long.

It was written by the apostle John around 90 AD. This is a little less than 60 years after the death of Jesus Christ.

The Apostle John wrote 5 books in all. Each of these books were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit therefore they're more than just a compilation of John's thoughts and ideas.

These are actually God's truths given to us through the pen of a human author.

John may have known Jesus better than any man who ever lived. He was with Jesus all the way through His earthly ministry and stood at the foot of the cross when He died.

After the resurrection John stayed in Jerusalem where he saw his brother become the first Christian martyr.

Later on John traveled between the churches of Asia Minor (which we know as Turkey) and used Ephesus as home base.

John was really up in years at the time he writes this one page letter we're looking at today. He was a man who finished well. Truth wasn't negotiable for John. He wasn't willing to sell out.

What's really striking to me is how quickly the truth gets lost to most people. Adam and Eve knew God's truth firsthand. They got it from God Himself, but they bought into a lie in what seemed like no time.

The churches of John's day were first generation churches. Jesus commissioned the disciples to go into all the world and preach the Good News.

They did, and as they went they started local groups of believers. With in a very short time though people from the outside and people from the inside brought confusion.

The truth became blurred and distorted.

So here's 85 year old John whose sold out for the truth having to write to Christians challenging them to stick with the truth.

Let's look first of all at verses 1-3.

*I. We Must Know The Truth* **Read 1-3**

The word "Elder" is used a couple of different ways in the New Testament. Some times it's used to designate pastors or leaders in a local church. When it's used that way it's a title.

But the word *presbuteros* literally means "older man" and I think that's the way John is using it here. He's the "old guy," He's the only living Apostle at this point and the idea of the elder implies dignity.

John, who's faithfulness has been demonstrated by his life, has something to say.

This one page letter is addressed to the “elect lady,” or the “chosen lady.”

Bible scholars have taken a few different approaches to identifying the “lady.” It could be a well known Christian woman. It could be a euphemism for a local church. Or, it could have something to do with a church that met in a well respected ladies’ home.

Whichever it is, what I want us to see is John’s emphasis on truth.

He brings it up 4 times in the first 3 verses.

The word “truth” is a translation of the Greek word *aletheia*. *Aletheia* is derived from the negative particle *a*, which means “not” and the verb *lanthano* which means “to be hidden.”

Truth is something obvious. It’s evident. It’s not hidden.

The Bible says there is truth and that it can be known. It says truth will be with us forever.

Now, just because truth isn’t hidden doesn’t mean that we don’t need to search it out.

The book of Proverbs says *“Buy the truth, and do not sell it, Also wisdom and instruction and understanding.”* Proverbs 23:23

*“Let not mercy and truth forsake you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart...”* Proverbs 3:3

In other words, value truth. Go after it and pay whatever price it takes but latch on to the truth and don’t let it go.

In Psalm 43:3 the Psalm writer cries out to God in prayer, *“Oh, send out Your light and Your truth!”*

John opened his letter on this note of truth because there were already people taking that which was accurate and real and twisting it around.

Why are there so many religions and philosophies, and tenets, and isms? Because rather than buying into God’s revelation of the way things really are people want to create their own reality.

It may not be true. It may not have one shred of evidence or substance to back it up, but they like it because it's theirs. They feel good about it.

John was not one to say that all religions and ideas are true in their own way and we just have to be accepting of everything everybody comes up with. To John there was this gargantuan, huge, massive difference between truth and error.

Truth isn't going to change. And it all starts with the Grace, mercy, and peace that comes from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here's where the Bible speaks with crystal clarity.

Jesus said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."* John 14:6

*I am the bread of life*

*I am the light of the world*

*I am the door*

*I am the good shepherd*

*I am the Son of God*

*I am the resurrection and the life*

*I am the true vine*

Jesus spoke with perfect clarity and absolute exclusivity. He didn't say I'm an ethicist, a philosopher, or one of many smart people you ought to listen too.

He said I'm the truth. According to the Bible anything that contradicts Jesus is error.

So here's Jesus saying I'm the way to God and there is no other way. I'm the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved. I'm the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.

Here's how we respond to truth. We learn it and then we appropriate it. We read what the Bible says about ourselves and Jesus.

We're sinners who have failed God big time. Jesus is the Son of God who sacrificed Himself to pay the price of our sin. He's the only door. He's the only way to forgiveness and God's family.

God in grace and mercy has provided forgiveness. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep

There's no middle ground when it comes to the claims of Jesus Christ. It's either take it or leave it.

Jesus claims to be truth.

*I. We Must Know The Truth*

*II. We Must Walk In Truth* **Read vs 4**

The word walk in the Bible often means, "live." It means, "to walk through life."

John says, "I'm happy to know that some of the people there are walking in truth. There's a bunch that aren't, so to hear about the ones that are is great."

Next week we're celebrating FCC 27th anniversary. Things have changed a whole lot here in 27 years.

We used to record sermons on a little tape player with the built in mic. It would pick up the sound of the motor and go rur, rur, rur on the tape. When it came to the end you'd have to turn the tape over and press the play and record buttons at the same time. Remember those?

We met in Arundel High school band room. There were no windows and no air conditioning. During the summer we had about 20 box fans all roaring at the same time. It would get so hot there were people kind of drifting in and out of consciousness during the sermons. (Of course that still happens once in a while)

In the winter the heat was on a timer and went down on the weekend. We could get it to put out a little heat, but not much. And then it made a whole bunch of racket. I had to speak over the clanging.

We couldn't wait to get in our own building. There was joy in getting into our own facility.

But I'll tell you what. If all we got out of the deal was a building and people weren't walking in truth I'd say let's go back.

I love what God has provided for us here. But it's not my greatest joy. It's icing on the cake but it's not the cake. My greatest joy is to see a marriage that was strained renewed by God's truth.

Or to hear a wife say to me, "My husband never had time for church but since we

started coming here he gets me up and going. I can see us both changing.

Or to watch parents and children work through disagreements God's way and see the unity that comes out of it.

Those are the things that bring me real joy.

Truth is so practical. God only wants the best for us so He directs us in His truth and we get the blessing. When people are walking God's truth they're blessed and the people around them are blessed.

As soon as we start to get away from God's truth there's pain and heartache.

Now look at this: **read vs 5-6**

To listen to some people you'd think that love and truth were at odds with one another.

In 1966, just as our nation was entering into the throws of a cultural revolution Joseph Fletcher published his book entitled "Situation Ethics, The New Morality."

His book played right into the emerging drug, Beatles, eastern thought, sexual revolution, do your own thing mentality.

I know for many of you this is like ancient history, but I can't tell you how much these converging ideologies transformed this country.

Everyone of us sitting in this room have been imprinted by this cultural shift.

Fletcher was a key player.

This is what he wrote: "The situationist enters into every decision-making situation fully armed with the ethical maxims of his community and its heritage, and he treats them with respect as illuminators of his problems. Just the same he is prepared in any situation to compromise them or set them aside in the situation if love seems better served by doing so."

In other words our ethics aren't determined by truth. They're determined by what we believe is the loving thing to do.

Fletcher taught Christian Ethics at Harvard Divinity School and was the first professor

of medical ethics at the University of Virginia. He eventually gave up his faith and declared himself to be an atheist.

He served as president of the Euthanasia Society of America. He was also a member of the American Eugenics Society. The Eugenics Society believed in discouraging or preventing the "less fit" from reproducing.

See, the philosophy the Beatles propagated through "All You Need Is Love," Fletcher propagated to the religious community through Situation Ethics.

But now notice this, according to the Bible here in 2 John, love and truth aren't mutually exclusive. They go hand in hand. We walk according to God's commands in truth and love.

Ephesians 4:15 commands us to *speaking the truth in love*.

1 John 3:18 *My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.*

Look at the cycle: The command is to love, and to love is to obey. So to obey the command is to love. And to love is to obey the command. And all that's called "walking in the truth."

The greatest cultural shift in the history of our country happened when we bought into the "love is more important than truth" philosophy. In the end we reaped moral chaos and ethical anarchy.

I don't have to give you the statistics on abortion, child abuse, divorce, porn, spousal abuse. We're living it and it's anything but the love the Bible teaches.

What it is is self-love. You can't have real love without the truth to guide you.

Jesus presented Himself and the Bible as truth. Then He said this, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free."

Truth impacts life ... John speaks of the greatest impact of truth being "love."

Truth openly expresses itself in a genuine selfless love for others.

Truth will never lead us into being arrogant or to think less of others.

Truth designates what we as Christians are to believe.

Truth designates how we as Christians are to live.

As Christians we are to be affectionately committed to the reality of truth.



- I. *We Must Know The Truth*
- II. *We Must Walk In Truth*
- III. *We Must Hang On To The Truth*

## **Read vs 7**

Now at first we might say, “Wow, that’s really strong language.” And it is. But remember if there’s such thing as truth, then there has to be such thing as error.

Our culture seems to have a tough time saying anything is wrong. Especially when it comes to religion.

If you think about it, religion is the most important thing when it comes understanding right and wrong.

If I’m wrong about a financial investment I could lose money. If I’m wrong about a moral choice I could really mess up my life.

I heard a guy on the news before Katrina hit New Orleans saying, “I’m not leaving. We’ve heard these warnings to get out of town before. All it does is chase away tourist dollars. I’m staying right here.”

He was wrong. I don’t know where he is right now but I have to believe where ever he is he’s thinking I made a BIG mistake!

But all those wrong choices only impact us in the here and now. If we get religion wrong the repercussions are going to last for all eternity.

It’s not only right to make judgments when it comes to religion, we’re commanded to judge.

Listen to Jesus in John 7:24 *“Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.”*

What did he mean? He meant don’t judge by how things look to you or how you think things should be.

That’s why situation ethics doesn’t work. Situation ethics makes us the arbitrators of right and wrong based on what we think.

Jesus said, *judge with righteous judgment*. There's only one way for that to happen. We need a righteous standard to evaluate by.

If we don't have a righteous standard we'll start saying things like, "How could this be wrong when it feels so right?" Or, "I just have to do this for me."

God says, "Listen up guys. My word is truth. My commandments are righteous . My Son is irreproachable."

He says this in the Bible, "*There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.*" Proverbs 14:12

There are really only two ways. The way of eternal life and the way of eternal death. One is union with God forever and the other is separation from God forever.

When it comes to our religious beliefs it is absolutely imperative that we evaluate by God's standard.

Now, God says you need to understand that there's deceivers out there. They've gone out into the world. Sixty years after the cross and there's already people distorting God's message.

The specific ones John's talking about said Jesus Christ didn't come in the flesh. They were called Gnostics from the Greek work *gnosis* which means knowledge.

They said, "We have special knowledge from God that the rest of you don't have."

The Gnostics believed that the material world was bad and the spiritual world was good so the Christ came upon the man Jesus at His baptism and then left before the cross.

There was no union of human and divine. Since the material world was evil they believed that God wouldn't live in a human body. So Jesus wasn't really God.

The problem is they were letting what they believed determine what was true, rather than letting what was true determine what they believed.

They ended up with a Jesus who wasn't the perfect sacrifice for sin.

If Jesus Christ wasn't the sacrifice then we might as well forget about forgiveness because forgiveness takes a perfect sacrifice.

So John doesn't say, 'Hey, why can't we all just get along?' He says, "Watch out for these guys because they're against Christ. They're against the one who is the way, the truth, and the life."

We need to know and hang on to the truth because it makes a difference in our life now and it makes a difference in the life to come.

### **Read vs 8-9**

There is no greater disappointment than working for something for a long time, only to see that work just disappear.

Did you ever work on something on the computer, but you never saved the file? And after hours of getting that thing just right the computer locks up. You press every combination of keys you can think of but nothing happens. The only way out is to reboot.

What a sinking feeling.

The Bible's giving us a challenge here. Watch out. Hang on. Don't let anything rob you of the end reward of focusing on God's truth and finishing well.

Abide in the doctrine of Christ. Hang out there. Be at home there. That's the place of joy.

### **Read 10-11**

The New Testament is big on showing hospitality to others. There wasn't a Motel 6 in every town for travelers to stay in. Most inns weren't the best environment morally. So Christians were commanded to show hospitality.

There were traveling teachers and pastors who needed places to stay and other Christians would put them up.

But they needed to use some discernment. If some one comes along who denies the essential truths of the faith don't help them out.

Some people have read this and said, "This means that if someone from a cult comes to my door I should slam it in their face."

One well know Pastor has written, "If they do not agree with the true doctrine of Christ, not only must we not let them in, but we must not even say 'goodbye,' which means 'God be with you.'"

I really think that's reading it wrong. That would mean I couldn't have my Hindu neighbor over for a cookout or a non-Christian international student over for ice cream.

Literally what John says here is don't keep on receiving them. If they're on a mission to deceive people about Jesus don't help them do it.

But this doesn't rule out the need for common courtesy, or for a gracious approach to people, or for the meeting of emergency needs or whatever.

The Southern Baptists are at the forefront of disaster relief in the wake of hurricane Katrina. They're usually the ones you see in the food lines dishing out the food.

Believe me, they're not giving people a religious quiz before they hand them a hamburger. They're helping everyone, no questions asked.

If we love the truth and are walking in the truth then we should be known for our graciousness and kindness.

**Then John closes, Read 12-13**

I can't wait to get to see you in person. There's joy in seeing what God's doing in one another's lives.

What is truth? According to the Bible it's summed up in a person. That person is Jesus Christ.

He might have lived 20 centuries ago but He was eternal before that and He's alive today.

Truth can be known. You can know truth personally. you can know the only person who could say those words: *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."*

There is absolute truth. And even though sometimes it gets clouded by our words and actions, Jesus Christ epitomizes truth.

According to His own words He alone is the way of forgiveness.

According to His own words, the Bible gives us the way of wisdom for life. The way to honor God, and the way to live a life where we're at peace with our Creator.