

THE BASIS OF FELLOWSHIP
2 JOHN 1-6

Satan is the ruler of the world (1 Jn. 5:19). That makes the world a wicked and awful place. And despite our discouragement about what we find in the world, we've come to expect what we find in the world and from the world.

But what about the church? How will the church relate to the world? And how will the church relate to people in the church who are false teachers? There are essentially two options:

- ✓ Because we have a desire to be loving and we want to reach the world, we minimize our differences with the world and with those who pretend to be in the truth but are not. So inclusivism governs our relationships with the world and ecumenism governs our relationships in the church. If truth divides, should we minimize truth and embrace love instead?
- ✓ Or, we can stand firmly for the truth, separate ourselves from everyone and be rigid and hard-nosed and become known as unloving and unkind.

Both those alternatives are filled with dangers and are unbiblical. And the Bible has answers for how we should relate to those who do not believe and follow biblical truth.

Following his first letter to the churches in Asia Minor, John wrote two more brief letters to individuals from those churches. They were individuals who continued to encounter the false teachers that John warned against in his first letter and they had encountered the two kinds of responses I just articulated: becoming too open-armed and becoming too exclusive. So John writes these letters to provide them a foundation for how they should think about fellowship and unity in the church body.

Over four Sundays, we are going to examine these letters and see if we should draw lines for fellowship and if so, how those lines should be drawn. This morning we begin with the basis of fellowship:

THE BASIS OF BIBLICAL FELLOWSHIP IS A WARM-HEARTED STANDARD OF TRUTH AND LOVE.

- 1. We Love BY the Truth (v. 1)**
- 2. We Love BECAUSE of the Truth (v. 2)**
 - ✓ The truth is IN us
 - ✓ The truth is ours ETERNALLY
- 3. Truth and Love Are the Basis of Our GREATEST Possession (v. 3)**
 - ✓ We WILL have salvation
 - ✓ We WILL have salvation only through GOD's truth and love
- 4. Our Goal and Joy is to LIVE in the Truth (v. 4)**
- 5. We Live Truthfully as We LOVE One Another (vv. 5-6)**

CONTEXT:

- ✓ The general setting for these letters is similar to 1 John. There are still false teachers who are attempting to influence the church — now they are trying to influence people through home Bible studies and more personal contacts.
- ✓ So John, *the elder* writes to address two different kinds of responses that arose from the attempts of the teachers. We notice that John doesn't identify himself by name here; in calling himself *the elder* he is not referring to his age, but to his primary role in the Ephesian church. These readers would primarily know him not as an apostle, but as the prominent pastor in that church; he is appealing to them with the authority of his position as elder.
- ✓ In 3 John there was a prominent leader named Diotrephes who had become belligerent and was refusing to acknowledge the ministry of legitimate, faithful missionaries sent to the churches by John. Diotrephes was being arrogant and exclusive and too separatistic.
- ✓ In 2 John there was a prominent woman who had gone to the other extreme; in a quest not to create offense, she was allowing false teachers to come into her home and teach. Her motive was love, but she was giving up truth and truthfulness in the process.
- ✓ So John writes these two brief (they would have been written on a single sheet of parchment, the way many secular letters were written in that day) companion letters to address both situations.
- ✓ **ASIDE:** There is a significant question about the identity of *the chosen lady*:
 - It could be a reference to the church(s) in Asia Minor, and not a literal woman. That seems unlikely since,
 - ... the church *is* called the bride of Christ, but it is never called a “lady.”
 - ... John uses the same grammatical structure in 3 John and he is obviously writing to an individual there and not the church.
 - ... John met some of this woman's children (v. 4) and that only makes sense if she's a real person.
 - ... John does use the plural *you* in vv. 5, 12, but that applies to the woman *and her children* just as well as to the church, if not better.
 - It could be a lady named Eklekte (“chosen”). For grammatical reasons, that's not likely.
 - It could be a chosen woman named Kyria (“lady”). That's possible, but because of the way John refers to the woman's sister in v. 13, that's unlikely.
 - It probably is a woman in the church body who is a well-known, but unnamed believer.

Remember that the theme of this brief letter is to know real, biblical fellowship:

THE BASIS OF BIBLICAL FELLOWSHIP IS A WARM-HEARTED STANDARD OF TRUTH AND LOVE.

So in these first six verses, John offers five ways that truth and love relate to one another:

1. We Love BY the Truth (v. 1)

- John says he *loves* this woman *in truth*. And John isn't the only one who loves her: *also all who know the truth*. In other words, her reputation as a follower of Christ was such that all other genuine believers also had a godly love for her.
- What is most important to notice here is that John and the others love her *in truth*.
 - ✓ Some have suggested that *in truth* could mean, “genuinely,” or “really.” That’s possible.
 - ✓ But John uses a variation of the word *truth* 4x in vv. 1-3 and once more in v. 4. So he probably means something more than “we *really* love her.”
 - ✓ He means, “we love her by that which is embodied in the truth — the gospel.” John is using the term *truth* the same way other NT writers use the term “faith” (Tt. 3:15; Phil. 1:27; Jude 3).
 - ✓ In other words, John says he and the others love this woman because they are united together by a common gospel. They don’t love her because she makes great casseroles for the potluck or because she is a good friend or because her children were well-behaved or because she is handling her widowhood well (because her husband isn’t mentioned might mean she was a widow).
 - ✓ They love her because they might have nothing in common at all, but the gospel has united them and made them one. The truth about Christ and the gospel are what unite them together.
- So John says that he loves her and her family *in the truth* — in the gospel. They are united together in harmony and love and service because of the gospel. Now he hasn’t said it yet, but what *must* that imply? If you take truth out of the equation, you no longer have a basis for love. One writer has said, “truth must always govern the exercise of love.” He’s right. There is no communion and fellowship and harmony with those who reject the gospel of Christ. If they reject the essence of Christ (as these false teachers did) then they are outside the church and outside fellowship.
- “The communion of love is as wide as the communion of faith.” [Alford] But there is no communion of love outside the communion of faith. And that’s why there must be firm parameters about who is a believer and who is not.

2. We Love BECAUSE of the Truth (v. 2)

- Continuing the sentence that he began in v. 1, John says, *whom I love in the truth...for the sake of the truth*. In other words, the *reason* John loves her is because of the truth. Truth is the ground and foundation of all love.
- What does John mean with the word *truth*? We’ve already alluded to part of it —
 - ✓ Truth is possessed and imparted by the Holy Spirit who is truth (1 Jn. 2:20; 5:6)

- ✓ Truth refers to the ethical and moral standards established by God in His Word through His commands (2 Jn. 4; 1 Jn. 1:5-6; 3:18).
 - ✓ Truth is the quality of the conformity to the way things are in God's omniscient wisdom (1 J. 2:8).
 - ✓ Truth refers to the gospel of Christ with all its implications — and the entry into eternal life (1 Jn. 3:19).
 - ✓ So **truth** is an objective standard revealed by God and ultimately manifested in Christ; to live truthfully is to live in conformity to that standard. And to love people in the church is to say, "I am loving because of the truth of the gospel that is in both of us and conforming both of us."
- This woman evidently was tempted to embrace the false teachers who were outside of the truth of the gospel and John is saying, "if they are outside the truth, there can't be love." Why? Because —
- The truth is IN us
 - ✓ One of the central realities of the gospel is that when we believe the gospel of Christ, that truth **abides in us** — it comes to indwell and remain and inhabit us.
 - ✓ Because the truth indwells us, the truth becomes an inward force compelling us to act in a particular way. In John 14:17, Jesus says that it is the **Spirit of truth** who indwells us; so for John to say here that **the truth abides in us** is another way of saying the Spirit indwells us. So we can't love those who are outside the truth and we can't dismiss the truth because the Spirit doesn't dismiss the truth and doesn't love unbelievers as if they are believers.
- We also love only those in the truth, because the truth is ours ETERNALLY.
 - ✓ **[the truth] will be with us forever.** The Spirit of God and the truth of God are eternally possessed by the believer. We will always have the Spirit and truth.
 - ✓ And that's why we love those who are also in the truth (other believers) — because we all have the same Spirit and the same eternal destiny.
- What's John's point with all this talk about the truth? Truth and love are inseparably connected. And you cannot increase love by diminishing truth. Observe and overlook and ignore the truth and you will not love the one you are trying to love.
 - ✓ Because the unbelieving heretics had a different teaching, they had different goals and different purposes (they wanted to engage in sin with impunity, 1 Jn. 1:6, 8, 10); there could be no fellowship and love.
 - ✓ So we will increase love for one another as we continue to uphold and reinforce and embrace the truth of the gospel as the one thing that binds us together more than anything else (which was the very experience of the Ephesian church from which John wrote; **Eph. 2:14ff**).

3. Truth and Love Are the Basis of Our GREATEST Possession (v. 3)

- We WILL have salvation

- ✓ When John uses the words **grace, mercy, and peace**, he is following a pattern of greeting that is similar to most of the Epistles; it is another way of referring to the gospel (**grace** = granting blessing, **mercy** = withholding judgment, and **peace** = result of grace and mercy). **Rom. 5:1**.
- ✓ And John is emphatic about our possession of this salvation — **will be with us** is the first part of the sentence; John wants this woman and her children to know, “you will have this salvation.”
- ✓ But where does the salvation come from?

- We WILL have salvation only through GOD’S truth and love

- ✓ Salvation comes **from God the Father**; it originates with His eternal plan and decree.
- ✓ And it also comes from **Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father**. So there is an inter-Trinitarian plan to provide salvation (**Son of the Father** again reiterates the deity of Christ). The Father and the Son (and Spirit) worked together in eternity and in time to plan and produce salvation.
- ✓ And what motivated the Godhead to give us this salvation? They did it **in truth and love**. They were not motivated by love apart from truth and they were not motivated by truth apart from love; the two attributes of **truth and love** in the Godhead together produced our salvation.
- ✓ So John is reminding the woman (preparing for what he’ll say in vv. 7ff) that one cannot disconnect truth from loving people in the church. If we love, it must be done with the truth and because of the truth that is in us.

“Our love grows soft if it is not strengthened by the truth, and our truth grows hard if it is not softened by love.” [John Stott]

- Isn’t it good to know that if we are believers in Christ, we *have* salvation? We’re secure.
 - ✓ That salvation is the result of God’s commitment to be true — judging those who reject Christ — and His commitment to love — extending the offer of Christ to all men. Because He is true and He is love, we have this great gift of eternal salvation.
 - ✓ Our temptation will be to fall into one of two errors:
 - We will love and accept others regardless of the truth; we will ignore fundamental doctrinal differences (like differences about the deity of Christ and authority of Scripture).
 - We will hold rigidly to the truth and be unloving and unkind to those who are believers but not *exactly* like us.
 - Both of these tendencies are destructive. We must hold to the truth and be unwavering and unflinching. And we must love all those who hold to the truth of God and His salvation.

4. Our Goal and Joy is to LIVE in the Truth (v. 4)

- The children of the woman were evidently grown and perhaps had moved away from home; somewhere, John *found* (encountered) some of the children and saw they were *walking in the truth*.
 - ✓ In the NT, the verb *walking* has the idea of “living life,” so John means that the children he saw were living lives that conformed to the truth; they believed and obeyed the truth of God.
 - ✓ Some have suggested that John is being critical since “only” *some* of the children were walking in the truth; but John’s point is that he is *very glad* — extremely, utterly happy, so he’s not being critical.
 - ✓ John simply means, “I saw some of your children, and the ones I saw were walking...”
- In some regard, John shouldn’t have been surprised, because this is the *commandment from the Father*.
 - ✓ Because the truth is *in us* (v. 2), how can we do anything but live truthfully? “It dwells in us; we walk in it.” [Stott] The Father has given a commandment to live truthfully. That command is for every believer and it should be their regular conduct; and that’s just what the woman’s children are doing.
 - ✓ Our goal is to live the truth. Scripture says that many different ways:
 - Our ambition is to be pleasing to Him.
 - We do all things for His glory.
 - We have one desire — to be in His presence and see Him.
 - We love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. And because we love Him we obey Him.
 - All these things reinforce the same principle — God has decreed that He is to be enjoyed and desired and obeyed above all things and so that’s what we do.
 - To live truthfully is our “unavoidable duty.” [Jackman]
 - ✓ And because God has decreed it, then when we see it (in ourselves or others), it is a great joy. Conversely, because living truthfully is God’s commandment, “to go astray is not just an unfortunate error, but an act of disobedience.” [Stott]
- So a couple of questions are fitting:
 - ✓ Am I intentionally moving myself towards obeying and living the truth? Do I speak the truth to myself about my world and my temptations and struggles? Do I remind myself what God has said about every circumstance of my life and heart? We don’t accidentally fall into holiness — holy lives are the consequence of people intentionally endeavoring to live the truth of God.
 - ✓ Do I rejoice when I see others living truthfully? Do I encourage and help them? Do I pray for them? Do I assist those who are weary and struggling?

5. We Live Truthfully as We LOVE One Another (vv. 5-6)

- Now the question might be, “what does it mean to live truthfully?” John provides an answer in vv. 5-6.
 - ✓ Notice verse 4 — ***We have received commandment from the Father***...then v. 5 — “I am not writing a new commandment. I am writing again the commandment that we have had from the beginning of the ministry of the ministry of Jesus — love one another.”
 - ✓ Jesus alluded to this on numerous occasions, but in particular He addressed it in **Jn. 13:34-35**.
 - ✓ The mark of believers in Christ is that they love one another. That will confound the world.

Yesterday [Matt Lauer interviewed Nancy Writebol](#) in front of a banner that read SIM. It was so third century.

In *The Rise of Christianity*, Rodney Stark argues the Christian faith exploded in part because early Christians sacrificially helped their neighbors in times of crisis. Pagan religion had no answer for the deadly plague that struck North Africa. Even their priests fled from the contaminated cities. But average Christians risked their lives to nurse and comfort the sick, and the pagans noticed. Stark estimates that by the middle of the fourth century, more than half of the Roman Empire had converted to Christianity (p. 6-10, 73-94).

Then, as now, the dominant culture thinks our Christian beliefs are a threat to society. But they have no answer for the missionaries who caught Ebola while serving those who had the disease. So they put them on TV, in front of the banner that advertises their mission agency. [[Mike Wittmer](#)]

- ✓ Francis Schaeffer said, “We cannot expect the world to believe that the Father sent the Son, that Jesus’ claims are true, and that Christianity is true, unless the world sees some reality of the oneness of true Christians.”
 - ✓ The Father, Son, and Spirit are One, so they love one another. A husband and wife are one, so they love one another. We are one in the church; so we love one another.
- This love for each other is also rooted in our love for God, so if we love one another (v. 5), then we will also ***walk according to His commandments*** (v. 6).
 - ✓ There is a circular argument here very much like 5:1-2; we love God so we love God’s people and we love God’s people because we love and obey God.
 - ✓ Over and over John reminds his readers of these truths — because it’s central to our identity as followers of Christ. But when you hear, “love one another,” don’t hear, “love — and don’t worry about whether their teaching is true.” To embrace a false teacher in so-called love is actually to hate him because we don’t confront him with his sin and give him an opportunity to repent.
 - ✓ That’s why the basis of genuine fellowship is a warm-hearted standard of truth and love.

CONCLUSION: Are there any examples of loving like this? How about Jesus?

Jesus Christ reserved His most gracious, hopeful words for unbelievers trapped in sin (e.g., the woman at the well and the woman caught in adultery).

And Jesus gave His harshest words of condemnation to the pharisaical (hypocritical) false teachers who had infiltrated Judaism and were leading people astray. E.g., Mt. 23 — “men of hell...blind guides...fools and blind men...hypocrites...full of robbery and self-indulgence...For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness.” (Matt 23:15-27)

And He was lovingly compassionate towards His own followers and disciples (e.g., Jn. 13:1; 21:15-17).

Beware of embracing false teachers in the name of love. We cannot love someone as one of us if he is untrue and false; and it is not love to love him and not confront him with his error. Real fellowship and unity is based on genuine love *and* truth. It is a warm-hearted response of love to those who hold to the same standard of truth.

BENEDICTION: Based on 1 Thess. 3:11-13 —

May our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord continue to unite us together in love as we serve one another.

May the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another.

May the Lord cause you to increase in love for all people.

May the Lord establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father.

May your love for the Lord and His people be evident at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.