

How Firm is Your Life's Foundation?

2 John

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July 6, 2014

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VMzKHFnD29E> - Frontline

What do you really believe about Jesus?

If you don't believe Jesus existed, you will likely pay no attention to His teaching or commands. He will have little or no influence on your life. It's unlikely you would call yourself a Christian.

If you believe that Jesus existed, lived and was killed on a Roman cross for crimes he didn't commit, you might respect Him. You might even be inspired by His life. You may live according to some of His teachings. You may or may not call yourself a Christian.

Say you believe that Jesus lived, died on a cross for crimes he did not commit and rose again. Then you've agreed to some of the basic claims of Christianity. Yet, you may not think it important to live according to Jesus' teaching and commandments. Yet you might call yourself a Christian.

Say you believe that Jesus lived, died innocently on a cross, rose again and continues to live today. And say you believe that His death had something to do with you. Say you accept that His death covered you. Then you might actually see the need to call out to Him to protect you or pay for your sins. You might also realize that you need to respond to this great act of sacrifice on your behalf by living in obedience to Jesus' teaching. You would likely call yourself a Christian.

Say you believe all we just stated about Jesus. But someone close to you has a very different view of Jesus. They don't believe He was anything more than a historical figure like we often heard in that video. How do you relate to them? How do you even talk with them about what they think of Jesus?

What we believe impacts the way we live. It is important every once in a while to evaluate our beliefs. We must examine whether the thing or person that we place our trust in or stake our lives on is in fact trustworthy and true.

Today we have an opportunity to examine what one piece of the New Testament says about Jesus. In our journey through this text, I invite you to examine how your beliefs about Jesus compare to the claims in the text.

We will also have opportunity to think about sincere and convinced people in our lives who do not accept some or all of the New Testament claims about Jesus. What does the New Testament say about where they're at with God? How might we even begin talking with them about Jesus?

Our text is one of the most obscure and unknown pieces of the New Testament. It's the second shortest writing we have. We'll look at the shortest one next week. It was written by John, the author we've come to know well over the past year. He was one of Jesus' 12 disciples and part of the inner circle of three Jesus depended on them and expose to unique moments in His ministry. The other two were Peter and John's brother James. But James was martyred early on in church history. Peter was also killed or martyred about 20 years later. John survives and writes some major parts of the New Testament – the Gospel according to John; the Revelation and what's known as his first letter which we spent 20 messages on this past year.

But he also wrote 2 other short letters known today as 2nd and 3rd John. The inclusion of these letters in the New Testament has puzzled scholars. Why are they in the Bible? The most likely theory is they were included with 1st John in a bundle that was delivered to different churches. Since 1st John contained so much about the Christian life, 2nd and 3rd John just continued to be read. Though short, they pack an incredible amount into their few words.

We must see them as notes written quickly to meet a mail departure deadline. Yet they are written urgently because of the need John feels he must address immediately. In the second letter of John, he talks a lot about the Christian walk. We will discover a very clear and simple summary of the New Testament teaching of Jesus.

Through our journey, I invite you to compare your belief about Jesus to John's claims and your Christian walk to what's described here. And also think about others in your life who are not close to Lord. Maybe one of their major issues is a divergent view of Jesus compared to what's revealed here. After we're through the text, we'll have time to think and respond to God.

2 John 1 English Standard Version (ESV)

Greeting

¹The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all who know the truth,² because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever:

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

Walking in Truth and Love

⁴I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father. ⁵And 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. ⁶And 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. ⁷For 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. ⁸Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we^[a] have worked for, but may win a full reward. ⁹Everyone 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. ¹⁰If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, ¹¹for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.

Final Greetings

¹²Though 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.

¹³The children of your elect sister greet you.

Now you may have noticed that this letter contains no mention of John. But the author identifies himself as the elder. This term gained standing in the church as not only a person more advanced in years but a spiritual leader in the church. The author writes as a church leader to “the elect lady and her children.” It's very unlikely that he had a specific woman in mind for throughout the letter he address a group of people not an individual whenever he uses the word “you.” So he's talking to a group and most likely “lady” refers to a church. Her children are the church members. We identify John as the author because the writing style and topics very much line up with John's style and topics.

So what does John write about? I would summarize the message from this letter from John like this. **Christians must continue to walk in the truth and love of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Scriptures.** John rejoices because some in this church walk in truth & love. But what does he mean by this? “I will learn to walk in your ways.”

He can write about truth and love to his readers with confidence that they understood what he meant by this. He had spent time with them. He taught them. He explained a lot of this in 1st John. But we do not have their experience. So we have to look a little harder for what it actually means to walk in the truth and love of Jesus Christ.

What does John mean when he writes “walk in truth?” Notice in verse 4 that he rejoices to find some of the church walking in the truth as commanded by the Father. The truth seems to be a path along which Christians walk. It is by this path that we keep on course. It’s a path from which we must not wander. But what is this path of truth? John does not give us as a simple definition of what he means by truth. Yet his writings are saturated with the word truth. Think about some of the most famous verses from John. In John 14:6, Jesus says “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except by me.” When Jesus promises the coming of the Holy Spirit in John 16:13, he says “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.” In John 8:31-32, Jesus talks to those who believe in him. He says “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.” Perhaps most famous is his encounter with the Roman governor Pilate just before the crucifixion. Pilate asks “so you are a king?” Jesus answers “you say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world – to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” Pilate famously responds “What is truth,” and walks away from the truth standing right in front of him.

So John uses truth to describe a number of spiritual realities. And from this we can get a clue of what it means to walk in the truth. Robert Yarbrough has summarized 5 ways John uses truth

throughout his writings. I want to give you all 5 so you will see how broad and deep John's understanding of truth is for us.

What does it mean to walk in truth?

1 - To listen to and be led by the Holy Spirit who is truth.

- 1 John 4:6 - ⁶We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error. So he calls the Holy Spirit the spirit of truth.
- 1 John 5:6 - ⁶This is he who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.
- John 15:26 ²⁶“But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.

So the Holy Spirit is of truth. The Holy Spirit is the truth. The Holy Spirit will bear witness about Jesus.

We walk in truth when we listen to and are led by this Spirit of truth.

2- To live according to the ethical (or moral) standards of God expressed in His commandments.

- 1 John 1:6 (ESV) ⁶If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.
- 1 John 3:18 (ESV) ¹⁸Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.
- 2 John 4 (ESV) ⁴I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father.

So, walking in the truth means to live according to or in line with God's moral law.

3- To live recognizing God's personal sanctifying presence in us and cooperate with His work.

- 1 John 1:8 ⁸If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.
- 1 John 2:4 ⁴Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him,

- John 17:17 ¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.
- John 17:19 ¹⁹ And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

So John calls God's presence in us the truth. We walk in the truth by recognizing that God is truly in us doing His work and cooperate with His sanctifying work in us.

4- To agree that God defines truth or the way things really are.

Jesus said about John the Baptist in John 5:33 – “You went out to John and he has borne witness to the truth”. Or in talking to some who were trying to kill him, Jesus says in John 8:40, “but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth.” So to walk in truth in this manner means we recognize that God and His Son Jesus actually reveal truth. They reveal things as they really are. We trust them.

5 - To accept the Gospel of Jesus Christ and its implications on our lives.

John uses truth to describe the Gospel. 3 John 8 – John writes about others who have believed the Gospel and describes them this way. “We ought to support people like this, that we may be fellow workers for the truth. Or in second John's first verse he talks about loving this church in truth and not only I but those who know the truth. It seems John refers to the Gospel message and others who have accepted it in this greeting.

All of these show that walking according to the truth in John carries massive and multiple themes. It might seem a little overwhelming to us to consider all this. But I find it greatly reassuring that God doesn't leave us alone to try to find some lost path of truth. He has provided the Holy Spirit of truth, the moral standards of truth, His personal sanctifying presence of truth, His accurate description of reality in truth and the Gospel of truth. We have these multiple aids to help us stay on the path of walking in truth.

What does it mean to walk in love? John defines it for us in verse 6 of 2nd John. “And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments.” So we walk in love when we walk according to the truth of Christ. When we walk according to this truth, we can walk in love and give love that is in

harmony with Jesus Christ. So with all this in mind, we have a lot more flesh to add to the John's call – Christians must continue to walk in the truth and love of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Scriptures.

But why must we? Why must Christians continue to walk in the truth and love of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Scriptures? This is the reason for this little letter. There is the potential for people to wander from walking the path of truth. Some people think they're Christians when they are actually far off the path. I could find four reasons John gives to urge his readers and us to continue on the path of truth and love.

Reason 1 - It is the only foundation that will endure through anything. Continuing to walk on the path of truth and love of Jesus Christ is the only rock that will sustain us through life, death and eternity. John does not say this directly. But he implies it forcefully in the first three verses. Notice how many times he mentions truth in the first three verses. In 2 sentences he uses truth 4 times. He talks about loving in truth and others who know the truth. He states that they are able to love each other and know truth because of this everlasting truth that will live in them. He even ties his blessing to truth and love. "Grace, mercy and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son, in truth and love." So he celebrates the reader's reception of God's grace and the blessing of His mercy. He looks forward to their experience of peace and wholeness because of God's grace and peace. All of this comes from God and Jesus in truth and love. It's like he's saying "the truth that we have staked our souls on is as alive, stable and enduring as Christ Himself who is the truth. You live on a firm and solid foundation in Christ. It is this foundation which binds us together. It will continue to deliver God's grace, mercy and peace and will go on forever. There is no other foundation that can deliver that. There is no other name or person or system that can promise that. So you must continue walking on this "truth and love path" because it is the only one that will see you to the right end.

Why else must Christians continue to walk in truth and love of Jesus Christ?

Reason 2 - Many deceivers and antichrists have successfully deceived other Christians. (7) Here is the major problem that spurred John on to write this letter. There were itinerant preachers going out who claimed to be Christians. They maybe even believed they were Christians. But there was a fundamental flaw in their message. They did not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. They had a new and better way. They did not believe that Jesus was both God and Man throughout his life. Some taught that the God nature of Jesus came on him when he was baptized and left him before the cross. So the man who died had no divine nature. He just died. The human Jesus certainly didn't rise again. This was no minor variation understanding Jesus.

It went contrary to the central claims of the New Testament about Jesus. John identifies people who bring this message as deceivers and the antichrist. There might be people in your life who are unaware that their understanding of Jesus is actually an antichrist message.

But isn't this overstating it a little. Why is John so upset about this? Why is that such a big deal anyway?

If Jesus was not God in flesh through His entire life, death and resurrection, , then He Himself was a liar. He claimed to be God's Son. He claimed to come from heaven. He claimed that He would rise again. If He didn't, all He promised was a lie. If He was not God in flesh, then we are still in our sins because he was just another sinful human. Sin has not been atoned for. Justice has not yet been served. We will face the guilty verdict on Judgment Day. We are not reconciled to God today. We cannot walk closely with Him. Our faith is really futile. Christianity is over.

So Jesus as just a historical figure or Jesus as a good man or a good moral teacher or a religious founder or a prophet from God but not God fall into the same category. Without knowing it, people repeat or believe deception and the spirit of the antichrist. John warns his readers that if they stray from walking the path of truth and love, they too are in danger. So stay on the path of truth and love of Jesus Christ.

Reason 3 – You may lose your eternal rewards. (8) I don't believe it's possible for a true Christian to lose their salvation. But several places point to the possibility of true Christians losing their rewards in heaven. Look at what John says in verse 8. ⁸ Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward.

For lives that continue to walk in the truth and love of Jesus Christ, there are eternal incentives. Christians receive blessings from God today like love, truth, joy, peace, mercy, and fellowship. But John's vision extends beyond this life and age –to receive back eternal reward. 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 is the key passage that summarizes the reality of spiritual rewards and the possibility of a Christian losing eternal reward.

1 Corinthians 3:10-15 (ESV) - [10] According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. [11] For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. [12] Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—[13] each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. [14] If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. [15] If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. (1 Corinthians 3:10-15 ESV). You can't lose your salvation – but you can lose your rewards. But you can keep your rewards by staying on the path of truth and love.

Reason 4 - Those who stray off the path don't have God. But those who remain have the Father and Son. (9)

Anyone who gets so progressive in their thinking that they walk out on the teaching of Christ, walks out on God. But whoever stays with the teaching, stays faithful to both the Father and the Son. 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 Son". So if you or someone you know says "I'm a Christian. I believe in God." You ask "what about Jesus." Lived, died, buried, resurrected. "Oh, I don't know about Him." That sounds farfetched. I need an updated Jesus? Yet we or at least our culture has a fascination with the "latest thing". We seem to live by the mantra that if it's new, it's automatically good. If it's old, it's automatically bad. Some old things or practices are bad. Some new things or inventions are good. But when it comes to belief and description of Jesus Christ, we have to hang on to the 2000 year old New Testament. For according to John, those who think they have the newest and latest understanding about Christ don't even have God.

This is quite ironic, because those who teach something alternative or more progressive about Jesus often believe they are providing something better; something more modern; something more acceptable. Yet in trying to solve one problem they create many more by removing all He came to provide.

Perhaps this reveals a rejection of the teaching that Jesus Christ came in the flesh a flawed understanding of the state of humanity and our need for restoration. The belief that man can save himself or attain higher levels by his/her own achievements is an attractive alternative to calling out to the Lord for mercy and grace. It's quite humbling to admit need and call out for deliverance. It's much more dignified and affirming to talk about inspiring ideas and what we can attain to ourselves. Or it's much more tangible to attach ourselves to a charismatic personality or leader and go with them.

But to admit that Jesus was God in flesh and suffered and died for me because I desperately need help is pretty humbling. It forces me to face the depth of my own sin and my massive need for a Saviour.

Yet this is what the Bible teaches. This is what makes our salvation so sweet. The person who departs from what was originally received does not have God. But the one who abides in the teaching has both father and son. John concludes with instruction on dealing with antichrist teachers.

So do not affirm or promote or join with those who deceive and teach another Christ. (10-11) Some have struggled with this passage because they believe it goes contrary to other New Testament commands about hospitality. John is not talking about personal friends, exchange students from another country and perhaps of other faiths, or non-Christian family members. He has in mind aiding and abetting people so contrary to the New Testament's teaching about Jesus. They sought entrance into church circles, and even personal residences, to convince the unwary of new and different teaching about Christ and salvation.

Today, this includes JW's, Mormons and other missionaries who seek to spread quasi-Christian views. This is no call to be uncivil to them. But to receive them in the sense of endorsing teaching, given them financial support and offering them personal encouragement makes no sense when their teaching rejects historic Christianity.

In the first century, to receive opponents of Christian belief into your home meant granting to them and their doctrine the respect due only to true Christian faith and practice. The threat was so serious that John feels compelled to write that they have to be careful about this.

So what did you believe about Jesus when you came here today? How does that compare with this example of the New Testament teaching? Is there some way in which your beliefs need to change or come more in line with what's revealed here? Or maybe you believe all this about Jesus but your life doesn't match up with it.

What about those around you who do not know Jesus Christ as revealed by the Scriptures? Maybe this gives some clarity about where their lives are at. Maybe this gives you a starting point of discussion. What we believe impacts the way we live. Instead of talking about how they are living, talk about what they believe about Jesus.

Humbly raise the issue of their understanding of Jesus does not line up with the New Testament. Lovingly direct them to the truth about Christ.

Our faith is founded on a certain and sure person. Christian, the person you have staked your life on has never lied. He is Himself truth. He did what He came to do. He has fulfilled His promises. Your life is anchored to the most solid rock that's out there. You're not a Christian. If the foundation upon which you have built your life may be crumbling, Jesus invites you to come to Him and build your house upon Him. He calls you to come. Will you?