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“I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father,” II John 4.

Truth in the Heart

Lesson Aim: to call for conscientious efforts to live according to truth

L350. Date: August 1976. **Text:** II John 1-13. **Topic:** Truth: Of God.

Today, the lesson text is the entire Second Epistle of John. That is a surprising epistle. (1) It has only one chapter of thirteen verses. (2) It is the only epistle of the New Testament which is addressed to a woman. (3) It stresses the importance of truth and love. (4) Though one of the shortest books of the New Testament, the Second Epistle of John is a valuable book filled with needed lessons for today.

Today's lesson has a wonderful aim: to call forth one's most conscientious effort to live under the principles of God's truth. The believer walks in truth when he lives according to the principles revealed in Holy Scripture. He who walks in truth will rejoice in upright conduct, pure thoughts, true doctrines, and growth in the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ, who said, “. . . **I am the truth . . .**” John 14:6. No aim could be more wonderful than that.

The key words to the Second Epistle, of John are “love” and “truth.” “Love” occurs four times and “truth” five times in those thirteen verses. Those concepts are needed today in the lives of men and women.

The book falls into three very logical divisions. (1) Divine truth is set forth in verses 1-6. (2) Heretical error is warned against in verses 7-11. (3) Personal greetings and expressions of Christian love conclude the epistle in verses 12, 13.

Jesus said, “**Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free,**” John 8:32. Seek truth, whatever the cost. Value it highly. Share it gladly. Spiritual truth is the most important truth of all.

I. FELLOWSHIP IN TRUTH (1-3)

“Thank God for Christian fellowship!” That is the spirit with which John began his second epistle. How he loved “the elect lady” and all her children because of their devotion to the truth of God! The truth of God unites the hearts of believers as nothing else can.

The Apostle John wrote of truth almost as if it had personality. He referred to truth dwelling with and in the believer, abiding there forever (verse 2). The believer is a child of God through faith in Jesus who is Truth; he is led into all truth under the instruction of the Spirit of God (John 16:13); he is assured that he will abide eternally in divine truth.

Truth is essential to fellowship. An ancient prophet asked, **“Can two walk together except they be agreed?”** Amos 3:3. Of course they cannot, but two can enjoy fellowship when each is joined in agreement under the truth of God.

“Grace, mercy, and peace” are pronounced upon each reader by the aged apostle. Even they are based upon the truth concerning God's nature, man's need, and Christ's redemptive deed. Departure from truth will surely result in departure from God.

The truthfulness of God's nature is the basis of man's hope. If God constantly fluctuated between truth and error, no man would ever be sure of Him. He has no error in Him, nor is there even a shadow which might be caused by His change (James 1:17). Because He is unchanging, man can have hope in Christ.

The believer should hold to the truth of God. Fellowship and worship are impossible apart from it. **“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth,”** John 4:24. Only in the realm of truth can one meet God.

“If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth,” I John 1:6. Many people are magnifying their “religious experiences” which are not in agreement with the truth. Believers should be warned! God can be met only when one approaches Him in truth.

II. OBEDIENCE TO TRUTH (4-6)

“Walk in truth,” John admonished. That is good advice. One walks in truth when he obeys the teachings of God. Walking in truth is more than merely believing correct doctrines. It is both belief and conduct guarded by and directed by the principles of God's Word. John happily reported to the “elect lady” that he found her children walking in truth. That was an

occasion for joy. “How beautiful to walk in the steps of the Saviour; stepping in the light . . .”

How can one know what truth to obey? He can study the Bible. God's truth is revealed in His Word. He who desires to walk in truth must meet God in the Word that he may know what the truth is. Not even loving devotion will satisfy God if it is divorced from knowledge of and obedience to Bible truth. One will know the truth when he knows the Bible. Jesus prayed, “**Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth,**” John 17:17.

Truth and love walk hand in hand. Believers should never think that only a harsh spirit can “defend the faith.” “From the beginning,” John wrote, “we have had the commandment to love one another. And this is love, that we walk after his commandments.” May God deliver His churches from belligerent “defenders of the faith” and give them loving teachers of the truth. Truth and love are companions in the life of the committed Christian.

That love which motivates one to walk in truth is more than human sentiment. Sentiment is weak, fickle, and subject to change. Divine love, which inspires loyalty to truth, is strong, devoted, and never changes. It is the **agapa** of which you studied in last week's lesson.

No one ever loves to the limit of his capacity. God wants believers to keep on growing in the capacity to love. Paul prayed for his converts this petition: “. . . **The Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you,**” I Thessalonians 3:12. There is no substitute for obedience prompted by love (increasing love) and exercised in agreement with truth.

III. ORTHODOXY AND TRUTH (7-13)

A. Need — “. . . **Many deceivers are entered into the world . . .**” verse 7. The presence of teachers of error makes more evident the need for teachers of truth.

How do false teachers arise in the Christian fold? (1) Some who have accepted the Christian ethic and philosophy do not know Jesus Christ personally. They are not saved. It is easy for Satan to lead them astray. (2) Some true believers are deceived by Satan because they are not grounded in the Word of God. Such a case is mentioned in Galatians 2:11, 14. However error enters, it is always deadly serious.

Satan has a particular point of attack upon Christian doctrine. He prefers to create doubts or denial of the deity and the incarnation of Jesus Christ. If those two doctrines were destroyed, the fabric of the Christian faith

would be destroyed. Those are the two primary areas in which extreme liberal theologians attack the historic faith. They are tools of the devil in that attack. Believers should be prepared to stand against the attacks of Satan.

B. Diligence — **“Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward,”** verse 8. Tragic loss will follow, if Christians ignore the danger of false doctrine and do not stand up to defend the truth by declaring it. (The truth needs no defending other than for it to be declared. It will defend itself if it is declared in clarity and fullness.) There is a personal responsibility on each Christian to look to himself that he not suffer loss in the attacks of Satan upon the truth.

How can the ordinary believer who loves the Lord Jesus defend the truth against false teachers? (1) He is to love the truth as it is in Jesus and saturate his heart and mind with it. (2) He should give careful instruction to his family that they may not fall unto the error of heretical teachings. (3) He should encourage the teaching ministry of his church and help to enroll many people to hear the teaching of the truth. (4) He can give a loving and fervent witness of the Lord, Jesus Christ at every possible opportunity. (5) He can purchase and spread literature which sets forth the truth of God's Word. (6) He needs to support the missionary program of his church that others may hear the truth and receive it. One can have a vital part in overcoming error with truth if he will follow those guidelines.

Things are going to get worse before they get better. **“. . . Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them,”** II Timothy 3:13, 14.

C. Guideline — There is a rule by which one can distinguish truth from error. **“Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son,”** II John 9.

The believer should watch out for new doctrines. His forefathers did not know all the truth of God; neither does he. New teachings should be received with caution and great searching of the Word of God. False teachers are often enticing, learned, and attractive. They will blast the spiritual life, make shipwreck of one's faith, and leave a man without hope. They are zealous; they are dangerous. The Christian should not take their literature, nor encourage their fellowship, nor listen to their doctrines. If one stays close to the Bible, he will have all the truth of God.

Today's study has issued a call to loyalty. Believers are challenged to

know the truth, to love the truth, to proclaim the truth, and to defend the truth against error. “. . . **Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason for the hope that is in you with meekness and fear,**” I Peter 3:15.

Questions

1. What is truth?
2. How could Jesus say, “I am . . . the truth”?
3. How can a believer walk in truth?
4. What is the relationship of truth and love?
5. How can you defend the truth?
6. What is orthodoxy? heresy?
7. How can you be firm in the truth?
8. How can you share the truth with others?
9. What does Ephesians 5:11 mean to you?
10. How has the study profited you?