

Sermon Title: Truth and Love  
Scripture Text: 2 John 1-13 (Bible Postcards #4)

Speaker: Jim Harris  
Date: 10-9-22

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Our current sermon series is "Bible Postcards"—those are the one-page books of the Bible, and we are looking at working our way through all of them. We began with Obadiah in the Old Testament. We have spent two weeks on the Book of Philemon—notice, I said "single page"; I didn't say "single-sermon." And our next one is the Book of Second John. The other ones are Third John and Jude, and we are going to do a deep dive into Jude that I'm sure you have never heard before.

To find Second John in your Bible, you might want to start at the end and start working your way backward. The New Testament ends with First John, Second John, Third John, Jude, and Revelation.

Like the other "Postcards" of the Bible, Second John suffers from neglect. In over a half-century that I have been a Christian, I'm not sure that I have ever heard a sermon on this book that I didn't preach, except for a cross-reference here and there.

As with Philemon, when you see the background, this book is going to be pretty easy for you to understand. Second John is not complicated, but it *is* profound.

Most of the debate around the Book of Second John—and the same things apply to Third John—arises in Verse 1—"The elder to the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in truth; and not only I, but also all who know the truth." (NASB-1995; and throughout, unless otherwise noted)

The big questions are: Who is "the elder," and who are "the chosen lady and her children"? Well, the difficulty arises primarily because the author of this letter—same as Third John—doesn't give any other hints about his identity except "the elder"; so, whoever "the elder" was, he knew that the recipients of his writings would know exactly who he was when he used the term "the elder"; it was a nickname, so it was well-known to his friends.

There have been a lot of silly ideas that have been propagated through the centuries, but there is one that fits the facts: "The elder" is John the Apostle. He is "the brother of James" (Mk. 3:17; 5:37)—"James and John" are "the two sons of" a man named "Zebedee" (Mk. 10:35); they were called "Sons of Thunder" (Mk. 3:17). He is the author of the Gospel of John; the sequel to the Gospel of John, which is First John; this book: Third John; and Revelation. So he wrote five books of the New Testament, second only to the Apostle Paul.

There is very strong evidence to support that, both from comparing the book to other writings that we know to be from John, and from quotations and allusions to this book from the Early Church, as early as the Second Century.

We do know that John was the last of the Apostles to die. And the evidence is quite strong that he did not write his books of the Bible until around the time 85 to 95 or 96 A.D. The fact that a book as small as this was so rapidly circulated and quoted tells us that there is strong attestation to the fact that everybody who was in the know knew this is an apostolic book from John himself. There is no reason to reject the longstanding

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---

tradition that this was written by John the Apostle late in his life. I don't know how much you can make of it, but he probably wrote John, and then First John, and then Second John, and then Third John, and then Revelation. But it makes no difference—you can get to Heaven no matter what order you think they were written in.

Next, we need to understand: Who is "the chosen lady and her children"? Depending on your translation, it might say "the elect lady and her children," because the word "chosen" and the word "elect" are the same Greek word: *eklegō*, "chosen by God."

Remember something that you have heard many times around here, if you are a veteran of Heritage Bible Church: When you are reading something in the Bible, if the natural sense *makes* sense, there's *no* sense searching for any *other* sense. When something is plain, take it as plain. If it is symbolic, there will be tipoffs that it is symbolic. The commentaries on Second John are just rife with classic examples of violating that principle.

What is the most natural sense? The Apostle John wrote this letter to a specific woman and to her children. I think it is safe to assume: probably *grown* children, and therefore an extended family that was well-known in that region. I think we can also fairly surmise that she was probably a widow, because there is a lack of reference to a husband, which would have typically been the way that a household would have been addressed.

He did not use this woman's name; but then, he did not use his own name, either. If her name was crucial—that would be a funny name—but if it was crucial that we know her name, we would know it because it would be here.

We can tell from the letter that this lady and her family were given to hospitality. They were well-known for ministering to fellow believers (cf. Rom. 12:13; 1 Tim. 5:10), and John wrote to caution them about the possibility of being ripped off by deceivers.

This letter was considered so practical and important that it was quickly passed around and shared with all the other believers; and in the providence of God, it was intended all along to become part of the Bible. That just makes sense. I would even be so bold as to say that it is obvious, but you would be surprised how complicated people try to make it.

Many say that "the chosen lady" is the church, and her children are the members of the church. Why do they say that? Because they made it up absolutely out of thin air, without *one shred of evidence*! The closest you can come to anything that you might call evidence is that the Greek word *ekklēsia*—translated "church"—is grammatically feminine in form—and that means *nothing*! The church is *never* called a "lady" anywhere else; a "lady" is called a "lady." So that doesn't mean anything.

As a matter of fact, as you work through this book, most of the time there are singular pronouns used—like in Verse 5 and Verse 13: a singular "lady." That would be a *very* strange way to refer to a group of people like a congregation. When Paul wrote to churches, he addressed them with plural pronouns.

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---

So, John was old. We know that he had many friends in the region in which he lived. There is very strong evidence that he lived in and around the region of Ephesus and that area known as the Roman province of "Asia"; we would call it "Asia Minor"—it is mostly in the country of Turkey now. There was that cluster of cities with churches all founded during Paul's missionary journeys: "Ephesus...Smyrna...Pergamum...Thyatira...Sardis...Philadelphia...Laodicea" (Rev. 1:11); there was also Colossae (Col. 1:2) and "Hierapolis" (Col. 4:13). The Book of Colossians was written to Colossae, and the Book of Philemon went to a man in that church. That is where John lived for those years that he survived about 20 or more years beyond most of the rest of the Apostles. Then he wrote these five books of the Bible late in his life.

There is an obvious theme-word here—or actually, two or three theme-words here, but I would say the one that rises to the top is the word "truth," and it is introduced in the first few verses there. We already read Verse 1; we will come back to it.

But we can use the word "truth" as the basis for outlining the 13 verses of this book: Truth Is The Source Of Life; Truth Is The Rule Of Life; Truth Is The Boundary Of Love; Truth Is The Boundary Of Fellowship; and then, Truth: There Is Too Much To Say.

Let's look at the beginning; I'll read the first three verses. Truth Is The Source Of Life: "The elder to the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in truth; and not only I, but also all who know the truth, for the sake of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever: Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love."

There's that theme-word: "truth." In his epistles, John often contrasts truth and lies, truth and falsehood, black and white, light and dark, Christ and antichrist—he is very skilled at writing in antitheses; and here he talks about the truth as opposed to deception.

And notice that he says to be "in the truth" is to be a Christian (cf. Jn. 17:19; 1 Jn. 2:4); it is the same as to be "in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:17). Notice how he equates truth with Jesus Christ; he says: "The truth...abides in us" (cf. Jn. 14:6). Well, that is certainly true of Christ; Christ abides in us (Jn. 14:23; Col. 1:27), and we abide in Him (Rom. 8:1; 12:5; 16:7; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 12:2; Eph. 1:3; 2:6; Phil. 1:1; 4:21; Col. 1:2; 1 Thess. 4:16).

And then he says: "Truth...will be with us forever." Well, Jesus said, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20), and Hebrews 13 says, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you" (vs. 5). So, John is going to say to this dear lady and her family that there are "many deceivers" out there (vs. 7; cf. 2 Tim. 3:13); they make lies sound good, and you need to know that the source of eternal life is "the truth," which is embodied in Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:17; 18:37; Eph. 4:21).

So look again at Verse 3—"Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love." Well, there's a standard greeting: "Grace, mercy, and peace"—but John worded it a little bit differently than you find it in most other New Testament books. He says that they "will be with us." He did not say, "May it be with you; I'm *praying* that it be with you"; he is not saying this is a

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Date: 10-9-22

---

prayer or a wish, it is a promise. He had lived 85 to 90 or so years as he wrote this. He spent three of those years in the presence of Jesus Himself, "the truth" (Jn. 14:6; cf. Ps. 31:5), and 60 of those years as His Apostle. John understood the practical reality of the promises of God. He is saying: "*Whatever* you encounter, 'grace, mercy, and peace' from 'God the Father' and 'His Son, Jesus,' *will* be with you"—absolute, ironclad promise. You belong to Christ; He is with you (e.g., Ps. 37:28; 2 Tim. 4:17).

He was careful to include a very precise and complete description of Jesus because of the circumstances that he was writing about. Notice, he calls Him: "Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father." Since this letter was written to caution friends against being involved with "deceivers" who *do not* preach the true Christ (cf. 1 Jn. 2:22; Jn. 8:44; 2 Cor. 11:13-15), he was very careful to specify details about the incarnation and the deity of Jesus.

A lot of people do not realize that the first main theological error concerning the Doctrine of Christ that came down the pike after Jesus ascended did *not* attack His deity. You would think somebody would say, "What, do you mean a *man* was *God*?" Actually, it was the other way around; they said, "No, Jesus was a man; the 'Christ-spirit' came upon him at his baptism"—remember, something 'like a dove...descended upon Him' (Lk. 3:22)—"and *then* he became 'Jesus the Christ,' and then that 'Christ-spirit' *left him* before he was crucified." It's known today as "Gnosticism"; there is a very bad Christological part of Gnosticism. So, it is *very* significant to say: "Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father"—He *always was* the "Son of the Father" (cf. Prov. 30:4; Gal. 4:4; Heb. 1:8); He *became* a man (Phil. 2:5-7; Col. 2:8-9; Heb. 2:14; 1 Jn. 4:9).

And notice also here the juxtaposition of "truth and love"; that's an introduction to how the rest of the letter sounds. "Truth and love" are inseparable, because they complement each other (1 Cor. 13:6). So, if the primary theme-word of Second John is "truth," the second theme-word is "love." In just the 13 verses of this little postcard, "truth" appears four times and "love" appears four times. And you are going to see *another* word that occurs four times—and now I just lost seven of you who are going to try to be reading through it to figure out what that word is; don't worry, I'll get there!

Understand: "Love" is not love if it denies or ignores "truth" (1 Cor. 13:6; cf. Ps. 85:10). You cannot justify skirting the truth because you *say* you are doing a loving thing. God's truth is *never* to be delivered without His love—both go hand in hand (cf. Lam. 3:33; Ezek. 33:11; Matt. 11:28-30; 1 Tim. 2:4-6; Titus 3:4; 2 Pet. 3:9). Paul says twice in Ephesians to "speak truth in love...each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another" (4:15, 25; cf. Zech. 8:16). In First Corinthians, he wrote that if we lack "love," we are like "a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" (13:1). Truth can be used like a *battering ram*, or it can be used like a miracle medicine, when it is wrapped in love (cf. Prov. 12:18; cf. Ps. 141:5; Prov. 3:3; 27:6a). It has to be mixed properly.

Truth *Is* The Source Of Life.

Secondly: Truth *Is* The Rule Of Life. And I'm not saying that there are grammatical turns at these points in my outline; I'm saying, "Here's how they relate to the theme-word of 'truth.' "

Sermon Title: Truth and Love  
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---

Truth Is The Rule Of Life. Verse 4—"I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth, just as we have received commandment to do from the Father."

"Walking in truth" is the key phrase here. A Christian is one who confesses the truth of God's Word (Is. 26:13; Jn. 9:22; Rom. 10:9-10; 1 Tim. 3:16), and *lives* in harmony with what he or she claims to believe (Ps. 26:3; Jn. 3:21; 2 Cor. 9:13).

He is not talking about perfect obedience—we know that none of us is capable of that (Jas. 3:2; 1 Jn. 1:8); but he is talking about the lifestyle of a person who judges all things by the standard of God's Word (Is. 8:20; Matt. 4:4; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). Always, we need to ask: "What does truth require me to do?" *That* is the right question; not, "What can I get away with?" "What does truth require me to do?"

He said he "was very glad" about these people "walking in truth." Those three words "was very glad" translate one Greek word that is used in such a way to indicate that John had been personally involved with these people that he was commending. "I have *seen* the impact of some of your ministry—maybe biological children, maybe grandchildren, but people you have influenced; and that makes me 'very glad'!"

I'm no Apostle, but I know, as a person who is devoted to teaching people the truth of Scripture, *there is no joy as wonderful* as seeing people devoted to the truth of Scripture; there is *no joy* like watching somebody *live* according to God's Word. The greatest "joy" of ministry truly is seeing people "walking in the truth" (3 Jn. 4) and enjoying Christian fellowship with like-minded believers (Ps. 133:1; Col. 2:2). And the greatest *heartache* of ministry is people *turning* from the truth (2 Tim. 4:4, 10a; Heb. 10:38b), or people *abandoning* fellowship (Prov. 18:1), or *destroying* fellowship (Prov. 6:16, 19b).

So, John is really specific about making sure his words are not subject to misinterpretation or twisting. He says: "just as we have received commandment to do from the Father." In other words, when he talks about "truth," he is talking about *specific* truth—the things revealed in the Word of God.

The voice of God is recorded in the Word of God (2 Pet. 1:21; cf. 2 Sam. 23:2; 1 Thess. 2:13). Your personal opinion of what is true might be interesting, but it doesn't matter about the way to get to Heaven. What God says is true is what matters (Prov. 19:21). We have a lot of thinkers in our society today who are pretty successfully convincing a generation or two to reduce truth to something relative, something subjective, something personal—but that simply is not true!

I listened this week to a little bit of a recording of somebody witnessing on a college campus and talking to people who honestly, *truly* believed: "I can have *my* truth, you can have *your* truth; they can be mutually exclusive and contradictory, and they're both true. Because it's what works for you, it's what works for me, so it's okay." "So, if *my* truth says that I should pull out a machete and lop off your head, that's okay?" "Well, no." "Well, why not?" "Well, that's wrong!" "Well, why is it wrong?" "Well, I believe it's wrong." "Well, why do you believe it's wrong?" "I just do; that's my belief." It truly does become laughable, but it's *tragic*!

Sermon Title: Truth and Love  
Scripture Text: 2 John 1-13 (Bible Postcards #4)

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Date: 10-9-22

---

We now have the high and humbling calling of taking the truth to a generation that rejects the idea of truth (cf. Ezek. 2:7). There are people today who truly do not believe that there is any such thing as absolute truth. And yet, to say there are no absolutes *is an absolute!* That shows: The issue is *blindness*—spiritual blindness (1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 4:3-4). They need the blinders lifted, which is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to open their eyes to the truth (1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Cor. 4:6; cf. Ps. 146:8; Acts 16:14). The truth of God's Word *is* the standard by which everyone will be judged (Prov. 13:13; Jn. 12:48; 2 Thess. 1:8; 2:12; Jas. 2:9b).

So, Truth Is The Source Of Life, and Truth Is The Rule Of Life.

And then, Verse 5—Truth Is The Boundary Of Love. He writes in Verse 5—"Now I ask you, lady, not as though I were writing to you a new commandment, but the one which we have had from the beginning, that we love one another."

Notice, he uses "commandment" in this context as a synonym for "truth" (Ps. 119:151). He uses "truth" four times, in the first four verses; he uses "love" four times in this book; and here's the other one: He uses "commandment" four times in the rest of this letter. When he says he is talking about the "commandment...which we have had from the beginning," he is going way back to that first thing he wrote—the Gospel of John—where he recorded the words of Jesus in John 13:34-35—"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

So, *how* do I love God and love my neighbor? Read on: Verse 6—"And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments." *Not* "we walk according to what makes us feel good"; not "we walk according to our own personal truth"; not "we walk according to what doesn't hurt anybody else." "We walk according to *His* commandments. *This is* the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it."

The command to "love God" and the command to "love your neighbor" are not two separate things (Lk. 10:27). *Every* command of God *is* a requirement to show love to Him and to our neighbors (Matt. 22:40; cf. 1 Jn. 5:3; Rom. 13:8; Gal. 5:14).

And he uses that same word we have seen Paul use so much: "walk"—the word for describing your daily conduct (e.g., Rom. 6:4; Gal. 5:16, 25; Eph. 2:10; 4:1; 1 Jn. 1:7).

You can say all you want about being a Christian and believing the truth, but if the truth does not affect and control the decisions that you make every day, and if it does not direct you toward loving others, well then, your claim to belong to the Lord is in question (cf. Matt. 7:21; Lk. 6:46; 1 Jn. 2:4). You can be a staunch defender of the truth of God's Word, and not show any love to others. You can believe that God's Word is inerrant, and that Jesus is His Son; but if your relationships with others don't manifest love, then what you say you believe is *suspect* (1 Jn. 3:10; 4:20).

If you really "know the truth," it sets you "free" (Jn. 8:32; cf. Rom. 6:18, 22; 8:2-4). That includes setting you free from "bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and

Sermon Title: Truth and Love  
Scripture Text: 2 John 1-13 (Bible Postcards #4)

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Date: 10-9-22

---

slander" and "malice" (Eph. 4:31). This freedom shows up in your life in the pattern of loving other people in the same way that you "love...yourself" (Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:39). And just as you "want" people to "treat you...treat people the same way"—the so-called Golden Rule (Matt. 7:12; cf. Lk. 6:31).

Truth Is The Source Of Life. Truth Is The Rule Of Life. Truth Is The Boundary Of Love.

And, Number 4: Truth Is The Boundary Of Fellowship. We are sneaking up here on the punchline.

Notice the first word in Verse 7, "For": "For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist."

Notice how carefully that is worded. There is a big difference between saying, "Jesus the man became the Christ" and "Jesus Christ came from the Father"—the difference between right and wrong, truth and fiction.

This is why John wrote this book; it's the reason for the commands here: "*Many* deceivers have gone out into the world." The Apostles weren't even dead yet! John was still around. It had only been *20 years* since the close of the ministry of the Apostle Paul, and already, "*many* deceivers have gone out into the world"? (cf. Acts 20:29-30)

That is the same message that he gave in First John Chapter 4, Verse 1. He calls these false prophets "deceivers" because they *deal* in deception! Spiritual destruction of Christians is one of their goals (1 Pet. 5:8). The other one is: preventing people from *becoming* Christians (Matt. 13:19; 2 Cor. 4:4).

And he gives us this description: "those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh." There is nothing more crucial for you to understand, if you are going to be able to avoid deception when it comes to who Jesus is. He is fully God—that's His deity (Jn. 1:1; cf. Jn. 5:18; Phil. 2:6a; also Rev. 1:8 with 2:8 and 22:13). He is *fully* man—that is His humanity (Jn. 1:14; cf. Col. 2:9; Heb. 2:14, 17). He is totally both of those, all the time, simultaneously. He does not have an invisible switch that He can flick—"I'm going to do something in My humanity now, and then a little later today I'm going to flick over to the deity side; I think I'll heal a few people." No, He is Jesus Christ the God-Man. Neither one of those aspects of His being overshadow or negate the other.

He existed for all "eternity" (Mic. 5:2; cf. Jn. 17:5). He took on human flesh by being born of the "virgin" Mary (Matt. 1:23, 25; cf. Lk. 1:27, 35). He always *was* the Messiah (Gen. 3:15; Ps. 110:1; 2 Tim. 1:9); the word "Christ" is the Greek word for the Hebrew word *māsiāh*, "Messiah." He "died for our sins...He was buried...He was raised on the third day" (1 Cor. 15:3-4), He "ascended to the Father" (Jn. 20:17), and He will return again to set up His Kingdom on Earth (Acts 1:11; 3:20-21; Matt. 25:31; Rev. 20:4-6).

That is about as short as you can make the description of who Jesus is, and there are "many deceivers" out there. You might encounter them today (2 Tim. 3:13).

Sermon Title: Truth and Love  
Scripture Text: 2 John 1-13 (Bible Postcards #4)

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Date: 10-9-22

---

There is a whole group that says Jesus is actually the archangel Michael.

There are people who say that he is "a son of God"—he achieved really high status, but he is not "God the Son"—very big difference.

There are those who say he was born of a man and he *became* the Messiah at his baptism, when that "Christ-spirit" descended upon him. That was the teaching of Gnosticism, but it has been adopted by a lot of New Age kinds of people; you can have that "Christ-spirit" come upon *you*, as well.

There is a group that says he was a spirit-child of the god named "Elohim" and one of his many wives.

There are those that say he was a great teacher and a great example who therefore *came to be called* "son of God."

And there are people who say he was a man who achieved godhood by virtue of his works. There is a wrinkle of that these days among most of the "Prosperity Gospel" preachers and some others in the Charismatic movement who say *we* are "little gods"—you have to find "the little god" in you, and sort of water it and fertilize it so it will grow up and take over, and you can do the same things that God did; you can speak things into existence. Not true.

People say there is a similar spirit in you that can be discovered and developed—I mean, we are *all* sons of God, right?

Or, there are those who say he was a great man who taught and did wonderful things, and then his followers, who liked what he said, embellished the truth into myths and legends that we have in the Bible—so that no one really knows the "historical Jesus." If you ever see those two words together—"historical Jesus"—just slam the book or turn off the TV; *go away!* It is people who are *presuming* that what we have in Scripture, which documents who Jesus is better than *any* other person in antiquity—"We know *that* isn't true! But here's what *we* think people made up, and here is what the 'historical Jesus' might have looked like."

Look: *No one* who believes or teaches *any* of those things about Jesus Christ is a Christian! It doesn't matter what they say; they may have the word "Christ" on their church buildings, they may have the word "Christian" all over them—but if you do not hold to the biblical doctrine of Jesus Christ, *you cannot be a Christian* (2 Jn. 9; cf. Matt. 24:24; Gal. 1:6-9), because you are saved by *the* God-Man, Jesus Christ: the *only* "mediator also between God and men" (2 Tim. 2:5), the one and only Savior (Acts 4:12)! And you are "saved" *only* "by grace," *only* "through faith" (Eph. 2:8), *only* "in Christ" (Gal. 2:16; cf. 1 Cor. 15:22; 2 Cor. 5:17, 19), *only* on the authority of Scripture (2 Tim. 3:15).

There is *one* "way"—there is *only* one "way"—and Jesus said, "No one comes to the Father but through Me" (Jn. 14:6). So, those who say otherwise are "deceivers" and "antichrists" (cf. 1 Jn. 2:22).



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---

What does he mean? Well, a "deceiver" is one who tells you something that is not true. Most deceivers are themselves deceived; they are the victims of their own deception (Prov. 17:4; Jer. 14:14; 2 Tim. 3:13b). But they are spreading lies.

"Antichrist"—we use that as a capital-A "Antichrist" to describe the man who is going to be the world leader in the end times (1 Jn. 2:18a; cf. Dan. 9:26-27; 2 Thess. 2:3-10; Rev. 13:1-8). But it literally means "instead of Christ" or "opposed to Christ"; and in a context like this, it refers to anyone who substitutes *anything* for the true doctrine of Jesus Christ (1 Jn. 2:18b).

Now, here is the punchline of the letter. Why did he write this? Verse 8—" Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward."

There is a little bit of enigmatic stuff there, but understand: He is not saying that you can achieve salvation and then lose it and achieve it and lose it, or you might achieve it and then lose it once for all (cf. Jn. 5:24; 6:37b); that's not what he is saying. He is talking about the concept of rewards.

You read about it in First Corinthians Chapter 3, Verses 10 through 15, most extensively; and we have taught on that in the past. The idea is that your works, *as* a Christian—not in order to *become* a Christian, your works *after* you become a Christian—will be tried by "fire" (1 Cor. 3:13); those which prove to be spiritually "gold, silver," and "precious stones" (vs. 12)—they will "remain," and they will be "rewarded" (vs. 14); what is "wood, hay," and "straw" (vs. 12) will be "burned" away by the "fire" (vs. 15) so that only the good things are left, and everyone is rewarded for that.

But it says here: "that you may receive a *full* reward." That *implies* the possibility that maybe there is a level of reward that you *might* have achieved, but you might miss out if you get deceived along the way. This passage tells you that you *can* miss out on reward you might have earned by being deceived or by participating in the work of a deceiver. Fascinating subject. It has nothing to do with the Doctrine of Salvation; it has everything to do with the Doctrine of Christ and other things that are in play.

Now look at Verse 9—"Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching"—those are parallel; it is one description in two parts: "goes too far" and "does not abide"—"Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ"—the Doctrine of Christ—"does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son." (cf. 1 Jn. 2:23)

When someone believes anything else other than what the Bible teaches concerning Jesus Christ, it is not a child of God—that person is not a Christian; that person is not saved (cf. Jn. 10:2-5, 14, 27). He must not be treated *as if he is* a member of God's family, because he isn't (2 Cor. 6:14-15; cf. Acts 8:21-23).

So, when you venture beyond the boundaries of revealed doctrine concerning Jesus, you have crossed a line; and that is the line we must *hold to* (cf. Matt. 24:5, 23-24).

Sermon Title: Truth and Love  
Scripture Text: 2 John 1-13 (Bible Postcards #4)

Speaker: Jim Harris  
Date: 10-9-22

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It is very clear: Verses 10 and 11—"If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds."

Now, that does not mean: be nasty to them. That does not mean: verbally assault them. What it means is: Do not welcome them into your home, or welcome them into your church, or pretend that what you are doing in your interaction with them is Christian fellowship.

Now, there is giving "a cup of cold water" in Jesus' name (Matt. 10:42)—that's a good thing to do. What about those people who are ministering so tirelessly to the refugees from the war in Ukraine? *That's a good thing!* You don't say, "I see you are starving, and I know your kids haven't eaten for three days. What is your Doctrine of Jesus? Tell me, and maybe you can get a Big Mac." No, that is *not* what this is saying.

"Do not receive him into your house"—that was a much bigger deal in the early church. Cults *love* to prey on those who know just enough about the truth to be extra-gullible when somebody comes along and *seems* to know it well. "Well, these people were talking to me; and, you know, their name tag said 'Elder,' and they know the Bible better than *I* do." Well, that means you have a problem! *You* need to know the Bible better than *they* do! (Heb. 5:13-14; cf. Prov. 22:17-18; Col. 3:16; 1 Tim. 4:6; Titus 1:9)

They are *going to come* (2 Cor. 11:13-15); and in the Early Church, hospitality toward strangers was a *lifeline* for travelling Christians. Motel 6 was *not* leaving the light on! There were no "KOA's" with hookups for your donkey or camel on the edge of town. You *had* to rely on your spiritual family (3 Jn. 5-8).

It is quite possible that John was also referring to a house church—a group of believers worshipping together in a "house" (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Philem. 2). And if that is the case, he is emphasizing all the stronger: The church *must not* welcome so-called "teachers" and "prophets" without testing their doctrine (cf. 1 Cor. 14:29).

*Anyone* is welcome to come and visit us *anytime*. Bring your friends! We would *love* them to hear what the Bible says! We would *love* to have opportunity to share the Gospel with people. But we don't just have somebody who comes and stands at our driveway and passes out pamphlets say, "Oh, come get in the pulpit! We want to hear what you have to say." It does not work that way.

The line to draw is: Never let a false teacher into your home, or permit him to teach you his doctrine. If you can't take control of a situation to make sure *you* share the Gospel, it is better to just excuse yourself and close the door, than to open up your household and your family to deception (cf. Prov. 14:7; 1 Tim. 6:20).

Fellowship has a boundary—the truth (Acts 2:42; cf. Ps. 119:63; Phil. 1:27). You cannot have *Christian* fellowship with people who reject the truth about Jesus Christ. And if you *assist* them along the way toward teaching their error, you are "participating" in their "evil"—and that is *not* a good thing (cf. 1 Tim. 5:22).

Sermon Title: Truth and Love  
Scripture Text: 2 John 1-13 (Bible Postcards #4)

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Oh, and by the way: This command does not negate the other commands to welcome strangers: Hebrews 13:2—"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it." *That's quite a verse!* We know it happened at least once, in "Sodom" (Gen. 19:1-3), but it says "*some* have entertained angels without knowing it"; so sometimes, you being kind to the one who *is* the stranger—the one who *is* hungry, the one who *does* need a cup of cold water, the one who *does* need temporary shelter along their way—that can be a really good thing. But Christian fellowship is something *very different*, and *very special*, and *very precious*. And the boundary on fellowship is truth.

Finally—Truth: There is Too Much To Say. Look at Verses 12 and 13—"Though I have many things to write to you, I do not want to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, so that your joy may be made full. The children of your chosen sister greet you."

This little letter makes one strong point: Truth is *everything* to a Christian! It is the Source of Life, the Rule of Life, the Boundary of Love, the Boundary of your Fellowship—but notice this final important principle here: There is *no substitute* for face-to-face discipleship and fellowship.

The idea that you do not need to spend plenty of time learning from more mature believers—that's *bunk*. You *need* to be with each other. "Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" (Prov. 27:17). It is *good* to be together! It is *good* to talk about things! It is *good* to weigh ideas, and then say, "Now let's bring them to the Scriptures and see what is absolutely right here" (cf. Is. 8:20).

Look, recordings are good things. This is being recorded; it will be used elsewhere. The Internet can be used for a couple of good things and a whole bunch of bad things. Radio, television, can be used for good things; we have been on the radio for years and years—it's the most used portal into the fellowship of Heritage Bible Church. Books are a *great* treasure! But there is *nothing* in *any* of those that can possibly replace fellowship face-to-face in the Body of Christ. You *cannot* grow the way God wants you to grow in isolation (cf. Prov. 18:1; Eph. 4:16).

Oh, and by the way: Verse 13—"The children of your chosen sister greet you." I won't bore you with the inane spiritualizing you can find in commentators. Do you know what that means? John sent greetings from nieces and nephews and cousins to "the chosen lady and her children." If you can't leave it at that, I don't know—*read another book* of the Bible. If the natural sense makes sense, there is no sense seeking any other sense.

This book is so clear and simple: Helping deceivers is like committing spiritual treason (cf. 2 Chr. 19:2). So keep the balance—*always anchored to the truth*, always tenaciously clinging to love. And if your knowledge of the truth is not causing you to reach out beyond yourself to serve somebody else—well, then, you are not "*walking* in the truth"! Pick up a packet of love; walk with the truth into the world (Matt. 28:19; Acts 8:4; 2 Cor. 5:18-20). And spend as much time and energy on serving as you do on studying and praying and reading, because we are the stewards of truth and love.

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And let's pray:

*Father, thank You for the truth. Thank You for the written truth of Your Word. Thank You that You loved us so that You sent Your only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him would never perish, but have eternal life. Oh, put that message on our hearts! Help us to see the people around us, not as enemies but as victims of our Enemy, as prisoners of our Enemy; and help us to "speak truth in love," that they might be set free. Have Your way with each of us to that end, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.*