

9. Learning to Walk in Love

In our previous eight topics, we have looked at the things that Peter taught about false teachers. We see that such false teachers deceive themselves as well as deceiving others. John and Jude also wrote about false teachers and how they deceive themselves and others. In our topic today, and the next topic we are going to see that John tells us how to walk in love even toward false teachers and at the same time protect others.

In 2 John 1:1-2, we see that John describes the people to whom this letter was originally written. Those verses say, “The Elder, to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all those who have known the truth, because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever.” Here, we see that this letter was originally written to a particular lady and her family. This lady and her family must have been well known among the Christians in the area in which she lived because of the things that are written in this introduction.

The focus of this letter is the importance of showing hospitality to those who are followers of the truth but not providing hospitality to those who deny the truth. As a result, we see that the word “truth” is mentioned three times in the first two verses and two more times in verses three and four. In two verses in the book of John, the writer defines who and what is meant by the word truth. In John 14:6 we read, “Jesus said to him, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” Then as Christ prayed in John 17:17 He said, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.” In these verses, we see that Christ and the Word of God are called truth. As a result, those who would deny the truth would include those who deny that the whole Word of God is truth or that Christ is the One who is truth.

We see that John wrote to a lady and her children in one of the churches. This woman must have been known for her hospitality to Christians who were traveling through her area because the second half of this book is a warning about false teachers who might come posing as Christians. Matthew 7:15-17 says, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.” Here, we see that false teachers will try to deceive so John wanted to protect this lady and her family from deception by false teachers.

John gave us much detail about the prayer of Christ the night before He was crucified. One of the key things that Christ prayed for all true Christians is that we might be one. John 17:20-21 says, “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.” Here we see the Christ prayed that all true Christians would be one as Christ and the Father are One. Just prior to those verses, we read in John 17:17, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.” Here we see that the basis for unity among true Christians is agreement about the fact that the whole Word of God is truth. As a result, it is only possible to have unity when that unity is based on truth.

That is why this letter about hospitality begins by focusing on the importance of truth. As we said as we began this topic, both the whole Word of God and Christ are truth so there must be agreement on those two points in order for Christians to have unity. However, we also see in these verses that truth dwells in us. In John 16:13, Christ promised, “However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own *authority*, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.” Here, we see why it is possible for us to have unity when that unity is based on Christ and the Word of God.

That unity is possible because of the fact that all Christians have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them. Galatians 5:17-18 says, “For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.” At any time a group of Christians are being led by the Holy Spirit, there will be unity among those Christians. In any group where part of the people are not being led by the Spirit due to the fact that they are not yielding to the Spirit, or if some are not Christians, there will not be unity because that part of the group may be acting in the flesh. However, when all are Christians and are being led by the Holy Spirit, Acts 2:46 says, “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.” The early church was of one accord because they were being led by the Holy Spirit.

In 2 John 1:3-6, we go on to read, “Grace, mercy, *and* peace will be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love. I rejoiced greatly that I have found *some* of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father. And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another. This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.” John went on to tell the lady and her children that they would experience grace, mercy and peace as they walked in truth and love.

Ephesians 4:15-16 says, “But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ--from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.” Here, we see that part of our growth as Christians is learning to speak the truth in love. As we learn to speak the truth (share the Word of God with one another), and speak the truth in love, we see that we will help each Christian to experience grace, mercy and peace.

John wrote to the lady who received this letter that he experienced great joy when he found some of her children walking in truth. Galatians 5:16 says, “I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” As we also help our children learn to walk in the Spirit, they will also learn to walk in truth. The Father is the One who commands us to walk in the truth. In fact, John 14:16-17 says, “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever--the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.” Here, we

see that the Father has given us the Holy Spirit and He is also called the Spirit of truth.

This is why John went on to plead with this lady that she would walk in the truth. John realized that the Christian love that this lady had was great and that is why she was so quick to show Christian hospitality to travelers who claimed to be Christians. John realized that her love and concern was making it easy for deceivers to deceive her. That is why John went on to point out the fact that true love results in obedience to the commandments of the Lord. 1 John 5:2-3 says, “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.” Here, we see that true love for God will cause us to love the children of God and at the same time also keep the commandments of God

The night before His crucifixion Christ gave the disciples a new commandment. John 13:34-35 says, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” The new commandment is to love one another as Christ loves us. This is why we are to recognize the teachings of those who are deceivers and false teachers. We will not show true love to weak Christians if we do not protect them from false teachers.

However, at the same time we are also commanded to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Any person who is not a Christian is our neighbor, and so we are to speak with love even if a person is a deceiver or false teacher. However, as we saw earlier in this topic we are to speak the truth in love. In order to speak the truth in love to deceivers, we are to warn them with love about the judgment that is coming. Christ modeled that love as He spoke from the cross and said in Luke 23:34, “Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.’ And they divided His garments and cast lots.” In the same way, we want to warn false teachers with love so that they are given the opportunity to repent and turn from their sin and turn to Christ.

Here, we see that learning to walk in love includes giving all people the opportunity to understand the love that Christ showed by paying the penalty for their sin with His blood on the cross. As Christ talked to the rich young ruler, Mark 10:21 says, “Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, ‘One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me.’” Jesus looked at this young man with love even though he was depending on his own works. In His love, Christ invited this young man to follow Him. In the same way, we want to help our children learn to show love to false teachers by offering eternal life instead of offering hospitality.