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Truth, Love, and the Truth in Love - Part 1
"The Truth, the Whole Truth, and Nothing But the Truth!" - 2 John
By Tal Davis

"And the lonely voice of youth cries, 'What is truth?'" - Johnny Cash

In the Gospel and the three letters ascribed to the Apostle John, the themes of love and truth were prominent. This was also especially true in the life and ministry of Jesus. Jesus is both the embodiment of truth and of love. The two principles are inextricably linked. Truth without love is empty propositional facts. Love without truth is nothing more than maudlin emotion. The Apostle John especially linked these principles when he was confronting false teachers and theological error. This was John "the Disciple whom Jesus loved" who wrote the Fourth Gospel (he never mentions his own name; John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20). We see this expressed quite well in his Second Letter. That letter, which we have preserved in the New Testament as the short book of 2 John, was written by the Apostle John late in the first century when he was very old.

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, 2 because of the truth which remains in us and will be with us forever: 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. 4 I was overjoyed to find some of your children walking in truth, just as we have received a commandment to do from the Father. 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. 6 And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you are to walk in it. 7 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. 8 Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. 9 Anyone who goes too far and does not remain in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who remains in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. 10 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; 11 for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds. 12 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 complete. 13 The children of your chosen sister greet you. (2 John NASB)

John addressed this letter to the "Chosen Lady" and her children. He was not talking about any one person specifically but probably meant a local church or churches in Asia Minor (present day Turkey). They may have been the same ones to whom he transmitted Jesus' messages in Revelation 2 and 3. He obviously wrote it to counter a threat of spiritual error that was growing in the congregation. He did not detail exactly what the heresy entailed, but it may have been an incipient form of Gnosticism. In this context, John speaks of two separate, but inextricably connected concepts: truth and love; and the need to speak the truth in love.

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The point it is that Christians are to proclaim and defend the timeless truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in love. Let us look carefully at how John addresses these two concepts and how they are intrinsically bound together. In this three part series, we will analyze John's letter to see how he explains the meanings of truth and love and then see how and why he ties them together.

First, let's see what John says about truth. John uses the term "truth" five times verses 1-4. The Greek word translated as truth is *aletheia*. He commend his readers saying the truth lives/abides, or remains, in them. Like the youth in Johnny Cash's old song, and the Roman governor who interrogated Jesus, Pontius Pilate (John 18:38), people often ask, "What *is* truth?" Truth is simply what is real. It is what actually exists, or what actually happened in the past. Most people have some inner longing for truth, that is to know what is or was real. Sadly, many of them simply choose to ignore their own questions – much less look for answers.

I once got into a rather deep discussion with a secular college professor about truth. A student who overheard us just put his hand over his face and said, "I never think about those kinds of things. It hurts my head!" That seems to be a common attitude in today's world. "What I don't know or think about can't hurt me. Pass the bottle."

Even sadder is that many people today don't even believe that truth exists. Postmodernism, probably the most influential philosophy on college campuses today, says truth is merely a construct of a person's culture or worldview. It asserts that no one can ever find or know the final truth about anything. Therefore, we have no right to question

another person's worldview or beliefs. "You have your truth, they have their truth" (even if they diametrically contradict each other).

If you have read many of the articles on the MarketFaith website, you know that a worldview is composed of the set of assumptions and presuppositions a person possesses through which they look at, and evaluate, the world. We delineate four such worldviews: Theism; Naturalism; Animism; and Far Eastern Thought. Within each worldview are various belief systems based upon it. We will not explain them all here but if you are not familiar with the concept of worldview, make sure you explore our website at www.marketfaith.org.

As Christians we unwaveringly assert that there is real truth and that what people believe does matter. We maintain that the facts concerning who Jesus is and what He said are true. We contend that Jesus really lived, that Jesus really died on the cross, and that Jesus rose again from the dead. as Paul convincingly wrote:

1 Now I make known to you, brothers and sisters, the gospel which I preached to you, which you also received, in which you also stand, 2 by which you also are saved, if you hold firmly to the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. 3 For I handed down to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 After that He appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; 7 then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; 8 and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. (1 Corinthians 15:1-8 NASB)

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These are not just a set of imaginary precepts or cold propositions. Jesus himself said: *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me."* (John 14:6 NASB) Jesus is the essence of truth! To know Him is to know truth itself. He is what John writes about when he describes: *"the truth which remains in us and will be with us forever."* (2 John 2 NASB)

But, according to Scripture, knowing and believing the truth is not enough. It must be linked with the other essential element of love. In the next

installment we will examine further the deeper meaning of God's love and why we should love one another. In part three we will show how the two concepts of truth and love are both indispensable, especially when countering false teaching.

To sum up this installment, what people believe really *does* matter. Jesus is our only Lord and Savior. Salvation is through Him alone. We can accept no substitute or counterfeit. "What is truth?" Sorry, Johnny, wrong question. Right question: *"WHO IS TRUTH?"* Jesus Christ.

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