

## Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

### **The Primacy of Truth**

Scripture: 2 John 1:4

Code: 63-1

Well, let's open our Bibles to a little book that we need to look at--2 John, 2 John. The New Testament ends with 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude and Revelation. Second John, this and 3 John are going to be our points of study over the next several months. It won't take a long time to go through these wonderful epistles, although they do contain some great insight and wonderful instruction.

As I have often said, the most important thing--the most important reality--is divine truth, divine truth. It is the one great essential. A few weeks ago we were studying at the end of the tenth chapter of Luke, the story of Mary and Martha and how Martha busied herself, you remember, with the preparations of the house, and Mary was seated at the feet of Jesus listening to every word He said. And Jesus Himself said Mary has chosen the best part. It will not be taken away from her. The best place that you could ever be is under the hearing of the truth of God. Truth is the priority.

Let me give you just a brief survey of what the Bible says about divine truth. God is the God of truth, according to Deuteronomy 32:4, meaning He is the source of it. Christ is the truth and full of truth, John 14:6, John 1:14. The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of truth in John 14:17. The Bible is called, in Daniel 10:21, the Scripture of truth. We are saved by the truth. We are sanctified by the truth. We love the truth. We are judged by the truth. We are set free by the truth. We worship in the truth. We serve God in the truth. We rejoice in the truth. We speak the truth. We think on the truth. We desire the truth. We manifest the truth. We hear the truth. We obey the truth. Most comprehensively, we walk in the truth. That is to say we conduct our lives in the realm of the truth. It determines how we think and how we speak and how we act. We walk in the truth.

With that as a background, let me read the opening four verses of 2 John. "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. I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth, just as we received commandment to do from the Father."

Five times in those four verses you have a Greek word *aletheia*, meaning "truth." Clearly, then, John is writing in the realm of the truth. He lives in the truth. In every sense he is informed and controlled and motivated by the truth. John has written this brief letter to call us to that same truth in a world of lies and liars. This is, by the way, the emphasis of his third letter. If you turn over to the third letter on

the next page there, you read this, "The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth. Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers. For I was very glad when brethren came and bore witness to your truth, that is, how you are walking in truth. I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth." Verse 8, "Therefore we ought to support such men, that we may be fellow workers with the truth." Verse 12, "Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself; and we also bear witness, as you know that our witness is true." Both of these letters is about the truth in a world of lies.

The first letter, 2 John, is written to a lady. The second letter, 3 John, is written to a gentleman. The lady to whom this first letter was written is not named. The gentleman is Gaius, as we read. One letter to a lady, the other to a man--both clear exhortations to live in the truth. And contrast to that, we exist in a realm of lies presided over by the arch-liar, Satan, who is the father of lies. He dominates his subjects so that they fail to understand and to believe the truth. He so dominates the world that men do not speak the truth. In fact, Jeremiah 9:5 says, "They are skilled at teaching their tongues to lie." Hosea 4:1, the prophet says, "There is no truth in them." Isaiah 59:4 says, "They do not plead for truth. Jeremiah 9:3 says, "They are not valiant for the truth." First Timothy 6:5 says, "They're destitute of truth." Second Timothy 3:8 says, "They resist the truth." Second Timothy 4:4 says, "They turn their ears from the truth."

The unconverted then are called, in Psalm 58:3, "Those who speak lies." They live in a realm of lies. They live in a realm of deception and falsehood. The divine indictment of all of the lost, rendered in Romans chapter 1 and verse 25 says, "They exchanged the truth of God for the lie." That's how people live in the world. That's how all of us lived in the world before God opened our hearts to understand the truth. You heard it again, didn't you, in the testimonies tonight? One deception after another people pursue--one unfulfilling deception after another. Everybody in the world lives in one of these two realms. You either live in the realm of the truth, or you live in the realm of lies. The world then is divided into two groups: those who live in the truth and those who live in lies.

Now the role of the church is clearly defined in the Bible. One verse sums it up, 1 Timothy 3:15, "The church exists in the world to be the pillar and ground of the truth." "The church exists in the world to be the pillar and ground of the truth." And if the church ever abandons the truth then it ceases to be the church of Jesus Christ. What does it mean when the apostle Paul writes to Timothy, who is pastoring a church in Ephesus? What does it mean when he says that the church is to be the pillar and ground of the truth?

They would have understood that because in the city of Ephesus was this massive edifice built to Diana, the god of the Ephesians. Diana sounds like a lovely name, and indeed it is, but this particular god was the grossest kind of deity imaginable. In fact, an animal and a very ugly one at that. But the temple was massive. It was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, along with the hanging gardens of Babylon, and the pyramids, and others. And the great feature that struck you when you saw the Temple of Diana was the pillars. There were 127 of them: massive pillars, solid marble, carved and then overlaid with gold, and then studded with jewels. When you see the ruins of an ancient temple today, you often see them all as white. There was a time when many of them were overlaid with gold and studded with jewels. This was one, 127 pillars--every pillar was donated to the building of the temple by a king and bore the name of that king. And it was all of those kings paying their homage to the goddess and sometimes god, Diana.

Now these pillars held up the roof, which was an immense structure made of stone. Underneath the pillar were the *hedraioma*, which means "the support." As I said, the ground it's called, but this is the *hedraioma*, the support. It references the foundation. So you had this massive stone foundation, supporting 127 solid marble pillars, holding up this heavy roof. That whole edifice, that whole massive structure with its foundation and its pillars and its roof was a testimony to Satan. It was a testimony to lies, like the Vatican. It was a monument to deception.

The church, on the other hand, is to be a monument to the truth. We exist to represent the truth. That is our mission, and that is our purpose. And failing to uphold and live the truth, we cease to be the church, as Israel failed to uphold and live the truth and cease to be the witness nation. If there's anything that should ever occur in a church, it should be the centrality of the truth, the revealed truth of God's Word. People treat the church so flippantly today. They blithely come in and out of church, never having a thought that they're interacting with the God of truth who hates deception and lies. One writer says, "Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke in our prayers? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear lady's velvet hats to church. We should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should provide life preservers and signal flares. They should lash us to the pews for the sleeping God we say we worship might wake up and take offense."

The true church is the pillar and ground of the truth. It proclaims the truth and the people who are there come to hear the truth. And the truth, of course, is the revealed truth of God. The only truth that we will know is that which God has revealed to us and that, of course, is revealed in the Scripture. It is the solemn responsibility, then, of the church to solely, without wavering, without moving, unshakably uphold that truth. The church does not author the message of truth, and it alters it only at

its own risk. The church is called to be the foundation and the support of the truth. To put it another way, the church has the stewardship of the Scripture. That is our stewardship.

We read so much in the paper about this church and that church. We read all of the things that are going on in the Roman Catholic Church, particularly with the preoccupation of the pope. All the things that are going on in the Anglican church as they ordain homosexual bishops and legitimize same-sex marriages. And all the church leaders meet together. Those really are not churches at all. They have...they have really taken the name they're not entitled to. That's the church of Antichrist, not the church of Christ. The church of Christ upholds the truth; it doesn't tear the truth down; it doesn't destroy the truth. It doesn't mock the Scripture, nor does it substitute something else for it. It doesn't negotiate divine revelation.

The true church has always clung to the truth, always. In the midst of every storm, in the midst of all persecution, in the midst of rejection--whether its enemies attack from the inside or attack from the outside--the true church has always clung to the truth. And thousands through its history have paid the price for the truth rather than compromise it or abandon it.

I admit that our challenge is not that we might be killed for the truth. In fact, it probably would be better in terms of holding on to the truth if that were the case because if there were outright persecution against those who believe the truth, all the hypocrites would disappear. And the only people who would be left would be the people who really are the people of the truth. Persecution would help us to hold on to the truth because the true saints of God would receive the grace to endure the persecution that comes when the truth is attacked.

We have something far worse than being killed for the truth. We might be rejected by our society for the truth. We might be considered as offensive and divisive. We might be looked at as aliens. We might be vilified or even at best treated with indifference. We might be rejected by those around us. And so, in order to avoid that, we compromise or even set the truth aside that offends.

At this point--I told you this morning--I want to just say a personal word. This is John MacArthur, not the apostle John. But I...people ask me often, "Do you ever worry about what people think about what you say?" And I can honestly say I don't. Actually the thought doesn't enter my mind. I'm not trying to be harsh; I'm not trying to be unloving; I'm not trying to be unkind; I'm not trying to ride roughshod over people, either their understanding or their feelings. But, you see, what men think bears very little weight to me. It is not a heavy burden for me. There is a far greater weight that I feel, and it's the weight of the revelation of God. That is a heavy thing to me. The truth of God is very heavy upon me.

It is the greatest weight that I feel in my life by far--the glory of God. The Old Testament word for "glory" is the word in Hebrew "weight." I have a rather heavy view of God and His Word. It weighs heavy on me, and nothing equals the weight of that. Human opinion, popularity--whatever--bears very little weight. It is as a feature compared to the weight of the revelation of God that I feel.

God has exalted His Word to the level of His name, Psalm 138. It is as heavy as God is weighty. And I feel the weight of that, and that is why for me study and preaching is so intense because this is my responsibility to feel the weight of the truth of God and then to dispense it to you. This is my calling. This is not unusual. I'm not alone in this. This is the calling of every man of God, of every teacher of the Bible, of every leader in the church, every pastor, elder. At least this is what the church is about. We are the pillar and foundation of the truth. And it is a weighty matter to me. Nothing is as important to me as divine truth, for it is in divine truth that I know God. It is in divine truth that I know Christ, the Holy Spirit, salvation, that I understand everything I need to understand that matters.

So John also felt greatly the weight of truth, probably much greater than I do. And he was inspired by the Holy Spirit to give us these two little letters, to remind us of the weightiness of the truth, to call us to live in God's truth. And there's something to be said for where this appears in the New Testament. You have two letters--2 John, 3 John--calling us to live in the truth, followed by Jude, which warns us about the liars, followed by the book of Revelation which promises us Jesus is coming back; be ready. It's as if the plan of God was to remind them to live in the truth, warn them about liars, and tell them to hold on to the truth till Jesus gets here. And that's how the New Testament ends. Pretty strategic placement, I would say, of these two little letters.

Before we look at the actual words in these opening verses, a few comments. These are the shortest epistles in the New Testament. Both have less than 300 Greek words. This one has about 200, I think; 245 Greek words, very brief letter. Each of these two letters could fit as they do on your paper on one single papyrus sheet, and in both letters John says I have more to say but I'm not going to write it. Verse 12, "Have many things to write to you, I do not want to do it with paper and ink." In 3 John, verse 13, "I had many things to write to you, but I'm not willing to write them to you in pen and ink." He says, "Look, I'm just going to keep it brief because I'm going to come, and I'm going to tell you the rest--a letter's good; a visit's better.

Very brief letters; both of them written to an individual--one to a lady, one to a man. They are classic in the sense that they are in the correspondent style of the Roman Empire. They're classic examples

of personal correspondence in the way that they're laid out.

The apostle John is not mentioned in either of these letters, but he is widely held--and has always been held--to be the author by long-standing, universal tradition. The first people who read the letters knew they came from John, and they told the next folks and the next folks and the next folks. And there's never been a variation from that so that it is universally accepted that John is the author. They were then likely to have been written the same time or soon after 1 John, which was at the end of his life. He was the last living apostle. All the rest were dead and it was about 90 to 95 A.D., at the end of that first century while he was in ministry at Ephesus, that he wrote all three of these, and also received the Revelation just after that, probably in the year 96.

Now the reason for writing and calling people to live in the truth is because of the ever-present threat of false teachers, only the threat here is unique. You might say, "Well, if he was worried about false teachers, why didn't he send the letter to the church at Ephesus there, or the church at some other point in Asia Minor, Sardis, Pergamum, whatever? Or why didn't he send it to the universal church? Why does he write a letter to a lady, a letter to a man and warn them about false teachers and call them to the truth?"

Well, he already wrote his letter to everybody, and that was 1 John. And you certainly haven't forgotten that 1 John basically was directed at this same problem of false teachers--1 John 2:18, "Children, it is the last hour; just as you hear that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour." Verse 22, "Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ." Verse 23, "Whoever denies the Son doesn't have the Father." And again over in chapter 4 he says try the spirits; don't believe everybody. See if they're from God. "Many false prophets have gone out into the world." Verse 3, "Every spirit that doesn't confess Jesus is not of God; this is the spirit of the antichrist." I mean, at the heart of the whole writing of 1 John was the issue that false teachers were present. And they were giving a false standard of salvation.

And so, John in 1 John provided doctrinal tests and behavioral tests by which you could evaluate the truth. And so having written the letter to all in general--it is in that sense a general epistle--he now writes these two letters to one lady and one man. Why so? Because in ancient times preachers traveled and stayed in homes. Inns were brothels, places of disease, unacceptable unless one was in desperate need. And those who preached the gospel along with any other traveling teachers were itinerant, moving all over everywhere and depending upon hospitality.

You remember when Jesus sent out the Twelve; you remember that two by two in Galilee? He gave them some criteria by which to determine what homes they were going to stay in and how to deal with that. And then when he sent out the Seventy two-by-two later on, he gave them the same kind of instruction about where they would stay and where they wouldn't stay and to go to a place and if you were received there to remain there, and so forth. That was pretty much how it worked. You traveled around and you preached and somebody showed you hospitality.

Well, this appealed greatly to the false teachers. They would claim to be the true teachers of the true gospel--the true representatives of God. They would engage in an itinerant ministry. They would come into town and they'd say, "We're the true preachers of God." They would be strangers to the people in the town. They would approach those who were in the church. They would approach those who professed Christ. They would say that they also were preachers of the gospel. They would even come to the church. They would seek a place to stay. They would stay there, and once embedded there they would begin to teach their lies and to seek their converts and subvert the church. No doubt they had done it in Corinth. No doubt those demonized false teachers who came in and were ripping and shredding the Corinthian church had found themselves a place to stay in the homes of the people there and from that embedded vantage point were sowing the seeds of lying deception. And so you have in 2 John, for example, in verse 10, "If anyone comes to you and doesn't bring this teaching, don't receive him into your house, don't even give him a greeting." You have to be very careful or you're going to wind up participating in his evil deed.

On the other hand, look at 3 John, verse 6. When the true preachers come, even though they are strangers, verse 5, when they come, "You do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. For they went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to support such men...that we may be fellow workers with the truth."

So they're going to be itinerant preachers, some of them you're going to open your home to, and some of them you're not. Once they become embedded in a home and they can take advantage of someone's weakness or lack of understanding, and from that point they can begin to ply their lies and deception, they become dangerous and deadly. It may well have been that this lady unwittingly, unintentionally had actually opened her house to some false teachers. And that is why he says if someone comes to you again and doesn't bring the teaching, don't receive him into your house. And, you know, this was not an easy thing because Christians were called to hospitality, right? *Philoxenos* in the Greek, "hospitality"; it means "loving strangers," "loving strangers." But the church, remember now, is the pillar and ground of the truth, and it's not just that you have to be afraid of who gets in the pulpit. You also have to be afraid of who gets in the homes. The church has to be protected from deception, not only by who it allows to preach in the pulpit. It's not likely that a church committed to

the truth is all of a sudden going to invite a false preacher in and the leadership of the church is going to say, "Well, go ahead and have at it." The leadership of the church are fairly discerning. Hopefully, if it's a Bible-teaching church, they're not going to let that happen. But unwitting people who want to be hospitable may allow false teachers to become embedded in their congregation with disastrous results. And after all, Romans 12:13 says that we're to practice hospitality. We're to open our lives in our homes to strangers.

Hebrews 13:2 even goes so far as to say, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it." And that, by the way, was written 25 to 30 years before 2 John.

So it might have been that this lady was thinking to herself, when these strangers came along, "Wow, this is an opportunity for me to open my home to these who proclaim to represent the true God and claim to be part of us, and I'm going to let them in because, who knows, I might be entertaining angels without knowing it." Like Abraham and Sarah did, you remember, back in Genesis. And Peter had said, no less than Peter, the leader of the apostles, "Be hospitable to one another without complaint," 1 Peter 4:9. In other words, do it without complaining that you're having to do it. And, in fact, 1 Timothy, chapter 5, it was the apostle Paul who wrote that a woman couldn't even be put on the list of widows in the church when her husband died if she hasn't shown hospitality to strangers. And also, by the way, 1 Timothy 3:2 says, "You can't even be an elder or a pastor in the church if you don't have hospitality."

So, you see, hospitality was raised to a pretty high level. It was a matter of spiritual virtue. It might be a matter even of entertaining angels without knowing it. You were to do it without complaining. You were to do it if you ever hoped to be on the list. And it is possible that this woman was even a widow 'cause her husband isn't mentioned, but her children are. So she might have felt, "I'm absolutely doing the right thing." But there was always something and always will be something more important than hospitality. What is it? What is it? Truth. I'll say it again--truth is the most important thing there is. Even the Jews had a saying, "There are six things, the first of which a man eats in this world and by which he is exalted in the world to come. There are six things, the first of which a man eats in this world and by which he's exalted in the world to come, and the first one on the list is this: hospitality to strangers." So it's not only in the fabric of their Christian experience, it was part of being Jewish. And so, perhaps well intentioned, this woman had done this and John had heard about it and gave her instruction inspired by the Holy Spirit, which then became a personal letter with a very public impact.



In the early church this kind of caring for people was an essential service, a tangible way to share the love of Christ with strangers as they went from town to town with the gospel. And that was God's plan. God's timing was perfect, and one of the things that existed in the world at the time of the New Testament was the *Pax Romana*, the Roman peace. Rome had basically knocked down all the walls between all the countries in the Mediterranean world so that people could cross the borders without having problems. And that made the gospel spread faster. The Romans built roads everywhere. Roman roads, of course, are legendary. Rome developed tolerant laws. Rome erased the threat of borders. Rome stationed soldiers all over the place to make travel safe everywhere in the Empire. Well, the Romans all did that to advance their government, but God used it for the fast spread of the gospel. So the church would welcome the preachers like Paul, who was given lodging by Lydia; like Jason in Thessalonica; like Gaius in Corinth; or Philip the evangelist, who was given a place among the believers in Caesarea, or a man named Mnason in Jerusalem. It was pretty typical to do that.

Well, the false teachers soon figured that out. They could make a good living as an itinerant preacher leaching off people everywhere they went and saying just enough to seduce people into thinking they preached the truth. And then preying on the gullible Christians who were loving them in a kind way and getting a hearing for their lies and bringing corruption and distress into the church. Even the pagans function like this. I found an old writing of Lucian, the Greek poet. In his writing he drew a word picture of peregrines, showing an itinerant charlatan who lived on the fat of the land by traveling to Christian communities and settling in to live comfortably at the expense of the Christians, perpetrating himself on them under the guise of being one of them. So in the context of this issue of hospitality, John writes, "You have to be careful to maintain the truth. We live in the truth; we live in the truth."

Sound doctrine is always the test of fellowship, always. The truth, listen carefully, is never served--the truth is never honored; the truth is never respected; the truth is never aided by those who deny it or those who attack it. Nothing is gained by being exposed to error. Don't let it in your church, obviously. The church is the pillar and support of the truth. Don't let it in your house. You cannot hold up the truth and welcome in those who seek to destroy it. So if we get a little defensive around here about protecting the truth, you will understand our mandate. The truth matters more than anything else, people. If the church loses the truth, it isn't the church. Romans 16, "Greet one another with a holy kiss"; verse 16, "all the churches of Christ greet you"--great statement of love and affection. Immediately after, "Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting."

If you're sitting in a church full of deceivers, get out. If you're hanging on to some denominational affiliation that has abandoned the truth of the gospel, get out. The truth and lies are not compatible.

In Galatians chapter 1 and verses 8 and 9, "Even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed...let him be accursed!" Verse 9, "As we said before, so I say again"...Just to make sure you get it..."if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed! For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Am I striving to please men? If I was still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ."

Take your choice. What makes you feel the weight? You feel the weight of the Word, or do you feel the weight of human opinion? Anybody preaching anything other than the truth is accursed. In 2 Thessalonians chapter 3, verse 6, "We command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we didn't act in an undisciplined manner among you." Even if you find a person who deviates in their conduct, stay away.

Down in verse 14, "If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter," that's the revelation of God, "take special note of that man...do not associate with him, so that he may be put to shame." Nothing is gained, nothing is gained by mixing error with the truth. It is always destructive. That's why Titus 3:10 says, "Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and sinning, being self-condemned." You find somebody who takes a position opposite the truth, you confront him, you go through the discipline process, and you put him out because he's twisting. He's sinning, and built into that is its own condemnation.

Another passage that addresses this, 2 Corinthians 6, "Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness...what fellowship has light with darkness?...What harmony has Christ with Belial...what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?...what agreement has the temple of God with idols?...come out from the midst and be separate, says the Lord...don't touch what is unclean." Everything in the Scripture calls us as the church to be separate from lies.

And this goes back to one of the passages that was quoted in our baptism, Psalm 1. "How blessed is the man who doesn't walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night."

The point is, he hasn't got any room or any interest in meditating on anything else. That's why I wasn't interested in going to a liberal seminary. I had been asked to go to school of theology in Southern California--very liberal--to complete a doctorate degree. And I went there and they looked at all my transcripts and they said, "You have too much Bible to get a doctorate in theology." So they said, "You're going to...you're going to have to be able to read--I think it was two or three hundred books--in order to qualify for this degree." And at the time I thought, "Well, maybe I just need to go through this drill." And they told me that most of them were in French and German. So I trudged off to Glendale Community College--Patricia will remember this well--and learned German, thinking I would learn German and then do that. And after I did that I would learn French and do that and I'd read those books. After making this noble effort at German, I went down to get the first course assignments. The first course they wanted me to do was the ethics of Jesus in the cinema, which is a wacky title, and I had no interest in that. And the second one had to do with trying to find the real Jesus. And I went in to the dean and I said, "You know, I'm not even...I'm going to end before I start. I already know the truth. I'm not about to spend the rest of my educational efforts learning lies."

It would not have been helpful. It would have corrupted my conviction. It would have worn away my resolve. In fact, that's exactly what 2 Timothy 2 says, verse 15, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God...a workman who doesn't need to be ashamed...handling accurately the word of truth." Love that. How you going to handle the Word of God accurately? Verse 16, "Avoid worldly...empty chatter, it leads to further ungodliness, and their talk spreads like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, men who have gone astray from the truth." Stay away from that stuff. Verse 21 sums it up. If you want to be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, "prepared for every good work," verse 21 says, you have to cleanse yourself from these things. What things? The effect of worldly, empty chatter--ungodliness and talk that spreads like gangrene, eating away at the truth.

Now all of that takes us back to 2 John. John says, "Truth is everything. I love in the truth with all who know the truth, for the sake of the truth. Grace and mercy and peace comes in truth and love, and I'm glad to find some of your children walking in truth."

That's what it's all about, folks. It's about the truth. It's about the truth. We're going to look into this little epistle. I'm not going to have time tonight to develop this. But I'm going to give you five things in this little epistle that's all about the truth.

First, I'm going to talk to you next time about living in the truth. What does that mean? Then I'm going to talk about loving in the truth. And then we're going to look at being loyal to the truth. And then we're

going to look at looking for the truth. And we're going to close out this little letter learning more about the truth. Living, loving, loyal, looking, and learning.

This is a postcard, it really is. It's a postcard. Compared to Luke it's a postcard, but it isn't a small message. It's a big message. And the dynamite here comes in a small package, but it is dynamite. This is not just a call to recognize the truth; this is an exhortation to live in it, love in it, be loyal to it, look for it, and learn it. This is...this is filled with warnings about what will happen if you don't. And this, my friends, is at the heart of all the issues in the church. If we don't know the truth and we don't live for the truth and we aren't the pillar and ground for the truth, then the church has a deficient immune system. We lack discernment. And if we lack discernment, we'll die from a thousand illnesses. We can't have a low commitment to divine truth. We can't have an open door to those who deceive by misinterpreting and misrepresenting the truth. Of all things to be protected, the truth is most important. You lose the truth, you lose the truth about God, you lose the truth about Christ, the truth about the Holy Spirit, the truth about man, the truth about sin, the truth about salvation, the truth...when you lose the truth, you lose it all. We need to be soldiers for the truth, don't we? Guarding the truth is critical. We don't just preach the truth, we contend for it. We fight for it.

Well, do you now get a little bit of a feel for what this letter's going to tell you? It will be a while until we can get into it because Tom Pennington asked me to come down and install him down there in Dallas and he...I decided that since he gave me 16 years, I'd give him a Sunday or so out of gratitude and love for him. I'm so thrilled to be able to do that. But next time we meet on Sunday night, we'll get back into this epistle and we'll find out what it is to live in the truth.

Father, thank You for just opening our eyes tonight to what is basic, but so tragically gets lost. The church is the pillar and ground of the truth. I'm not interested in anybody's opinion, not even my own. I'm not interested in what a committee decides, or a council. I'm not interested in coming to a compromise or conciliating. I'm not interested in making a truce with those who believe lies. We are the...we are the pillar and foundation of the truth in the world. This is the one temple where people should be able to go and hear the truth. Certainly not to have lies or even the truth depreciated and diminished and substituted with some man-centered psychology. Keep us faithful to the truth as a church and as individuals. Give us all discernment. Help us never to open our minds, open our homes, open our lives to those who come to deceive. Give us all discernment. Living in the truth is really living in the knowledge of You, the true knowledge of You. Living in the truth makes it possible for us to worship You for the God You are, worship You for the Lord Christ You are, worship You for the Holy Spirit that You are. Living in the truth informs everything. We thank You that You've given us Your truth. We thank You that we can hold it in our hands, that we have the mind of Christ and therefore the mind of God. We know what You think about everything You have revealed to us, and

we live in that truth, and we will contend for that truth, and we will proclaim that truth. And those who do not and abandon that truth may call themselves the church, but they are no longer the pillar and ground of the church and therefore they no longer fulfill that responsibility in the world, which is their responsibility and alone their responsibility to hold up Your glorious truth. And we say what Jesus said, "Thy Word is truth." We thank You for it in Your Son's name. Amen.

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