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“Truth and Love”

Sermon Series: “Complements,” No. 4

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2 John

1 This letter is from John, the elder.

I am writing to the chosen lady and to her children, whom I love in the truth—as does everyone else who knows the truth— 2 because the truth lives in us and will be with us forever.

3 Grace, mercy, and peace, which come from God the Father and from Jesus Christ—the Son of the Father—will continue to be with us who live in truth and love.

4 How happy I was to meet some of your children and find them living according to the truth, just as the Father commanded.

5 I am writing to remind you, dear friends, that we should love one another. This is not a new commandment, but one we have had from the beginning. 6 Love means doing what God has commanded us, and he has commanded us to love one another, just as you heard from the beginning.

7 I say this because many deceivers have gone out into the world. They deny that Jesus Christ came in a real body. Such a person is a deceiver and an antichrist. 8 Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked so hard to achieve. Be diligent so that you receive your full reward. 9 Anyone who wanders away from this teaching has no relationship with God. But anyone who remains in the teaching of Christ has a relationship with both the Father and the Son.

10 If anyone comes to your meeting and does not teach the truth about Christ, don't invite that person into your home or give any kind of encouragement. 11 Anyone who encourages such people becomes a partner in their evil work.

12 I have much more to say to you, but I don't want to do it with paper and ink. For I hope to visit you soon and talk with you face to face. Then our joy will be complete.

13 Greetings from the children of your sister, chosen by God.

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The book of Second John...the second shortest book of the Bible – that's our text today, if you'd care to turn back there with me.

We'll see if a short book makes for a short sermon.

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Complements.

Things that go together. [*Peanut butter and jelly ... placed on pulpit as an illustration*]

From the Bible, things that go together, even though they may not seem to. That's what we've been looking at for the last few weeks.

So far, we've talked about faith and works,  
we've talked about shrewdness and innocence,  
and we've talked about justice and mercy.

Each of those pairs, though they seem so different...maybe even contradictory...God works them **together** in a way that only He can.

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God does the same thing with people, you know?

Within the Church, in friendships, in businesses, in marriages, in families...wherever God is welcomed and pursued, He can take very different, even **opposite** sorts of people and work in their relationship such that they actually wind up **better together**.

God can make very different people complement each other, if He's given the room and the time.

Our problem is...we get in too big of a hurry and we wind up short-circuiting what He's doing.

And it **does** take **two** people who are truly open to Him. If one really isn't open to God, that's a hard path for the other to walk.

But where both are willing, God can help even very different people complement each other, and He does that in the context of the Church...His body.

The Church is God's laboratory...His workshop for all that...for creating...for accomplishing complementary relationships.

And if the church is His laboratory, then God's the scientist who knows how to make that happen, which makes us the mice, I suppose...not rats; mice.

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You know, along those lines...I think God's design is that His people live in the kind of freedom and security that allow us to walk up to a Christian brother or sister and just say something like, "You know, I truly don't get you. It seems to me that we're so different. I don't understand how you think, but I want to! So can we work at getting each other? Can we give God the space to help us become...complementary?"

I really think that's how the Church...the Christian family is supposed to work...with that sort of openness and honesty.

Now, I don't mean we're to give up truth for lies or orthodoxy for heresy. I'm not talking about that.

I'm talking about those differences that come with preference, with point of view, maybe with age or social or economic standing...those sorts of things.

I think God wants us to explore and even come to appreciate those differences, all in the context of love.

I mean, we're *going* to love each other...that's a given, just because we're both in Christ. Our relationship should be secure in love.

But beyond just a declared love, God wants to actually show us how we are, together, a better whole, and help us understand each other and learn from each other and appreciate each other.

Two very different people might even begin to *like* each other!

That going too far?

Complements...that God puts together.

Faith and works.

Shrewdness and innocence.

Justice and mercy.

Today...truth and love.

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Though John's name is not in the original text, we're pretty sure John is the writer here.

We're not sure if he was writing to a person – to an actual woman and her physical children, or, by way of metaphor, to a church and its members. Most scholars seem to think the latter...and that he was using this language because the times had become somewhat dangerous for Christians.

Either way, to explain the complementarity of truth and love is actually the whole reason John writes this note.

And he would have no reason to write if there were no problem in his world understanding that, which of course there was.

The situation was this: evidently, there were some teachers who were traveling through presenting untrue things. Chances are they were the same Gnostics whom John had confronted in his first letter, who taught, among other things, the inherent evil of the material world – which ultimately led them to deny Jesus' incarnation and resurrection.

That, of course, undermines the whole of the gospel.

But on top of the false teaching, those guys were also taking advantage of the church people's hospitality...their willingness to take them in and house them and feed them...which the church was doing based on their understanding of love and compassion and hospitality.

So you see, we have here a very real, practical question of how to handle the intersection of truth and love in day to day life.

“Do we not show these people loving hospitality, even though what they present...what they teach is not right?”

“Isn’t it unkind...unloving...to not welcome them?”

“Isn’t it unloving to question or critique or correct what they say?”

“What takes precedence,” one might ask in a situation like this, “truth or love?”

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Ha – is this an issue for us today or what?

How do we engage...how do we treat Christians...who are misguided in what they believe? Who have accepted wrong assertions and expect us to accept and embrace them too?

Do we welcome and bless them in the name of love?

Or do we reject them in the name of truth?

Or something else?

That is the very issue here in Second John.

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We’ll see how John answered that in his day, but to address this today, we have to understand first that, in our day, both truth and love have become terribly miss-defined.

When you have people, and there are many today...talking in terms of, “my truth and your truth...his or her or their truth,” we you have that sort of conceptualization of truth, you have to stop right there and say, “that’s wrong.”

You don’t have to be a Christian to recognize the senselessness of that sort of talk. It’s based in pure sentiment and has no integrity to it at all.

If truth is made relative to individual people and what they think or feel or believe in a given moment, then that means there is no real truth...and chaos is not far away.

If to murder someone is, to me, a perfectly fine thing to do, but to you it isn’t, what happens when I murder you...or your child or your friend?

If you believe in the right to have personal property and I don’t happen to believe that, what happens when I take your bicycle or your car or your house?

Who’s truth wins...and how is that decided?

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No, there is no such thing as personal or relative truth.

If we all did whatever we wanted and called it truth, we would cease to exist as a people because, *interestingly*, we would *lack* any sort of *love* for one another.

To have truth...for truth to exist...means to have *something* upon which truth is based *for all people*. But our culture is squishy, and getting squishier, on that very elementary and necessary fact.

Our culture has corrupted the very definition of truth. We have to understand that.

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In addition to that, our culture has also corrupted the definition of **love**, essentially by saying that **love must include agreement**.

To love someone, our society says, is to **agree** with them...to **accept** them and what they think, as they are, and expect nothing from them.

Or, to say it inversely, if you disagree with someone or what they think or believe, then many in our society would say that you can't possibly love them.

It's called, in short, **tolerance**, and it's a ridiculous notion that leads to nowhere good.

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My two-year-old son may **want very much** to play with blocks in the middle of Lexington Road out here. He may believe with all his heart he should be able to do that, and may even be thoroughly and sincerely convinced that no harm will come to him or anyone else if he does.

But...if I were to agree with him...if I were to bless and encourage his decision and even carry him and his blocks out there and set them all in the middle of the north-bound lane...am I being loving to him?

The driver of the car who comes over the hill and hits him would not think so.

And neither would the police or the courts or my friends or anyone else.

Why?

Because, **interestingly**, there is a no **truth** to his belief that it's a good thing for a two-year-old to play in the middle of Lexington Road, so it would not be loving for me to agree with him and to believe what he believes.

In fact, the **loving** thing to do would be to disagree or correct him.

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You see, there is a tie between truth and love that cannot be long ignored.

Real, actual truth and love cannot be separated.

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Back there in the first century, in John's situation, he certainly affirms that Christ-followers do have a duty to show loving hospitality – we find the same thing in Paul, Peter and the writer of Hebrews.<sup>1</sup>

Yet followers of Jesus, John and others, write, have to be discerning in doing so.<sup>2</sup>

We can never overlook or sweep aside truth in the name of love.

At the same time, we can't fail to love others as they uphold truth.

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¹ Romans 12:13, 20; Hebrews 13:2; 1 Peter 4:9

² Galatians 1:8–9; 2 Thessalonians 3:6

In this case here, John concludes that if the Christians there welcome or help those false teachers by showing them hospitality, they will lose, in some way, some spiritual reward.

Verse 10 and 11 there, ***“If anyone comes to you with false teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them. Anyone who welcomes them shares in their wicked work.”***

Now, that sounds cruel to our 21st century minds, doesn't it...what John says? But this was serious business to him. He knew that the very eternities of persons could hang in the balance here. He writes in verse 8,

“Watch out that you do not lose what you have gained.”

This was serious business to John because he understands how untruth...falsehood...heresy works in believers and in churches: it works just like the camel who wants to come into the tent – once you let his nose in, it's not long at all until he's ***all*** in, and your tent is no longer yours, but rather the camel's.

John knows that the camel of falsehood can crowd you out faster than you might think.

Besides that, John says that if we help or embrace those who embrace untruth, then we become a partner in the transgression, and while we may not be committing the sin of false teaching, we are committing the sin of ***failing to truly love the other*** by pointing out their error.

By accepting and going along with the teachers' errors of those at the church, we're not loving them.

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Now, the heresy that was being taught there in John's world...that was specifically about Jesus' incarnation and resurrection. That was the core issue there, and of course, we can easily see how that would lead people far, far astray.

But you know...John's point here goes beyond incarnation. John's point is that Christ-followers can, shockingly easily and quickly, lose truth in the name of love if we're not careful.

And if they needed to be careful about this back then, how much more do we need to be today!

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It's so easy to give up truth in the name of, what's commonly called, “love.”

We hear, very regularly, how no one should ever say that anything is actually, “wrong.”

Our culture tells us that it's unloving to claim to know a ***right*** way to live or to do things.

We're told that to suggest otherwise is intolerant and arrogant, and so strongly is this view held in our culture, and in a big part of the Church, if a Christian tries to challenge it, they're accused of being un-Christian.

In the mind of our day, John, here, is about as “intolerant” as it's possible to be, simply by saying that it's not loving to embrace untruth, and that Christ-followers cannot do that.

John says that to truly love people is to offer them truth.

To let people believe that lies are truth...that may seem nice...it may avoid argument, but there's no love in it.

Tom Wright says, "Is it unloving to shout to people that their house is on fire? Should we tolerate and show loving hospitality to those who come into someone's home and throw lighted matches on the floor? Is it intolerant warn people that the road on which their driving ends at the precipice of a cliff with no bridge? Is it a failure of love to warn people that certain behaviors lead to ruin rather than to life?"

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Now of course we need to be sure that we, ourselves, are standing on firm Biblical ground and that we're not just talking out of our own prejudices and preferences.

And while most of us will not have to deal with exactly the issue that John did, there are other issues that have nearly as much at stake, and they represent the camel's nose.

Of course we must watch our manner and motive, since it's always tempting to boast in our rightness. Many people have been needlessly hurt by the Church because of manner.

But even understanding that danger, that doesn't mean we just give in and let people believe whatever they like.

There's no truth in that.

And what John is claiming here is that there's no love in that either.

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Years ago, in the middle of one of the big arguments over the ordination of homosexuals in the United Methodist Church, someone, in defense of it, stood up and declared, "truth without love is not real truth!"

To which Maxie Dunnam replied, "Yes, but just the same, love without truth is not real love."

This is precisely what John is saying must be the Christian position.

Truth is too bound up with love, and love with truth, to ever truly separate them.

In thoughtlessly adopting unbiblical assertions and ideas and standards, both theological and behavioral, those well-meaning Christians were in danger of devaluing truth.

It seemed harmless to just take them in.

It was easier.

It was nice.

But to John, it was absolutely deadly deadly.

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As it was in John's day, it is still today.

That's why John writes – he wants us to be aware of this, and to do all we can to put it right...to see it clearly and to see it accurately in our lives. It does apply today. I know it does. It applies to many of us here in this place.

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If you are trying to find that balance in your life today – that balance of how to love someone without compromising truth...that is a hard road to walk.

If you'd like to ask the Lord for special help to walk it with you...to show you what to say, what not to say, where to draw lines that need to be drawn, and how to do it all in His kind of love, He will help you.

He'll help you keep the full definitions of both truth and love, and He'll steer you as you navigate those sometimes treacherous waters.

If you need His help with truth and love, He offers it to you today. Why not ask Him to help you?

He knows better than anyone else how they go together...

...and he has a recipe for every situation.

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### **Prayer:**

Lord, I thank you...we thank you...for the way that you present love and truth...for the way they go together in every situation and the way that they will prevail in the end.

Lord, I pray for those that are dealing with difficult situations with friends, with family members, particularly as we come into the holidays. There are people walking fine lines...making hard decisions about truth and love. Lord, help us to take our counsel from you. Help us not to do just what feels right to us in the moment and call it truth or call it love. Help us to take our definitions from you...and help us to follow you faithfully, winsomely with joy...but faithfully, faithfully, faithfully.

Lord, if there are some that need you in this way...this particular way this morning...would you meet them where they are? And would you let them know that you are nearby. In Jesus' name, Amen

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Closing Song: "Christ, Be My Leader"

Closing Word and Benediction:

John 16:13 says, *"When Spirit of truth comes, He will guide us into all the truth."*

That promised Spirit – God's Spirit – is here...in our midst...and He will guide us into lives of both His sort of truth and His sort of love...inseparably linked...just the way He designed.

May you sense His presence and help in these days of living truth and love in Jesus' name.

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Thanks for coming to worship this morning. The Lord bless and keep you. Go in peace.

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