

Small Books, Big Messages

“Truth and Love – Part 1”

2 John 1-6

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on August 19, 2018

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** Michael Ingham was the bishop over all the Anglican churches from Hope to the Sunshine Coast. He sparked great controversy when he released his book *Mansions of the Spirit*. He states that the main point of the book is to bring about peace between the world religions that often have a history of violence.
 - In a discussion about his book at Christ Church Cathedral in Vancouver he pointed out that the reason for this violence is because every religion makes claims about absolute truth. These absolute beliefs can then lead to intolerance and intolerance can in turn lead to violence. Ingham’s solution therefore is to reject the absolutes. In particular he rejects the historic Christian belief that a person *must* believe in Jesus to be saved.
 - Ingham argues that world religions need to move beyond absolute truth claims. **“We need to move beyond theology altogether to prayer.”** He said, **“Doctrine divides, but prayer unites.”**¹
- I bring up Michael Ingham simply to illustrate the fact that there is intense pressure to abandon or at least tone down the claims of Jesus. Amazingly this pressure comes even from those, like Ingham, who occupy high positions in the church.
 - Do you not feel this pressure? You can feel it when after sharing Christ with someone they dismiss your thoughts by saying, **“That’s true for you but it is not true for me.”** You can feel the pressure when people say, **“How can you be so arrogant as to claim to know the truth when so many people disagree?”**
 - So under such pressure to abandon or tone down Christian truth, what does it mean to live faithfully in our day? Do we downplay truth and emphasize love? What does it mean to be faithful?
- This is where the second shortest book in the Bible is so helpful. Here John is writing to a church under intense pressure. Like us they faced pressure from the outside culture but also from within the church. As we will see next week, some church leaders had been teaching that Jesus was just a man and not God in human flesh. These leaders had left the church but were now taking advantage of the well-intentioned hospitality of church members to keep teaching their doctrines. So what does faithfulness look like?
 - In the first six verses John teaches us that to be faithful under pressure we must do two things. First, we must live in the truth. Second, we must love in the truth.
 - In the first six verses the word ‘truth’ came up five times while the word ‘love’ came up four times. John combines them in verse 3. **READ 3 - Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father’s Son, in truth and love.**

LIVE IN THE TRUTH

- **(SHOW SLIDE 2)** First, **to be faithful under pressure we must live in the truth.** We will spend 2/3 of our time on this point.
 - Look at verse 1 with me. John introduces himself as **“the elder.”** This is a reference not to age but to his official position in the church. You will also note that he addresses his letter to **“the elect lady.”** She is God’s elect woman. The only reason we choose God is because he first chooses us.

¹ <http://www.canadianchristianity.com/cgi-bin/bc.cgi?bc/bccn/1297/hiphps>

- But who is this lady? Some commentators think she is an actual woman but the vast majority thinks that she is not a person but the personification of a church. The word “church” is feminine and John refers her as the bride of Christ in other writings. Also throughout this letter Paul speaks in the second person plural instead of first person singular. Or, as our friends in the US say, John writes to y’all not to one woman. So I take this to be a church and her children are the Christians in the church.

BELIEVE THAT ABSOLUTE TRUTH EXISTS

- Let’s keep going. **READ 1a - *The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth.*** So John loves them in the truth. Right away we learn something profound.
 - To be faithful under pressure we must live in the truth. **(SHOW SLIDE 3)** And **to live in the truth means we believe absolute truth exists.** John was not a relativist. He believed in absolute truth. He says his love flowed out his belief in ‘the truth.’ If you look at the end of verse 2 he also says that the truth will be with us “forever”. Truth is eternal.
 - John developed many of the truths, which make up ‘the truth’, in his first letter, which we call first John. The truth that God exists, that there are absolute standards of right and wrong, that we have broken those standards and sinned, and most of all, that God sent his Son Jesus into the world to rescue anyone who turns to Jesus.
 - To be faithful begins by believing in absolute truth.
- Now it is this claim of absolute truth that people in our day have so much trouble with. Way back in 1987 Alan Bloom wrote *The Closing of the American Mind*. He said, **“there is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: Almost every student entering university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative.”**² That statement is truer today than in 1987.
 - People today do not believe in absolute truths that apply to all people, at all times, in all places. People view truth as a matter of opinion or culturally shaped perspectives. You can hear this most clearly when people say, **“That’s true for you but it is not true for me.”**
- This is not a new way of thinking. A way back in 5th century B.C. there was a man named Protagoras. He famously said, **“Man is the measure of all things.”** By this he meant that there is no absolute truth that we must measure ourselves against. Rather, each person is the measure or the judge of truth. What’s true for me then may not be true for you.
 - Protagoras’ views greatly upset Plato, the famous philosopher who lived a generation later. Plato wrote a little book entitled *Theaetetus* to refute Protagoras’ relativism. Here is a paraphrase of the dialogue between Plato’s main character, Socrates, and Protagoras.
 - Socrates: **“So you believe that each man’s opinion is as good as anyone else’s?”**
Protagoras: **“That’s correct.”**
Socrates: **“How do you make a living?”**
Protagoras: **“I am a teacher.”**
Socrates: **“I find this very puzzling. You admit you earn money teaching, but I cannot imagine what you could possibly teach anyone. After all, you admit that each person’s opinion is as good as anyone else’s. This means that what your students believe is as good as anything you could possibly teach them. Once they learn that each person is the measure of all things, what possible reason would they have to pay for any further lessons? How can you possibly teach them anything once they learn that their opinions are as true as yours?”**
 - Plato is showing that relativism falsifies itself. As Paul Copan writes, **(SHOW SLIDE 4)** **“You can’t in the same breath say, ‘Nothing is universally true’ and ‘My view is universally true.’”**³ Relativism is logically self-defeating.

² Alan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 25.

³ Paul Copan, *True for me but not true for you*, 30.

- Moreover, if you push people you will see that no one really believes that what is true for me is also true for you. When Matthew Raymond shot and killed two police officers and another man and woman in Fredericton last week no one said, **“Well he has his truth and we must be tolerant of this.”** No, everyone believes his actions were wrong. But if truth is relative, then how can we say he was wrong?
 - Listen, you cannot say that nothing is universally true and then say it is universally true that murder is wrong. You see, I am not so much trying to convince you that absolute truth exists. Rather, I am showing you that you already believe it exists. Whether we admit it or not, we live our lives on the basis that truth does exist and that it matters.
 - So to be faithful under pressure we must live in the truth and that begins by refusing to buy into the logically incoherent view that truth is relative. To live in the truth means we believe truth exists.

BELIEVE THAT TRUTH CAN BE KNOWN

- But it means more than that. **(SHOW SLIDE 5) To live in the truth also means we believe truth can be known.** Look at verse 1 again. **READ 1 - The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all who know the truth.**
 - John says it is not just he who loves this church but all who *know* the truth also love her. This is a reference to all Christians. John says Christians know the truth. Once again, this does not sit well with our culture.
- If you say you know the truth, someone will say to you, **“How can you speak so confidently that you know the truth when so many people disagree?”** The argument here is that since so many people disagree, truth must be relative. Now there is no question that truth is sometimes hard to discern but it does not follow that truth is relative just because people disagree.
 - If one person thinks the earth is flat and another thinks it is round, do we say, **“Well, there is disagreement here so I guess there is no ultimate truth on this matter?”** Of course not. There is truth.
 - The fact that people disagree does not prove anything except that they disagree. The person who thinks the earth is flat lacks certain knowledge. Once such knowledge is attained that person will know the truth.
- But this only increases the intensity of the questioner. How can Christians be so arrogant as to assume *they* have the knowledge of the truth? Listen carefully here: Christians do not claim to be smarter or more enlightened than anyone else. In fact, we say that unless God reveals truth to us we are so puny that we could never understand anything about him. The only reason Christians claim to know the truth is because we believe God, the author of all truth, has spoken to us. And the chief way he has spoken to us is through His Son, Jesus.
 - You see, truth is not an abstract principle that smart people try to discern. Truth is a person. We believe that Jesus is God in human flesh. Jesus said, **“I am the truth.”** So when Jesus speaks, it is God speaking to us. When Jesus tells us about God, or explains what sin means, or tells us that He will rescue all who trust in him, we listen.
 - So you see this should destroy any pride or smugness among Christians. We can only know the truth because God has revealed it. This should make a Christian incredibly humble (for God has to reveal the truth for us to know it) and yet also incredibly confident (for God has revealed the truth that we might know it).
- So dear Christian if we are going to be faithful under the pressure of our day we must believe that truth exists and that it can be known. The truth is known in Jesus.

OBEY THE TRUTH

- There is one more thing to be said about what it means to live in the truth. **(SHOW SLIDE 6) To live in the truth means we obey the truth.**
 - Look at verse 4. **READ 4 - I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father.** To understand this point let’s read verse 4

backwards. The key is in the last line. The Father has commanded us to obey him. So what is the truth that exists, that can be known, that God commands us to obey?

- John already told this church when he wrote 1 John. It is 1 John 3:23: “**And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.**”
- So what is the command of God? Let me explain it as plainly as possible. You were created by God and for God. But we have all turned our backs on our true King. We have committed treason against him. We live for ourselves instead of living for Him and so are locked in the prison of our own sin. But rather than destroy us, God, in love, sent Jesus to die for our treason that we might be reconciled back to our King.
 - And now as the rightful King of the universe, God commands all people everywhere to believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ. This is a gracious command. Jesus has broken the doors of our prison down. And now he commands us to leave our sin and walk out the open door to him.
- Now we are ready to understand the rest of verse 4. **READ 4a - I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth.** John had apparently met or heard from some of the Christians in this church. He was overjoyed to learn that some of them were walking in the truth. This seems to imply that many were not handling the pressure so well and were succumbing to the false teachers.
 - But at least some were not abandoning Jesus in the pressure. Their beliefs and behaviour were in line with truth. They were walking in the truth. They were obeying God’s command to believe in Jesus and to love one another.

A WORD TO LOVE ORIENTED CHRISTIANS

- So now we are ready to wrap up and apply this first point. As we live in a culture that puts pressure on us to abandon truth and as we face pressure from supposed Christian teachers, authors, scholars, and pastors, to abandon the truths about Jesus, John calls us to live faithfully.
 - He says we do this first of all by living in the truth.
 - To live in the truth means we hold to absolute truth and don’t buy into relativism.
 - It also means that we believe truth can be known because God became a man and spoke to us.
 - And finally living in the truth means we are to obey the truth. We obey the command to believe in Jesus and to love each other.
- Now there are two types of Christians here today. There are truth-oriented Christians and there are love-oriented Christians. And I mean truth-oriented *at the expense of* love and love-oriented *at the expense of* truth. Right now, I am going to talk to the love-oriented people. Love oriented Christians are those people who are always talking about unity and harmony as the main thing. They bring people together. They stress the need for fellowship, care for the poor, and church unity. They remind us that God is love, that He has shown that love on the cross, and that the second great command is to love your neighbour. These are all good things.
 - But if you are a love-oriented Christian you face some dangers as well. Love-oriented Christians can be soft on truth because they know that truth makes people disagree and disagreement can lead to conflict. They are typically conflict avoiders. Love-oriented Christians can also lack discernment and so allow false teaching into their church and their kids lives. In trying to keep the peace they can fail to see that at times a line must be drawn in the sand for the sake of love. As we will see next week it is not loving to allow false teaching in the church because false teaching destroys.
 - For love’s sake we must ensure that our brothers and sisters do not believe false things that lead them away from Jesus. For love’s sake we must at times enter conflict when supposed Christian leaders deny major tenants of the faith. For love’s sake we must be clear thinkers, able to define and defend the truth.
- If you are more of a love oriented Christian I want to call you to take action this week to develop your mind in truth. Begin by reading the Bible. To learn the key Christian doctrines pick up a book like

Wayne Grudem's *Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know* and study it. Put effort into loving God with all of your mind.

- So although we took almost all our time on it, that is the first point. To be faithful under pressure we must live in the truth.

LOVE IN THE TRUTH

- Let's take our last few minutes to develop the second point. In the second place John says that **(SHOW SLIDE 7) to be faithful under pressure we must love in the truth.**
 - Without this second point we are danger of creating a bunch of self-righteous truth proclaimers. John knows this. When faced with so many pressures the tendency of the truth-oriented Christians is to fire back, to guard the truth, and to take a stand.
- There is no question that we want this church to be known as one that proclaims and defends the truth.
 - But hear me on this: it would be a great tragedy if this were all we were known for. We do not want to be a church that is known for truth. We want to be a church that is known for truth *and* love.
- John says two things about what it means to love in the truth. **(SHOW SLIDE 8) First, to love in the truth means letting the truth ignite our love.**
 - In verse 1 John wants to express his deep love for them. **READ 1a - *The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth.*** Do you see the connection between truth and love? It is not just love. It is the truth that ignites his love for them.
 - Is that not the case at Central as well? Why do people of different ages, ethnic backgrounds, interests, and personalities come together here? It is because of the truth – the truth of Jesus as our Saviour and Lord. Honestly, if it were not for Jesus how many of us would even know each other? It is the truth of Jesus that binds us together and ignites our love for each other.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 9) Second, to love in the truth means obeying God's command to love.**
 - **READ 5 - *And now I ask you, dear lady—not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning—that we love one another.*** The law had commanded us in Lev 19 to love our neighbour. This is nothing new. It is the most ancient of truths. We are to love because we are commanded to.
 - But then verse 6 flips that. **READ 6 - *And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it.*** So God commands us to love one another and we love one another by obeying his command, which is to love one another.
- Friends, if we are going to be faithful under the pressure of our day we must not just live in the truth, we must love one another in the truth. This community must be marked by love! It is not enough to just stand for the truth.

A WORD TO TRUTH ORIENTED CHRISTIANS

- So now let me speak to the more truth-oriented Christians in the group. The first thing to say is that truth-oriented Christians are also vital to the church. They remind us that it is not enough to just take cookies to your neighbour, you must also tell them about Jesus if they are to be saved.
 - Truth oriented Christians remind us of Jude 3 that we are to ***“earnestly contend for the faith that was one and for all delivered to the saints.”***
 - They are invaluable to the church because they teach the Bible, guide us in making godly decisions, and instruct us in the truth. They often have great discernment. They can smell the faintest hint of heresy and will not wimp out when the gospel is threatened.
- But truth oriented Christians also face great dangers. They can lack grace. They can be too harsh. In their zeal for the truth they can often forget that it is people who need the truth and people must be loved.

- Are you a truth-oriented Christian? If so, then here is the truth that you must pursue: love one another. Are you doing that in this church? Are you known for your care? Instead of writing responses to blog posts why not write a letter to another person in the church expressing your care for them.
 - Instead of reading another book, invite people over to your house for a meal. Invite people you would not normally invite. Encourage someone in leadership like the music team or those who work with the kids.
- How do you get this love? Fill your heart with the truth of the gospel. Glory in the truth with Paul and say, ***“The Son of God loved me and gave himself for me.”*** In light of this we say with I John 4:19: ***“We love because he first loved us.”***
 - Oh let the truth of God’s love for us in Jesus so melt our hearts that we love one another.

CONCLUSION

- This is how we live faithfully under the pressure of our day. We live in the truth. We don’t compromise it. We don’t relativize it. But we also love in the truth. This community must be marked by love.
 - Truth and love must never be divided. They are the twin pillars of the church.
 - Live in the truth. Love in the truth.