

# Route 66

## 2 John: Truth & Love

Part 63 – September 4, 2011



John wrote his Gospel, the three epistles, and his Revelation, toward the end of the first century AD, when he was in his late 80s. Church leaders in the AD 100s say he lived his final years in Ephesus.

He likely worked with the seven churches listed in Revelation.



Ephesus, 450,000; Miami, 433,136

The Apostle of Love, as he's come to be known, walked *this* street when Ephesus had a larger population than Miami! Paul once wrote to a young Timothy when he was left to superintend the churches here. But they're all gone. John has outlived 'em all. And he'll be the only disciple to die of natural causes.

Because of persecution in the early church, John uses code words instead of names, so as not to put anyone at unnecessary risk.

The elder [code for *John*], to the chosen [code for *Christian*] lady [church] and her children [congregation] ... - 2 John 1a NIV

And now, dear lady [beloved church] ... - 2 John 5a NIV

The children [congregation] of your chosen [elect/Christian] sister [church] send their greetings. - 2 John 13 NIV

2nd John is the *shortest* book in the NT (only one chapter), but look how John ends it ...



I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete. - 2 John 12 NIV

I wonder what the "much to write to you" was. Well, we might *already* know! The letters aren't dated. 1st John was only put first because it's the longest of the three.

Some scholars speculate that 2nd John was written *first*, and that 1st John was written because John wasn't able to make that visit. 2nd John is a micro version of 1st John, emphasizing that *Jesus is God's Son*, who came in the flesh; and that those who *know truth show love*.

Let's read his greeting and the micro-theme on truth and love.

The elder, To the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in the truth – and not I only, but also all who know the truth – because of the truth, which lives in us and will be with us forever: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, will be with us in truth and love. [His greeting anticipates his two themes] It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us. And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love. – 2 John 1-6 NIV

He's urging us to "walk in love" because that's what it means to "walk in obedience" and to be "walking in the truth/Gospel". John does something creative to make a point about balancing truth and love. Count how many times he repeats the word "truth". Now guess how many times he repeats the word "love"? Five each.



There's a great balancing act with truth and love. And we each have a tendency to emphasize one over the other.

We've all experienced truth without love! Maybe it was a parent's ongoing blistering criticisms. Or classmates who gave you a hurtful label that stuck. Or a spouse who has listed your faults in frustration.

The *truthfulness* of their remarks doesn't make it better ... it makes it worse! Truth without love is awful! And *the* truth, without kindness, grace, and mercy is a wretched thing. In our culture, believers who take a stand are often accused of being narrow, bigoted, phobic, and intolerant ... two questions: Do you deserve the label? (Because, some certainly do!) And, how do you choose to respond?

We're called to honor the dignity of the free will God has given. John learned this lesson from the lips of Jesus, long before he came to be known as the "Apostle of Love".

[Jesus] sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" But Jesus turned and rebuked them, and they went to another village. – Luke 9:52-56 NIV

John had a slightly different nickname back then.

These are the twelve [Jesus] appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means Sons of Thunder) ... – Mark 3:17 NIV



The Temple of Domitian, 81-96 AD

That's *code* for hotheaded and impulsive. Truth un-tempered by love. The way we treat others says a whole lot about who we think God is, and how we believe (deep down) he treats *us*.

There were many Greco Roman temples in Ephesus. And the concept of a *loving God* was foreign. *Their* gods were created in the image of man.



Here's a small sampling of who/what they were worshipping: Ares a.k.a. Mars was characterized by uncontrollable passion, aggression, ferociousness and blind violence ... he had a temper. He spread death and terror to everyone, and even killed one of the gods (Alirathios, Poseidon's son) for raping his daughter (Alcippe). He committed adultery with Aphrodite and was trapped and punished by her husband (Hephaestus).



Ares' mother, Hera a.k.a. Juno (queen of the gods) committed incest with her brother, Zeus. Funny story about that ... Zeus turned himself into a cuckoo on a rainy day, and tricked her into cuddling him.

They had some kids but Hera tossed (Hephaestus) her "ugly" baby, into the sea (but he survived and became the deceived husband who punished Ares).



Hera's father, Cronus a.k.a. Saturn was a different sort. He ate his sons for fear of losing his power to them. But, Zeus' mom (Rhea) hid him in a cave on Crete ("t'iz the "pirates" island from "Titus"). Zeus a.k.a. Jupiter dethroned Cronus and made him vomit out his brothers. They defeated the Titans, and the chronically unfaithful husband, Zeus/Jupiter became the head of the Greco Roman gods.



Zeus was known as the "god of thunder" and "thunder holder", and was often depicted with a raised thunder-bolt, ready to cast down "fire from the sky" against his enemies.

Jesus chose the name, "Son of Thunder" to playfully remind John which god he was reflecting, by his actions, as his father. Plus, this is a *great* example of balancing truth with love! How many times did old John walk past a temple to Zeus and chuckle?

As John the "beloved" internalized the intense and overwhelming love Jesus had for him, and as it became an emotional reality, John naturally imitated that love and made it his own. And he went from hot-headed disciple to tender-hearted Apostle.

When they had testified and proclaimed the word of the Lord, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages. - Acts 8:25 NIV

We all have to choose which father we're going to reflect.

But, there's a flip side to balancing truth and love, and this gets to the heart of John's second "micro-theme". John coined the term 'antichrist' to refer believers who reject Jesus' humanity, deity, or authority. And now he warns the *Chosen Lady* that these deceivers are on the prowl with their "insights".

Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work. - 2 John 7-11 NIV

He's not negating everything he just said about love. Wouldn't be much of a ministry if we shut out all the sinners! When he says "welcomes", he's speaking of an endorsing support of deceit, which isn't truth *without* love, but love *without* truth! It's an enabling compassion that sacrifices THE truth.

John wants us to discern the deception (which requires *knowing* the Word) and respond in love that's balanced with *truth*. Christ-like love is firm with truth, because that's what people *really* need. If you *truly* love someone, you try to steer them from destruction, even when it requires loving confrontation.

If you believe something is vital to their eternal welfare, the *highest* expression of love is to inform them in a gracious, compassionate, understanding, patient way. We tend to abandon truth for fear of rejection, until we get good and mad, then temper overwhelms fear and we sacrifice love!



Oh, and don't forget the *trapdoor* we use to welcome deceivers into our homes to tempt us to compromise obedience, distract us from our purpose, and bombard us with false values ... the TV! Now don't go home and say, "Pastor said the TV's the devil!" It's not ... that *remote's* the devil! Does it *give* control or *take* control? The next time you're hypnotically flipping through the channels, just consider whether you're prowling it, or it's prowling you!

Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work. - 2 John 11 NIV

We can be self-controlled or remote controlled. I'm just having fun, now! I don't know if you noticed, but we've read *every* verse in 2nd John. Some more than once. So, I'll close by reading an even further condensed version:

Truth, love. Truth, love. Truth, love. Truth, love. Truth, love. - 2 John condensed