

Introduction

I'd like to begin by playing a little game. I'll say a word and you tell me what goes together with it. Peanut butter – jelly. Hammer – nails. Salt – pepper. Shoes – socks. Pork – beans. Love – marriage. Horse – carriage. And finally truth – love. Those last two things may surprise you. Many people think that truth and love are mutually exclusive, that they don't go together. But they do just as love and marriage and a horse and carriage do. The Book of 2 John teaches us just that, they go together, and how they do.

The Exclusiveness of Truth

In the first century world of John, the spreading of the gospel or the false gospels that rose from it depended on the hospitality of individuals. There was no commercial lodging to speak of, which required that traveling teachers be housed in personal homes. The unavailability of such housing greatly hindered the spreading of their gospels.

Consequently, it was common for teachers of false gospels to ask Christians for hospitality, which put them on the spot. On the one hand, giving them food or lodging seemed to compromise truth because it assisted in the dissemination of error. On the other hand, denying them that seemed to compromise love because it turned away those in material need. So, should they show or not show hospitality to false teachers? John wrote this letter specifically to answer that question of theirs.

Let's start with the word "**truth**," which he uses five times in the first four verses. We all know what truth is. It's what is real or so.

Verse 7 reveals the subject matter of the truth that concerns John. It's what is so about Jesus and His gospel. That subject matter is what we call "**the fundamentals of the faith**." Those fundamentals are the basic tenets of the Christianity. God created the universe out of nothing. Jesus is the Second Person of God. The Bible is the inspired, inerrant, and authoritative word of God. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus died on the cross for the sins of everyone. Jesus rose from the dead. Jesus is coming back again. Those fundamentals of the faith and many others are the truth to which John refers in his second letter.

He focuses on one of those fundamentals in verses 7-9. It's that God, in the person of Jesus, came to earth in the flesh, as a man.

But some in John's day, called pre-Gnostics, believed and taught something contrary to that. It was that all matter, including the human body, is evil. Jesus, therefore, was a phantom spirit whose body wasn't real. It was only an illusion instead.

Now, notice what John calls those who believed and taught that. They were "**deceivers,**" verse 7, who had "**gone too far,**" verse 9. The Free Dictionary defines "**deceive**" this way, "**to cause to believe what is not true.**" Follow John's reasoning here. The proposition that God, in the person of Jesus, came to earth in the flesh is true. The proposition that the body of Jesus wasn't real but an illusion contradicts what is true. That proposition, therefore, must be untrue or false.

Verses 7-9 imply a vital insight about the nature of truth. There's a logical exclusiveness built into it. If something is true, that by itself excludes the truth of anything that is contrary or contradictory to it. What is contrary or contradictory to what is true must be false. Truth is exclusive in other words. All of us recognize this exclusiveness of truth in our thinking and acting. If the proposition, "**My car is silver**" is true, then the proposition, "**My car is black**" is necessarily false. There's no doubt about it. Truth, by its very nature, is exclusive.

Religious Pluralism

What I've said about the exclusiveness of truth applies to every context – including the religious. But it's precisely there that our culture, for the most part, denies or opposes it. Few things antagonize most people more than the claim that religious truth is exclusive. They think that claim is downright un-American and abhor anyone who believes or makes it. They do so because they're adherents of what is called

“religious pluralism.” Religious pluralism in America exists in various forms, two of the strongest of which I’d like to briefly explain.

One form contends that all religious beliefs are equally true. A YSU student once told me that Christianity and Islam are equally **“valid”** to quote him. I then pointed out what Christians believe, Jesus suffered and died for our sins, and what Muslims believe, He didn’t suffer and die but was translated to heaven. **“Are you saying that those beliefs are equally valid?”** I asked. **“Yes, they are,”** he replied

Another form of religious pluralism maintains that all religions **“come out at the same place.”** That means all religions equally please God and equally impact our earthly and eternal destinies. Christianity, for instance, doesn’t make our persons and lives any better or worse than Islam or Shintoism do – and vice versa. Oprah Winfrey seems to hold that view. She said: **“There couldn’t possibly be just one way (to God). I’m a free thinking Christian who believes in my way, but I don’t believe it’s the only way, with 6 billion people on the planet.”** Several years ago, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life surveyed 35,000 adults with regard to their religious beliefs. The results were shattering. 70% of Americans with a religious affiliation and 57% who attend evangelical churches like ours believe that many religions can lead to heaven. Oprah and they illustrate a strong form of religious pluralism. All religions achieve the same earthly and eternal results.

Religious pluralism rules the day in our culture. The majority of Americans are religious pluralists of one kind or another.

Christian Exclusivism

But we, as Bible believing followers of Jesus, aren’t. We reject religious pluralism. We embrace Christian exclusivism. We know and believe that all the principles and propositions that the Bible reveals are true, which means any principles or propositions contrary or contradictory to them are false. There are no exceptions to that. That is Christian exclusivism and it debunks religious pluralism for the nonsense it is.

First, all religious beliefs are not equally true as many pluralists contend they are. Any religious beliefs contrary or contradictory to the Bible's are patently false.

Second, all religions don't come out at the same place, as Oprah and other pluralists maintain they do. Truth always favors good and falsehood evil. Christianity, in that regard, is wholly true. All other religions are largely false. Consequently, we're far better off being Christians than we are being Muslims and Shintoists for example.

It's clear then. Christian exclusivism is right. Religious pluralism is wrong. And apologist R.C. Sproul explains what that implies: **"If all religions are equally good, then one stands out as terribly bad, and that is Christianity, because Christianity has no time for pluralism. It sees only one way."** He's right. Followers of Jesus have no time for pluralism. We see only one way, the Bible's.

That is Christian exclusivism and, as John reveals in his second letter, it requires two things of us.

Intolerance

One of those is intolerance.

Let's go back to the dilemma that John's readers faced. Should they show or not show hospitality to false teachers? John answers that in verses 10. They should not show it. He goes on to explain why in verse 11. Christians giving food or lodging to false teachers makes them their partners. They are, therefore, as guilty of evil, disseminating error, as those teachers are. So, they must deny not grant hospitality to them.

Verses 10-11, I know, trouble some Christians. One, for instance, said **"John's being intolerant here."** To which I replied, **"You're right. He is. And we should be too."** The Bible nowhere calls us to be tolerant of promoters and practitioners of falsehood. It calls us in verses like 10-11 to inform and oppose them. The fundamentals of the faith are non-negotiable and beyond compromise, and we need to speak and act as if they are. We don't negotiate or compromise when it comes

to them. We stand firm and confront instead.

Chuck Colson was the featured speaker at a luncheon for a group of powerful business and political leaders. Somewhere in his speech, he used the term **“total depravity”** to describe the human condition. Several men, in the question and answer session that followed, directed their comments to that. One said: **“You don’t really believe we are sinners do you? I mean, you’re too sophisticated to be one of the hell fire and brimstone types.”** Another immediately added, **“Intelligent people don’t go for that back-country preacher stuff.”** Colson replied that all human beings, including them, are desperately sinful and ugly inside. At that point, the leader of the luncheon himself weighed in and said: **“I’m a good person and have been all my life. I go to church and I get exhausted from doing good works.”** With that, everyone in the room grew quiet, fixed their eyes on Colson, and listened to his reply: **“If you believe that Mr. Abercrombie – and I hate to say this, for you certainly won’t invite me back – you are, for all of your good works, further away from the kingdom than the people I work with in prison who are aware of their own sins. In fact, gentlemen, if you think about it, we are really more like Adolph Hitler than like Jesus Christ.”** What followed was an awkward silence, which someone finally eased by changing the subject.

Colson’s response is a model for us all. We never negotiate or compromise the fundamentals of the faith. We don’t tolerate promoters and practitioners of falsehood. We confront them with truth instead.

Love

Christian exclusivism requires a second thing of us. It’s love.

Notice John’s coupling of truth with love in verses 3. We see that same thing in verses 3 and 6 of his third letter. We know from these verses that truth and love are necessary partners. They teach us that we are to love in truth and to hold the truth in love. Love grows soft if not strengthened by truth. Truth grows hard if not softened by love. In the

end, truth and love go together as surely as love and marriage and a horse and carriage do.

The implication is profound. You and I must be intolerant and loving at the same time. Almost all critics of Christianity don't grasp that we can be. It's a fact that some intolerant Christians are arrogant and unloving. It's also a fact that they don't have to be and when they are, it isn't the conviction that they're right that makes them that. It's something else instead. Know this and don't ever forget it. It isn't arrogant and unloving merely to believe, speak, and act as if we're right about something and others are wrong. In most contexts in fact, it's the loving thing to do. We're benefitting people by calling their attention to their errors and confronting them with the truth.

Let's go back to Chuck Colson's confrontation with the men at the luncheon. It was the loving thing to do because they desperately needed to hear what he said. After the luncheon ended, in fact, its leader, Mr. Abercrombie, drew him aside and asked him to explain in more detail what he had said. After he did, Mr. Abercrombie, that afternoon, decided to follow Jesus.

Colson was intolerant with love – and we must be too. That means we're appropriately modest and non-dogmatic about our own views. It also means that we respect the worth of promoters and practitioners of falsehood. Simply put, we see them as our neighbors and love them as we do ourselves. We desire their well-being and joy and confront them with the truth in order to achieve it.

Conclusion

Acclaimed apologist Josh McDowell sums it up well and I quote him in closing: **"I am not called in the Bible to be tolerant. I am not. I refuse to be tolerant. I think it demeans people. I am not called to tolerate people; I am called to love them."** He's absolutely right. So, let's do it. Let's marry truth and love in our lives. Let's hold the truth in love and love in truth.