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Wearing the Dust of the Savior

Postcards from John, Part 3

2 John 4

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

Truth matters. God is the ultimate truth revealer; however, since Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, there has been a battle against truth. Cultures over time have sought to change truth to fit their agendas and appetites, yet the truth of God remains the steadfast and trustworthy.

Discussion Points:

G.K. Chesterton's quote, "Fallacies do not cease to be fallacies because they become fashions", seems relevant to today's current culture.

- When and in what situations does it become difficult to separate fallacies and lies from the truth in your life?
- What are some ways to combat the deceptions of spiritual fallacies?
- Though Christ lived several thousand years ago, how is His life and truth relevant today, even in a culture hostile to the Gospel?

In his letter to this unnamed mother, the Apostle John makes mention of his gladness over her faithful children. How encouraging it must have been for her to read the words that her children were walking in the truth.

- In what ways does today's culture challenge a child's walk in the truth?
- How can parents help prepare their children to fight the lies, deception, and perversions of the truth the world constantly tempts them to follow?
- Why is it important as a parent / leader / church member to walk in the truth?

Discussion Guide Cont.

Mark 8:36 records Jesus' words: "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?"

- How does this quote from Jesus correlate with living and walking in the truth?
- In what ways does this verse imply the nature of choice in deciding how to live your life? How would that play into walking in truth?
- Who are examples of those walking in the truth in your own life? Why are they good examples to imitate?

Gospel Connection:

Truth is absolute and it matters. God has revealed His truth through His Word and the person of His Son. Walking in this truth begins with a belief about who Christ is and giving Him lordship over your life. Thus begins the opportunity to live a life walking in the truth.

Practical implications:

Think: Am I currently walking so closely to my Teacher that I am covered in His dust?

Pray: Praise Him for allowing us to know truth and to walk in it. Ask God to open your eyes to ways that you may better live a life of truth.

Do: Seek His truth and walk in it

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Several news items caught my attention this week – I don't normally take time to address the latest news, but these news items serve as an introduction to where we'll be heading in a moment.

One news item was about a corporation located in Norway which is now giving human parents of a newly born pet – a kitten or a puppy or whatever – they are now giving the human “parents” (quote) paternity leave.

Employees are given paid leave to look after their new born pet to allow for – quote – bonding time, which is so important, along with three days to focus on taking care of the baby animal.

I couldn't help but wonder what that company is going to do when one of their employees gets the bright idea to get a dozen female cats and dogs . . . and start claiming with every new litter three more days of paternity leave.

And I also couldn't help but think that if I worked for that company, I might finally change my mind and go out and get . . . another dog.

Another more serious news item was related to the ruling in a New York courtroom which ruled that an unborn baby can be aborted up to the very last moment before being birthed.

Just in case there might be any doubt that this was related to the health risk of the mother, the Mayor of New York made a big splash by saying – and I quote – “With the signing of this bill, we are sending a clear message that women in New York will always have the fundamental right to control their own body.”ⁱ

What's missing of course is any mention of the body of the unborn child.

But ignore that . . . stay focused on the message – a woman's body is her body.

Beloved . . . can you discern the subtle lie in that? Nobody's body belongs to them - your body belongs to God. You steward the body He designed for you, and you're responsible for what you do with it – but you don't own the right to your body – God does.

In fact, all of us will stand eventually before God and for all who've denied Him, it will be the horrifying discovery of the reality that He not only created their bodies, but, in His Sovereign authority, He will determine where their bodies will live forever.

Listen, in every generation and in every culture and at every level, there is a war taking place . . . from Satan's first lie to Eve in the Garden, it's been an all-out war on truth.

The strategy of Satan, by the way, isn't a brazen assault on truth, but a patient erosion where he tweaks the truth and adapts the truth and changes the vocabulary of the truth until what is believed as truth is really not true at all.

In fact, if the laws of your country and the majority opinion of your generation determines something to be true – whether it's that animals should have the same rights as humans, marriage can mean whatever you want it to mean, abortion is the right of the mother, or truth can be whatever you sincerely believe it to be . . .

. . . and if that's what most people follow . . . it has to be obvious that so many people cannot be wrong.

One hundred years ago, G. K. Chesterton famously responded to that kind of relativism when he wrote, fallacies do not cease to be fallacies because they become fashions. (G. K. Chesterton)

You might come to the conclusion that since we're surrounded by so many fashionable fallacies now, this would be a terrible time to

have a family or to raise children or to be a Christian.

No, this is the best time to demonstrate what marriage looks like, and how valuable life is, and what truth and love really look like.

Now the Apostle John is writing a mother of several children – in the bleakest of historical times. We’re not told how many – but he wants to warn her of false teachers that were traveling around in her neck of the woods. But before that warning, he sends her several words of encouragement.

Turn back to that first century postcard – called Second John – where we’ve begun exploring what God also intended to arrive in your mailbox, and mine.

We have determined that this was a private, personal correspondence to an older mother. John has graciously affirmed her as a faithful woman to her Lord – he has communicated his love to her and to her children – he has reminded her of unchanging gifts that she’s been given by the Lord – grace, mercy and truth.

He has one more personal comment to make; in fact, some New Testament scholars believe that this was what caused John to sit down and dash off this brief letter.

Let’s explore together his next statement to her . . . it’s found in **2 John, verse 4**:

I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth, just as we have received commandment to do from the Father. (2 John 4)

This is the fifth time John has written the word **truth** in this note. John was nicknamed by the early church, the Apostle of Love; he could just as easily been nicknamed the Apostle of Truth.

In fact, in his first sentence – verses 1 to 3 – he wrote the word **truth** four times – four times in one sentence. If you wrote the same word four times in one sentence your teacher would probably make you stay after school.

Is John getting so old he’s repeating himself? No...he’s emphasizing truth – because

a little later on he’s going to describe the danger of error.

You see, to the Apostle John, truth wasn’t a matter of public opinion – especially as it related to what God has revealed.

And don’t think for a moment that John had it any easier back then to deliver the truth or stand for the truth or define the truth than you do today. The concept of truth was as much like Jell-O then as it is today.

Just a few decades before John wrote this notecard, a politician stood face to face with Jesus before condemning Him to die.

Jesus was responding to Pilate, informing Pilate that He had ***come into the world to testify to the truth and everyone who is of the truth listens to Me . . . and Pilate scoffed at the certainty of Christ’s words and retorted back to the Lord, What is truth? (John 18:37-38)***

C’mon . . . don’t give me some that.

The word for truth (aletheia/αληθεια) that Jesus used and John uses here in this note means everything to us.

Gerhard Kittle defines truth by giving a catalogue of the many facets of this word through the Greek world and into the New Testament world of inspired scripture.

Truth:

- refers to something upon which you can rely – truth is then something reliable – it is something that’s trustworthy;
- truth is honesty in what you’re saying or teaching;
- truth is used for reality; truth is the real state of affairs;
- Even Plato nailed it when he wrote that truth is “genuineness – that which truly is.”ⁱⁱ
- So, when Jesus calls the record of scripture sanctifying truth (**John 17:7**);
- when He delivers moral standards (**Matthew 6**);
- when He warns of eternal judgment to come (**Matthew 25**);

- when He reveals to us the way to forgiveness and eternal life (*John 14:6*);

He's giving us the real state of affairs – He's giving us the honest, genuine, trustworthy, reality of that which truly is.

And by the way, even the most self-proclaimed open minded unbeliever believes in truth when he gets his refund check from the IRS . . . it better not be off by even one dollar!

If you run a red light and smash into his car at the intersection because you're late for church – he doesn't care that you were in a hurry or that you were distracted or that you've never liked the color red. There is a law that is absolute . . . and he'll make sure you pay for the damages.

Last Lord's Day I made a reference to hoping the Patriots would lose the football game that afternoon to the Kansas City Chiefs . . . I added, if God wills it. Evidently it wasn't the will of God because the Patriots won in overtime . . . sometimes I just don't understand the will of God.

For those of you who were watching the game, as the clock ticked down and everyone was on the edge of their seat, there were several penalties called by the referees in those closing minutes that allowed the Patriots to keep the ball.

The next day the newspapers and blogs and radio talk shows were filled with comments and quotes by both sides. As you would expect, for the losing team the refs got so many calls wrong . . . they were wrong . . . they were tragically wrong.

But for the winning team, in fact, in the words of the owner of the Patriots, and I quote, "The refs got every call right." They got it right.

What are we talking about here? We're talking about right and wrong . . . truth and error . . . even in a game – even in *a game* – it matters.

A couple days ago I received in the mail a card from one of the men in our church who is a big Patriots fan. I opened the envelope and it was a sympathy card that read, "I am sorry for your loss." I am sorry for your loss.

He's not sorry . . . in fact, he's visiting other churches today.

Okay, now that we've addressed the reality of truth, the basic meaning of truth . . . the emphasis of John the Apostle on the truth, it would be easy to skip on to the next verse and miss the heartbeat of this 95-year-old elder/shepherd.

Let's not move so fast. John is not just writing a brief, powerful dissertation on truth . . . he's writing a godly mother who has raised several children.

Can you imagine what it meant for her read John's own hand here:

I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth, just as we have received commandment to do from the Father. (2 John 4)

Let's not miss some significant truths that can be drawn from verse 4 . . .

First, this statement reveals the longing of a godly mother.

John makes no reference in this letter to this woman's husband. The children are older – John doesn't use the normal words for infants or for younger children such as *brephos* or *paidea*.

There are enough clues here for us to be assume that this faithful follower of Christ was more than likely a widow – and we don't even know for how long; what we do know is that she is a single mother of grown children. In fact, some of them may still be growing up.

And John writes, ***I was very glad to find some of your children*** – and the verb here, to find, is *heureka/ευρηκα*) – which gives us our English word, *eureka*.

It's a verb that symbolizes a *surprising discovery*.ⁱⁱⁱ

John doesn't mean that he was surprised to find out they were walking in the truth; what he means is that he was surprised to run into them – it was an unplanned, joyful encounter.

John doesn't tell us how or where he met up with her children – he just knew it would thrill her heart to hear it directly from him.^{iv}

So he takes the time to sit down and write, essentially, "Dear Madam, some of your

children I recently encountered are embracing everything about the truth that you hoped and prayed they would . . . I just wanted to tell you how glad I was to see that . . . and I knew it would lift your spirit to hear this directly from me.”

Second, this statement reveals the goal of godly parents.

Would you notice that John did *not* write,

- I was so glad to learn that they graduated with honors;
- I was happy to learn that they are successful in business;
- I was thrilled to learn that they are married and have a caravan of children;
- I was happy to learn they are healthy;
- I was thrilled to learn they hold offices in the church and in the community;
- I was happy to learn that they have money set aside to care for you in your older years.

All of that might make parents happy, but all of that is incidental – it’s gravy – to this key discovery . . . I was glad to discover - it was a eureka moment for me to learn - that they are walking according to the truth.

Ask the average parent on the street and even in the average church – how are your kids doing? And you’ll get an exposé on everything from schooling to making the soccer team to getting into that college to career choices.

Those are good things . . . but what does it matter if you have everything good that you can imagine . . . and lose your own soul? (**Mark 8:36**).

John effectively says, “Here’s what gets me off my seat with excitement – man, this was a eureka moment for me – I found out that your children are walking with God.”

Notice here, walking in truth. Not just saying they believe the truth, not just checking off the theological boxes of the truth – they are walking. This refers to lifestyle – they’re not just believing, they are behaving according to the truth.

There’s an old saying recorded in the Mishna, a commentary on Jewish tradition and

life; it was a common expression referring to students carefully following their teacher – disciples following so closely along with their mentor that they were – and I quote – “covered with his dust”.

In other words, they walked so close to their master teacher that they literally wore the dust kicked up by his sandals.^v

That’s a great way to understand this phrase – we’re walking so close to the Savior that we’re wearing his truth all over ourselves . . . as if it were dust kicked up by His sovereign feet.

There’s something else here I want to point out.

Third, this statement reveals the balance of a godly shepherd.

John’s words here not only reveal the longing of every godly mother and the goal of every godly parent; it reveals the balance of this godly shepherd.

Notice, John doesn’t write: I wasn’t surprised at all to discover your children walking in the truth – that didn’t surprise me at all. You’ve been faithful to Christ . . . you had motherhood buttoned down.

John doesn’t suggest in any way to this faithful mother that he expected it, or that she guaranteed it. There’s not a hint in this letter to her that she, of all people, had the secret to parenting success . . .

you were the guest lecturer on the Bible study circuit;

you bought the right books . . .

you followed the right advice . . .

you imitated the right families . . .

you kept the right schedule;

you even homeschooled them – that was the secret;

or, you stayed engaged with them while they attended a Christian school;

or, you prepared them as they stood for the truth in that public school setting . . .

whatever it was, whatever you did

Ma’am was the right thing for everybody and that was the ticket to success.

John does not write here, “I’m not surprised at all that your children turned out to become committed Christians . . . you did it right.”

Oh no . . . this old elder had lived long enough to write in his first letter about people who seemed committed to the gospel, but then turned away from Christ. John would write in *1 John 2 . . . they were among us, but then they went out from us revealing they really were not of us.*

John had been serving the Lord long enough to see church leaders who knew better grow proud or greedy and stray from the truth (*2 John 3*).

Somewhere along the way, the dust of their teacher got brushed off . . . and eventually their lives wore no resemblance at all to the Savior.

John understood the miracle of regeneration which is in the hand of God alone. With wise balance, John doesn’t imply that these children were walking in the truth because she was. He simply encourages her by telling her they were.

Maybe you’ve been a parent long enough to learn that you never stop praying . . . like Job of old who was still interceding for his grown and married children.

And about the time you think you can take a breath, you start praying about those grandchildren . . . and great-grandchildren.

I was talking to one of the men in our church family – he and his wife have several great-grandchildren. I asked him a couple of weeks ago, “Listen, I know the thrill of having grandchildren . . . but what’s it like having great-grandchildren?” He said, “It’s great, but the grandparents keep getting in the way.”

One more observation:

Fourth, this statement reveals the grace of a godly leader.

You can insert here for leader, the words, godly friend or co-worker or godly church member.

At this point John could have pointed his finger or spoken with the condescending air of

an apostle who had lived a faithful life . . . now in his late 90’s, he had the platform.

But notice his gracious choice of words . . . he doesn’t pour undue credit on her for the children who were walking with God; and likewise, he doesn’t pour on blame because some of them aren’t walking with God.

Notice, John simply writes, *I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth.*

The word translated *some* is italicized because it’s supplied by the translators to translate this preposition.

Some would argue that John is writing that he met some of her children and was glad that they were walking in the truth.^{vi}

If that’s what he meant, he could have written it more definitively and settled any confusion. Even if he’d only met up with some of them, he would have asked about the rest of them. So why make any distinction?

The truth is, John obviously knows all about this family – in fact, he knew their aunt and their cousins – in *verse 13* John relays back to this godly mother greetings from her nieces and nephews.

John knew this family.

What John is doing here is graciously encouraging her, while at the same time using gracious discretion by implying that he’s also aware of an underlying heartache – an undercurrent of longing and praying. He uses the words *“some of your children”* to just kindly let her know, “Look, I was given an update when I bumped into some of your kids who are walking with the Lord” . . . as if to say without saying it, “I’m praying for all of your children, and listen, I’m cheering you on as well.”

That’s grace.

I imagine that at this point in the letter, John stops writing for a moment and prays for those wayward children . . . perhaps grandchildren as well.

And I imagine that after reading this sentence, this mother stops reading at this same spot too . . . her eyes mist over with tears . . .

joyful tears that some of her children met John and their testimony of walking with the Lord made an impact of joy on the aged apostle.

And then . . . tearing up again . . . whispering the names of the other children, once again in prayer.

For what?

For success? Health? Good jobs? Nice homes?

No . . . that all of her children will walk so close to the Savior that they will wear the dust from walking in His presence.

This is what you pray for me . . . this is what I pray for you.

Listen, a 95 year old elder isn't going to mess around. This is what matters . . . this is the only way to live.

Because this *is* the truth.

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i Online News Source post 1/25/2019

ii Condensed from Gerhard Kittle & Gerhard Friedrich, editors, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume (Eerdmans, 1985), p. 39; Condensed from Gerhard Kittle & Geoffrey W. Bromiley, editors, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Volume I (Eerdmans, 1964), p. 240-244

iii Gerhard Kittle & Geoffrey W. Bromiley, editors, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Volume II (Eerdmans, 1964), p. 769

iv D. Edmond Hiebert, The Epistles of John (BJU Press, 1991), p. 297

v Adapted from the Mishna, 1:4

vi Hiebert, p. 297