

# How to live in a post-truth world

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[0:00] And let's pray and ask God for his help. Father, I just pray now that as our Elder Edward already prayed,!

that we would indeed not just receive your word, but we would internalize your truth. So Lord, as we come before you now, please humble ourselves. Please help us to be ready to hear what you have to say to us by your spirit.

And Lord, may you be pleased, Lord, to achieve your purpose through what you say. We pray all this in the name of Christ. Amen.

I wonder if you remember what the Oxford Dictionary Word of the Year for 2016 was. It was the word post-truth.

That was just a decade ago. And yet it already feels like we've lived in an entire era since then. Why did that word suddenly become popular?

[1:02] Because it seems to name something about how our world has shifted in the 2010s. Let me just mention three ways I think that has happened. First, technologically.

We now live in an age where anyone can publish anything online. There are no gatekeepers. No one to verify the stuff you say is true before they circulate on the internet.

And furthermore, we now live in algorithm-shaped worlds. First, our social media feeds are curated. Not so much to feed our souls with truth, but to confirm our biases, to stoke outrage, to blur the line between what is real and what's fabricated.

Then second, institutionally. In a more innocent world, we used to have pillars of truth we trusted. The nightly news, the university, even the government.

But nowadays, we are much more skeptical of all three. Political scandals, corporate corruption, even high-profile retractions in scientific publishing have all chipped away at our confidence that these institutions are reliable at telling us the truth.

[2:27] And third, culturally, truth has shifted from something objective to something expressive.

Thinkers like Carl Truman have shown us that we now live in an age where the inner psychological self defines reality. Authenticity matters more than accuracy.

And put that all together, and you get post-truth. But here's the irony. Despite all our talk of living in a post-truth world, people have never been more anxious about truth.

That's why people fact-check. That's why people install dashcams. That's even why some people in very secular countries have begun exploring religion again.

Because we all long to know the truth. To know what is real. So here's an interesting question for us to ask. If someone in Kuching walked into a church, maybe even our church, would they find truth?

[3:47] Not just confirmation of what they already believe. Not just a community that gives out good vibes. Not just performative actions that change nothing inside.

Could we be confident they'll encounter the truth with a capital T? That was also the question the writer of our passage today was asking.

You can see in verse 1, he's known as the elder. And he's most likely to be the apostle John. And he's worried the answer might be no.

You see, did you notice he names the problems his readers are facing in verse 7? I say this because many deceivers who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh have gone out into the world.

So John might not have used the word post-truth to describe his time, but he is concerned about very similar things. He's worried about those peddling fake news and giving people who come to church a deep fake Jesus.

[5:07] He names it as a danger. And so he writes this short but urgent letter to a church congregation he seems to know pretty well. That's what the lady chosen by God and to her children in verse 1 seems to be referring to.

Not so much an individual but a church and its members. And John makes clear that even in a post-truth world truth is not optional.

It is not private. It is not flexible. Rather it is something you number one know number two walk in and number three protect.

That is basically his three-point plan for living in a post-truth world today. So let's consider that plan and see how we can faithfully live as Christians.

Firstly know the truth. You might have noticed that John starts his letter by repeating one word in quick succession. He says it four times in three verses.

[6:23] Truth. So verse 1 to this lady and her children whom I love in the truth. Verse 1 again to all who know the truth.

Verse 2 because of the truth. And then end of verse 3 grace, mercy and so on be with us in truth. So John clearly wants us to stand for the truth.

But perhaps to us reading this letter today that doesn't sound as noble as it should. Because often whenever someone says oh we must stand for truth it sure sounds like someone is just trying to win.

Someone is being all rigid and inflexible. Someone is more concerned about being right than being loving. And that's because many of us have absorbed this popular cultural assumption.

Truth divides. Love unites. We've subconsciously internalized that the two are opposite to one another.

[7:36] And we better make sure love is not contaminated by truth. But did you notice how for John truth is not the enemy of love?

love? He doesn't say I love you even though we have this awkward truth stuff between us. Rather he says I love you in the truth.

So truth is not the enemy of love but the atmosphere in which love breathes. God is not the Or put another way this love John has for this church exists precisely because of the truth.

truth. How can that be? Because for Christians truth isn't simply about ideas. It's not just a body of knowledge.

Rather it is a person we've come to know. After all according to verse 3 truth has a name. Jesus Christ the Father's Son.

[8:51] Truth is the self-revelation of God in his Son. Because do you remember how Jesus described himself to his disciples in John's Gospel?

He said I am the way, the truth and the life. So Jesus isn't just claiming to deliver truthful messages.

He is saying he is the one who reveals reality itself. And what is that reality he has come to reveal?

He has come to reveal that at the heart of this universe stands the blazing eternal love of the Father.

You see when Jesus says I am the truth, what he's really saying is if you want to know what God is really like, look at me.

so let's look at what Jesus actually did. What do we see? We realize he didn't just arrive with a message about God.

[10:01] No, he touched lepers, ate with outcasts, and wept at the gravesite, and ultimately he walked deliberately towards a cross to die in our place, to bear all our sin, all to bring us home to the Father.

And in all of that, he was telling us this is the truth of what God is really like. And that brings us to a really important question.

Do you know this truth? You see, the Bible tells us that actually a post-truth world is nothing new. It has existed ever since Genesis 3, when the serpent told half-truths and untruths about God, and we all fell for his lies.

We told ourselves that we can be like God, we can replace God, we can live without God being at the center. And if you read the rest of the book of Genesis, you'll realize that all the features of a post-truth world are there, like spinning narratives, questioning motives, breaking trust, shifting blame, even playing the victim.

It has become part of our DNA. And only Jesus can reverse that, only Jesus can reprogram our DNA.

[11:40] Only he can undo the lie at the root of our hearts. For look at verse 3. Do you see what God gives us through Jesus?

He gives us grace, mercy, and peace. He gives us the relationship we don't deserve, he spares us the condemnation we do deserve, and he makes us whole again, helping to put back what is broken.

that's what the peace word is getting at. And all this, end of verse 3, comes wrapped in truth and love. Because in Jesus Christ, the two go together.

And it is him you must receive, if it is grace, mercy, and peace you want. So, do you know the truth? I'm not asking, have you been attending this church for a long time, or have you been baptized? I'm asking you, do you know this truth? And here's the thing, this truth has a specific shape.

[12:58] What I mean is this, I said earlier that truth is a person, but it also has specific content. In other words, you can't believe in just any Jesus.

You can't customize him to fit your preferences. The Jesus you trust must be the Jesus the Bible actually gives you. The one who took on flesh, who died on a real cross, who rose from a real tomb, who is Lord of all.

in fact, later on in verse 7, we'll discover John is so upset precisely because there were those who were trying to offer people a different Jesus to the one found in the Bible.

And so this should be what someone should encounter whenever they walk into our church. This should be the Jesus they'll meet. And we want that to be the case because look at verse 2.

If you have Jesus, you have the truth living in you and being with you forever. So in other words, if you have Jesus, you have all the resources you need to navigate a post-truth world.

[14:26] But here in church, what must we do if we want to make sure people really encounter truth?

Well, that's exactly where John goes next. So secondly, walk in the truth. Walk in the truth. Look at verse 4.

It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth just as the father commanded us. Now, notice what gives John joy. It's not simply that they know the truth.

It's not simply that they can define it. Rather, he rejoices that they are walking in it. Because for John, truth is not just something you merely agree with.

No, it is something that shapes the direction of your life. For if the truth lives in you, it cannot remain hidden. It has to be a path to be walked.

[15:31] But what does walking in the truth look like? Well, John says it's all about obeying a command God the Father has given us.

And what is that command? Well, end of verse 5, it is that we love one another. And in case we didn't get it the first time, he repeats himself at the end of verse 6.

Walk in love. And actually, if you look back earlier at verse 2, did you notice how all who know the truth are bonded in love with one another?

So to walk in the truth is to walk in love. And notice this is not a new command. Indeed, if you just flick back a page or two to 1 John 3 verse 23, which will also appear on the screen, you'll see that it pretty much says the same thing.

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 notice there is the truth component.

[16:47] We are to believe and receive Jesus as he comes to us. And then there is the love component. We are to love one another. Once again, the two go together.

But here is something important to understand. When John speaks about commands, he is not dragging us back under a heavy burden.

He says that this is the command we have had from the beginning. In other words, this is what life with Jesus has always looked like.

When you have encountered the love of the Father in Christ, when grace and mercy have become real to you, you begin to live differently.

You will love as he does. Now, you won't do it perfectly. In fact, there will be plenty of times you find this command to love one another hard to do.

[17:53] In fact, I think that is why John is reminding us of this command, even though in theory we all know this already. Because it's hard. It's hard, isn't it, when your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ sometimes rub you up the wrong way, when they say thoughtless things, when they forget you, when they take you for granted?

We all know people can be hard to love. I know that for a fact because I know who I am and I am sure there are times when I am hard to love.

Just ask my wife. And it is hard because loving one another isn't simply about endless affirmations of one another and saying how wonderful each of you must be.

No, because did you notice again in verse 6 how John defines love? It is to walk in obedience to Jesus' commands.

And he is simply echoing what Jesus himself said. And what that means is that sometimes the best way for me to love you is to call you to obey Jesus.

[19:13] because that is me helping you to love Jesus. And the best way for you to love me is to call me to obey Jesus because that is you helping me to love Jesus.

And that means sometimes there is need for correction, for admonition, for rebuke. and that can be hard. So here is the question for us.

Is the truth we claim to know visible in the way we walk? Would someone be able to see in our relationships, our speech, our habits, that the truth lives in us?

Because in a post-truth world, the most compelling apologetic isn't necessarily louder arguments. Rather, it is a community walking in truth-shape love.

So what does that look like for us here at KEC? I think it means at least three things. First, it means showing up.

[20:36] One of the quiet casualties of a post-truth world is that we've become increasingly isolated. We retreat into our curated feeds, our private WhatsApp groups, our carefully managed online personas.

But you cannot walk in love with people you are not present with. You cannot bear one another's burdens over a screen.

Walking in truth-shaped love requires the friction and the gift of actual presence, being here, being known, being available.

Indeed, that's what John himself seems to be getting at down in verse 12. Did you notice that he doesn't just want to write to them in paper and ink, but he wants to see them face-to-face?

And second, it means speaking truthfully to one another in love. John has already told us that real love sometimes means calling one another back to obedience.

[21:50] But let's be honest, that is the kind of love we find hardest to give and the hardest to receive. We would rather keep the peace. We would rather say nothing or just talk about trivial things.

But a community that never speaks hard truth to one another is not a loving community. It's just a polite one.

And politeness is not the same as love. Politeness keeps you at arm's length, but love draws you in even when it costs something.

And then third, it means being something the world around you cannot explain. Let's think about it. what holds this room, this hall together?

We all come from different backgrounds, different generations, different ethnicities, even different income levels. In any other context, many of us wouldn't even be in the same room.

[23:07] For the world forms communities around shared interests, shared demographics, shared politics, that's what holds them together. But when a watching, skeptical, post-truth world watches us, they should think,

wow, wait a minute, these people have diverse interests, diverse demographics, even diverse politics.

people loved people together. And the only answer they should land on is Jesus.

And the way we help them arrive at that answer is by showing love to people different from us. It is by walking in love to all the different varieties of people Jesus has bought with his very blood.

So the question is not just do you know the truth? It is, is the truth walking around in you?

people. But John doesn't stop there because remember what I said made John worried at the very beginning of this sermon? It is that this truth that makes our love real is constantly under attack.

[24:36] And if we want people who walk into church to encounter the real truth, then we must protect the truth. And that is exactly where John takes us next.

Because knowing the truth and walking in it means nothing if we just let it slip through our fingers. So thirdly, protect the truth.

You see, verse 7 tells us there are many deceivers. They deny that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. Now what does that mean? It is basically shorthand for all kinds of deviant teachings.

Ajaran sesak. So perhaps some were denying Jesus is truly human in some form or another. He is reduced simply to a moral idea or a model of enlightenment or a mediator of blessings, almost as if it doesn't really matter if he came in bodily form or not.

Perhaps some were denying Jesus really died on the cross in the flesh. The cross is just inspiration, not atonement.

[25:53] Perhaps some were denying that Jesus rose from the dead in the flesh, that he really is the living flesh and blood Jesus who really does make demands of us as our risen Lord and King.

Perhaps some were denying what Jesus thought in the flesh, what he said while he was here on earth. The point is whatever form their specific heresy takes, these people exist, even here in Kuching.

But why does it matter so much? Because it has devastating consequences. Just look at verse 9. 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. In other words, if you don't stick with the truth, if you don't stick with Jesus, then you lose God.

And when you lose God, you lose grace, mercy, and peace. In short, you lose everything. And that is why we must protect the truth because the stakes are too high.

[27:18] In fact, that's probably why John uses such strong language. Did you notice verse 7, how he doesn't pull any punches when he talks about these people? He calls them the deceiver and the antichrist.

Because these false teachers are walking in their father's footsteps. Not God, but the father of lies, the devil.

So, brothers and sisters, make it a priority to protect the truth. But how do we do that? Well, first of all, we must protect ourselves.

Verse 8, watch out that you do not lose what we have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. In other words, check that you are still walking in the truth, in and with Jesus.

Check that you are still following in his ways. And be careful. After all, did you notice how John describes these false teachers in verse 9?

[28:28] He says they are those who run ahead. In other words, they are seen as progressive. Their teaching is often attractive. Usually, they will invite you by saying, I am still learning all the old stuff you first learned in Sunday school.

Come, let me show you something deeper. Let me bring you to the next level. But John says, watch out that you do not lose all that you have worked for.

After all, haven't you been built up in the true faith? Haven't you been learning and loving and living in the truth? So don't let all that become undone by deceivers sneaking in and leading you astray.

Don't let the hard work of growing in the faith be destroyed by people who pretend to belong but really want to pull you away from Christ. Instead, stick with all that we've learned about Jesus in the Bible.

because here's the thing, we never outgrow him, we never move on from him, we never graduate from learning who he is and what he has done.

[29:43] Real spiritual growth doesn't mean leaving Jesus behind and moving on to something deeper because Jesus is the deeper thing.

Going further in the faith always means going further into him. Now, our home fellowship groups have just started on their new Bible study series and it is possible one or two of you might look at what we're studying and think, I already know all this.

Come on, give me something more advanced. But that instinct, however understandable, is precisely what John is warning against here.

don't be fooled by teachers who promise to take you to the next level if that next level means stepping away from the Jesus of the Bible.

That is not growth, that is drift. Better to stay humble than over confident. Keep asking the Holy Spirit if you are indeed walking in the truth in all areas of your life.

[30:53] sexuality. So, for example, maybe you say to God, you know, I'm pretty sure I'm completely orthodox on all matters of sexuality. I know what the Bible says about all of that and I'm confident I'm following it.

But then you can ask God, is there something else or somewhere else where I'm not in alignment with you? And the Holy Spirit could reply, oh, you know, it's great that you're walking with the Lord in the area of sexuality but what about greed and materialism?

Are you watching yourself in that area? Stay humble and God will guard you.

Then second of all, to protect the truth, we must not welcome false teachers. Look at verses 10 and 11. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them.

Anyone who welcomes them shares in their wicked work. Now, at first glance, these verses sound jarring, almost harsh, and they seem to be at odds with what we've already heard, the command to love one another.

[32:15] love. But actually, they form a vital part of that love. Let me explain. You see, the New Testament often calls us to practice hospitality.

In Hebrews 13, we are told not to neglect showing hospitality to strangers. So to have an instruction asking us not to show hospitality is especially striking.

John clearly thinks this situation is serious enough to warrant an exception to this general rule. But what exactly does he have in mind?

Does he mean that once we disagree with someone theologically, we cannot sit down and makan with them anymore? Not quite. Notice that verse 10 is specifically about those who do not bring this teaching.

in other words, his warning is not aimed at those who merely believe false things, but at those who actively teach them. And remember, John is writing to a church, not just an individual.

[33:25] So he has in mind a false teacher arriving at your congregation. And he says, don't receive such a person, don't give them a platform, don't support their ministry.

So how does that apply to our church? Well, I want to say first of all, here at BEMKEC, all are welcome to come and be with us on a Sunday.

But when it comes to those who are standing up here, preaching and teaching us, or leading us in prayer, when it comes to what books we might or might not sell or have in our library, when it comes to what songs we're going to sing together as a community, or when it comes to what conferences we'll recommend and advertise, we don't want to tolerate those who might deceive us.

In that sense, we have to draw lines. Because what we are really doing is simply following 2 John 10 to 11. We want to protect the truth.

But what if that guy is such a nice person? We might be tempted to say, surely it's fine, what about being loving? But here's the thing, welcoming such a person into your congregation is not loving.

[34:53] Not to your brothers and sisters whom you are exposing to dangerous teaching with serious consequences. And not even to the false teacher himself, because in welcoming him, you are failing to show him the error of his ways.

So protecting the truth is loving. The two are not intention. They never were. So as we finish, my friends, remember this, the world may be post-truth, but the church of Jesus Christ is always pro-truth.

Because we know the truth is not a weapon we wield, it is a person we love. And because we know that, we want to become a community of truth and love, as the fourth of our core convictions puts it. We want to be a community that holds out grace, mercy, and peace, because we hold out the truth. We want to make sure that whenever anyone walks through these doors, searching for truth in a post-truth world, we are ready to introduce them to Jesus.

So let's be that community of truth and love, so that, as 2 John 12 puts it, all who enter here may find their joy complete.

[36:30] God, let's pray. Father, we thank you for this little letter of 2 John, not a letter that we often hear in church, but we do pray that we take on board what John has to say to us.

Help us, Lord, indeed, to be people who know the Lord Jesus, the one who is the way, the truth, and the life. help us to never grow tired to know him more and more, to be hungry for the Jesus of the Bible, and not just a Jesus that doesn't really exist.

And will you help us to walk in the truth, walk in love, be obedient to your command, and help us to protect the truth, help us to be alert and discerning to any false teaching and false teachers who might come, so that people will not be deceived, but people can still be led to the one who gives us grace, mercy, and peace.

We pray all this in the name of Christ. Amen.