

The Combustion of the Right Combination

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Date: 15 November 2024

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[0 : 00] Lord, I know I'm a stranger here, and that's okay. We come under your family name.

Jesus, you have brought us into a fold. We're with legitimacy and full hearts. We can call God our Father.

We can live under his love and his acceptance and build our whole lives here.

Lord, be with us tonight in your word. Lord, some of my friends are tired. Some of my friends have more going on than I'm able to know about, but we pray by your Holy Spirit, you would be causing your word to rest on us and have its good way among us.

We ask that that would happen in a full measure because of your faithfulness. In Jesus' name, so be it. So, Sean's right.

[1 : 08] I want to talk about love and truth, and I see the graphic that you guys have prepared here. This would make a great tattoo. But there's a sub, and I'm not dissing the person that made this.

This is good. I want to talk this whole retreat, if this were kind of the roof over what we're doing, is the life and warmth of love and truth.

It's not just these two conceptually. It's the life and the warmth we draw by understanding how they work out in our hearts, how they work out in our convictions, and how they work out in community among us.

I love the little letters of 2 and 3 John. They're two of the smallest letters in the whole New Testament. But there is such a way about them.

And when we read from the Apostle John, we're going to pick up on the inevitable life and warmth that comes from love and truth.

[2 : 16] But I want to make some new friends. I don't have enough for everyone, but I have some illustrated scripture journals that go through John's letters. This person had like a reaction back here.

So I have to make sure that you get one. But who else would benefit from one of these? I'm going to do a little throwing.

I'm going to trust your dexterity here. Okay, I'm not going to just cherry up on this side. I'll make my way around. Oh yeah, I got you. There's still some more.

People are fear. I see that humility there. You're like, I want to get it in. All right, you ready? Oh, oh, that was there. That was a double. Okay, you're good.

What's up? You're trying to steal her blessing, man. I'm not charismatic. That would scare you. Oh, oh yeah, I see it.

[3 : 22] Let's do this. Oh, touchdown. Touchdown. How did I miss my guy? I wouldn't even be on without him. Thank you. I have four more.

I got you. Oh, I felt that. There you go. And here you go, sweetie. And I'm going to get my water and eventually we're going to get into the word here.

So, if you have a Bible, now you have a scripture journal. Turn to 2 John. All right.

So, a way of introduction for our first message, which is entitled, the combustion of the right combination.

I know you're not going to relate to this, but I just have to use the illustration. When I was young, I was kind of delinquent. Meaning, I was a latchkey kid. I had a lot of freedom and not a lot of money.

[4 : 29] So, I spent a lot of time at Taco Bell. There was no YouTube. There was no nothing else. But I like to collect free things.

And non-dairy creamer was free. I didn't even drink coffee. But the price is right. I'm sure there was some calcium involved. And then I would get free matches from, like, you know, the convenience store.

I don't know when and where I got it in my mind to combine the matches and the non-dairy powdered creamer. But somewhere in that magical 14-year-old mind of mine, I thought there must be a way.

Did you know that it's very combustible? I'll teach you how to do it as we go along. I didn't do it here. I mean, they don't even let you have coffee in here, so I won't try any pyrotechnics.

But non-dairy creamer and lit matches create quite the combustion. You're like, that's interesting. Some of you are much smarter than me. You're running through the science and the math.

[5 : 37] Just trust me for right now. But we're not talking about cremora and matches. We're talking about love and truth at this retreat.

And at times as Christians, we know that we're to have both. But we don't always know how they're meant to work together. There is a combustion that's not meant to just give a momentary flame. But a combustion that is actually what creates the warmth and dynamic that Jesus Christ intends for his people to share with one another.

And that's what we're going to look at. And not just look at it. We want to learn to own this. I believe that combining love and truth is the craft of all Christians.

We're called to know how to work these together to see the wonderful warmth that the combustion is meant to bring.

[6 : 42] With that said, let's read the first six verses of John, the second letter. 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. Because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever.

Forever, grace, mercy, and peace. Be with us from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son in truth and love.

I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth just as we were commanded by the Father. And now I ask you, dear lady, not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one you have from the beginning.

That we love one another. And this is love. That we walk according to his commandments. This is the commandment.

[7 : 56] Just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it. I look forward to unpacking this together.

But I think even upon a cursory reading, we can tell there is a sweetness and depth to John's writing here. This is John the Apostle.

So he is the human agent that the Holy Spirit used to write the Gospel of John. First, second, and third John. And the Revelation. And do you know, John is known as the Apostle of Love.

He uses the word love over 80 times in his collective writing. More than anyone else. But it may help us to know that this Apostle of Love, this older elder, and probably at this time, the last living Apostle, he didn't always start this way.

He had a brother named James. Do you know the nickname they were given in Mark's Gospel? The Sons of Thunder. It sounds exciting, but the Sons of Thunder actually in Aramaic means rage.

[9 : 11] And if you read Luke's Gospel, chapter 9, remember when Jesus was being rejected, do you know what James and John wanted to do? Well, they wanted to call down fire.

Can you imagine saying to Christ, can you call down fire to consume these people? John did not always start in a place of love, but a place of conviction.

A place of angst and energy. But there was something about walking with Jesus, and known as the one whom Jesus loved, that the love of Christ shaped this Apostle, sweetened him, changed the atmosphere of who he was, and then changed the atmosphere of what he creates.

And I believe a like work is what God wants to invest in us at this retreat, an internal warming of what's real and right, the gentle influence of Christ that changes us at our core, and then makes us effectual in our fellowship in a way that leaves people with him and not ourselves.

So if this can happen for John, we can take great hope. And it's no surprise to us then that John has almost a holy preoccupation with love and truth.

[10 : 39] It's throughout all his works, as we've mentioned, but tonight in this passage, we're going to consider this in two points. Our first point, which will cover the first three verses, is combine love with truth.

I think some of us can have a fear that if we combine truth with love, we will extinguish it, not ignite it. We can fear that the two have a subtle competition with one another.

That if I'm too loving, I'll compromise the truth. And if I'm too truthful, I won't be loving. But I would say the commitments are really meant to go together.

Now, with my opening illustration with that creamer, you would think if I put creamer on fire, it would put the fire out. And friends, we must realize biblically, love and truth are not in competition with one another.

They're in perfect tandem. Biblically, they are inseparable. To John, did you see what we read? They're inseparable to John. They're linked in a foundational way, and we can start to see the warmth of John already.

[12:00] How does he start his writing? The elder to the elect lady and her children. Very interesting line. Now, elder speaks both of John's age and his position of care.

He's a seasoned shepherd by this time. But the recipients, what's going on with the elect lady and her children? We don't talk that way.

And if you're familiar with John's writing, John's very influenced by Greek culture. He uses a lot of metaphor and imagery.

And what we have here is most likely a personification more than it is a person. He's speaking of the church with such affection. He's speaking to her as the elect lady and her children.

It can strike us odd, but it should more impact us to see the relational warmth of such a statement. Think about this.

[13:04] When you speak of the church, how do you speak of her? Never speak about her without the warmth that you should. The church is like an elect lady and all the saints in here, they are the children.

I love getting time with the Woo Girls at dinner. We had quite the time. We shared a pretty good cookie too. But I love that they call you guys all uncle and aunt.

Is that right? I guess unless you're new, that might be part of the membership process. I love that. That familial ethic.

And I almost left the retreat when I came in here because it was so evident you guys love one another. They almost thought these messages aren't needed. I'll give this back to Sean.

But I think the reminder is always helpful. If we ever see this as anything less than a warm family, we're not thinking or speaking of the church as we should.

[14:07] But the passage continues to go on. He says, whom I love in truth. All who know the truth because of the truth that abides in us.

There's so much love in this place because of what we share in common. Naturally, we have many differences. But what other place do you go to where everyone is collectively saying, I am here to worship Jesus Christ.

I acknowledge him as my king and my savior. You won't get that at Walmart. You won't get that at Barnes & Nobles. You won't get that in any other place. What we share in the truth is where our love comes from.

And so, we have to be clear about the truth. I don't want you to think that the truth needs love to warm it up. Truth is not cold by itself. Truth, biblically, is very warm.

I think of the beginning of this letter. Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, in truth and love.

[15:28] is there anything cold about grace or mercy or peace from the Father? That's all truth. See, it's not just like John is this warm apostle and he kind of warms up truth with love.

If we see truth rightly, truth already comes to us very warm, very alive, and we definitely see that in John's writing here.

And this also shouldn't surprise us because what does John refer to Jesus as in his gospel? The truth. Jesus himself says he's the truth.

Is Jesus cold? Aloof? No. Full of grace and truth. Friends, this is a warm reality and this, these are the ties that bind.

Any other heat is artificial. But if the warmth we have for one another we draw from Christ, that warmth will be real and ever with us.

[16:39] So let me ask you, what is your love and connection to other Christians based on? Season of life? Similar interests?

Interests? Or a savior like none of us could have imagined would bring us together? All right, that's, that's that.

There's, there's more to us that we need to see here. And it's not just that the truth is something beautiful and binding. It's something to be embodied. This leads us to our second point and these will cover the last three verses of our passage.

this point is to combine love with truth and obedience. And this is maybe the most important part that I think we'll get out of this tonight.

So something I didn't tell you about the Cremora, so if you go try this, again, that's on you, I make no disclaimers or anything like that. I've actually burned my eyebrows doing this. It's not just like you can take the matches and throw them on a pile of the non-dairy creamer.

[17 : 50] You actually have to oxygenate the non-dairy creamer. It has to have enough oxygen. So you have to drop it from on top, let it kind of mingle like a fine powder.

I know some of you are paying attention and you hold the match like underneath it away from you though because if you have big brows like this, you'll leave with no brows. And you do it like that and it works perfect.

And I think a lot of people have tried the love and truth thing but they don't realize something needs to be mixed in. That thing that needs to be mixed in for this to work, it's oxygen in the illustration. It's obedience when the Apostle John is talking to us. And now that might throw us the most. We're like, okay, you're telling me the truth is not cold, it's actually got its own warmth, but obedience, that's a hard sell.

Well, I'm happy to try to sell this. Obedience should be a very warm word and I would say from John's writing, a word we always connect to truth and love.

[18 : 55] Because it's not just that John had joy in them for their love. Read this with me. This is so great. Verse four, I rejoice greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth just as we were commanded by the Father.

What was John's joy in? Not just the truth. The truth lived out. Remember, John loves imagery and metaphor.

Walking was a metaphor we see elsewhere. Paul uses it in Scripture. So does our Lord. But John uses it here. He doesn't just rejoice in the children that they're children.

He rejoices that they're living out the truth. When you think of what makes you glad for the believers you're in fellowship with, is it their obedience to Jesus Christ that comes up among all the other things you love about them?

I think it certainly can and it ought to have a place in us. I've said for years, I don't think there is anything more beautiful in the whole world than healthy, mature, Christian disciples.

[20 : 23] I think in John's language, I don't think John thinks there's anything more beautiful than believers living out what they believe. I love what Psalm 16, 3 says.

As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones in whom is all my delight. Oh, friends, what do you praise to one another?

What do you encourage one another in? Because what you praise, you promote. Andrew and I, I'm going to call you out, Andrew. Both Andrew and I, we like some new balances.

And it's no lie, they're on both of our feet, so we're guilty as charged. We're recovering sneakerheads. We don't believe people fully under Jesus Christ can be under that kind of bondage, so we're seeking reformation together.

And I think God's given us grace, but I don't love my man because he's got some NBs on. I don't just love him because he smiles. I love the sincerity and sweetness of his faith.

[21 : 35] But if all I ever talk to Andrew about is new balances, what I'm praising, I'm promoting. And so when I'm fellowshiping with other believers, when I'm in communion with them, I don't want to just talk.

I want to make fire. I want to engender the things that matter most. Listen, how many lies are out there in the world about what it means to be a woman, what it means to be a man?

And you can read the little videos and get lost in the rabbit trails, and all of a sudden you have no more orientation of what matters. And then for a believer to strengthen your hand in God's grace in your life and to say, I love the way you are living out truth.

I love the way you are living out your faith in this trial. I love the way you're living your faith out in this blessing. Friends, we need that. Our relationships were meant to carry that kind of convoy to

bring the strength that we need.

Now, some of us may be thinking, well, if we only talk about Jesus, is this going to be real anymore? Like, I could say to Sean, nice flan. I mean, I do this kind of stuff you'll hear about when we get into 3 John.

[22 : 56] For tonight, it's like, well, can I ever just give someone a regular compliment? Can I ever say that's a nice coat or something else? Of course you can. But I don't think we need to fear that this kind of promotion of godly living is somehow less human, less warm, or less real than other things we could talk about.

I don't know about you, but when I came to faith in Jesus Christ, I learned a kingdom mystery. I was afraid that the more I conformed my life to Jesus Christ, the less I would be in touch with who I really am.

I thought I would lose myself. In fact, the scripture did call me to lose myself. But the paradox here is that in losing yourself in Christ, you really find yourself.

I am more truly human, more truly alive, more truly myself in Christ than I would be ever in my own identity or kingdom building.

And if we believe that fundamentally, we have no fear of this kind of holy promotion among one another. So, carrying on with this, this is where John increases his argument.

[24 : 18] Look at verses five and six with me. He says this. I'm going to bathe my eyes. I'm getting worse all the time. I lost my regular Bible this week.

I have my study Bible with a smaller print. I know you're like, you guys are not thinking about aging and needing bigger print Bibles, but your brother up here is, but I found where we're at. 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.

It just echoes 1 John. Even echoes the gospel. John is just, if you need to study anything in the Bible, read all of John's stuff in sequential order. It's amazing. That we love one another.

And this is love. This is a definition for us. 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.

This is love that we walk according to his commandments. This is such a paradigm shift. I will love you best when I obey Jesus most.

[25 : 42] I never even thought about this before I read this in John. This wasn't on my radar. But the apostle John by the Holy Spirit wants to get this truth embedded in us.

That the best, most loving thing I can do for the community, the best way I can love you is to keep the commandments of Jesus Christ.

The plural's important there. Let me read some verses here because this is beautiful. In John's gospel, Jesus is recorded saying this, John chapter 15, if you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love.

Just, just as I have kept my father's commandments and abide in his love. Jesus is not calling us to do anything he did not do himself here.

These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full. What I'm prescribing from the apostle of love is not legalism.

[27 : 01] It is not threat. This will not take you away from the heart of Christ or the gospel. This is what Jesus Christ did himself. Friends, and it will not take you away from life and joy.

There is fullness of joy and life here. He goes on in the first letter of John. He says this, for this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.

Oh, and his commandments are not burdensome. Did anything that Jesus teach, was it full of hate, regret, burden, deception?

No. These commandments are beautiful. They come from God's heart, his very nature. And remember, this is all familial.

Our Father wants to share his heart and likeness with us, not just in original creation, but in Christ and the Holy Spirit in renewal of our creation.

[28 : 13] Friends, this is life. But oftentimes, we don't connect keeping commandments to love or truth or warmth or life.

But the apostle of love is showing us a better way, a rich way. And one more, in case we're like, I still don't know. This is what we signed up from, and I'm going to pull something that's not from John, just in case you're like, well, I don't even think he has a full Bible.

That's why he just gives out John journals. That's what he lost. He doesn't even owe one. Small print. This is in the Great Commission itself.

I love this. The risen Christ says to his disciples, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.

We're familiar with that. Baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Yes. Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

[29 : 16] Yes. Yes. And behold, I'm with you always to the end of the age. I know it's late, so I won't stress it.

Make this a point of prayer. don't let this be something conceptual. This is how we're to understand how we craft these things. This is a calling for all of us.

I don't expect us to get it in a moment. I don't have it all myself, but I want to learn this craft better and better. And if I'm going to learn how love and truth work, I need to learn how obedience mingles in and I need to see the good intention of my father in all of this.

So, we carry on with this and I would ask in your friendships, how much do you care about one another's obedience and how much do you care about your own obedience?

obedience. I work with parents and youth at our church and I get a lot of questions about gossip.

And we do a lot of Q&A; and some of our youth stuff and they're like, what do I do if I'm in a circle with my friends and they start gossiping?

[30 : 39] Should I make a declaration that that's sinful? Should I leave? Should I wait? And they're trying to navigate how to do this. Here's what I'm saying.

If we care about our own obedience, I know the best way to love somebody else is to be obedient to Christ. And if I want to love them, their obedience is something I'm going to care about.

But do we see anything cold or harsh in this apostle of love? No. So when we think about how we live this out and how we look out for one another, it's not rigid.

It's not mean. It's not proud. It's not condemning. It should have life and warmth. Now, that's really gracious that you said, I love people well enough that I can.

And that's kind of my policy. I'll love you big, and if I see something, I'll tell you. But that's something you learn to work on. That is a craft. But there's no place for condemnation when we do this.

[31 : 46] And listen, and give each other grace. We're not always going to walk this out perfectly.

Someone's going to care about your obedience, and you're going to feel like they're overstepping their bounds.

Someone's going to make a hard call about something, and maybe they didn't do it the right way.

Yeah, we're learning together. I don't think this son of thunder got here overnight.

I think he was gradually shaped by the love of Christ over time. And I have that same confidence that that grace that's with the apostle is also with us.

Check out these two quotes. They're wonderful. Ray Van Ness' work on 2nd and 3rd John. By the way, there's not a lot of commentary work on 2nd and 3rd John. I guess scholars felt like they had bigger things to do.

But not Ray. And Ray wrote a wonderful work in the ESV expository commentary. He says this, proper love is shaped and informed by the commands of God.

[32 : 48] To love another person is to do what God commands us to do or not do in regards to them and is to help them obey God's commands.

Any action towards the other person that violates God's commands, no matter how well intended or how romantically inclined, is not love.

any action that encourages or helps that person to avoid obedience to God's commands, no matter how nice the motivation, is not love.

And then Matthew Henry simply and profoundly writes, it is loving to affirm people in obedience. To call people to obedience and to rebuke disobedience.

friends, I want us to learn this craft of combining love and truth in a way that really brings life and warmth to ourselves and to our communities.

[34 : 00] And we do this from a place of confidence. And I close here, go back to the beginning of 2 John. Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us.

Do you hear the apostle of love and his confidence for the believers? Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us.

