

READING

2 John 1:1-13

SERMON

What is Love? (2 John)

All you need is love - according to the Beatles Love is what makes the world go around – according to the song. Everybody needs somebody to love - according to the Blues Brothers. But what is love? This is a statement that is made in the reading we had from 2 John this evening, verse 6

“And this is love:...” (2 John 1:6 NIV)

And what is love?

“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)

But some of the people to whom John is writing are not walking in love. But to whom is John writing, and is it John because he is not mentioned?

The letter begins

“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—” (2 John 1:1 NIV)

It is from the elder and this is generally taken to be John along with the evidence that the three letters we have titled 1, 2 and 3 John are similar in style and early church fathers put them from John.

“To the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in the truth—and not I only, but also all who know the truth—” (2 John 1:1 NIV)

There are several theories as to who is the chosen lady:

- It could be that instead of lady John was writing to the chosen Kyria, i.e her name being Kyria.
- On a similar theme that John was writing to lady Electra, elected to chosen leading to Electra, and that this was her name
- Perhaps she was a matriarchal widow looking after her family
- Or maybe the chosen lady or elect lady is a church and the children are the members of that church. This would fit in with the sister in verse 13

“The children of your chosen sister send their greetings.” (2 John 1:13 NIV)

being another church. The church from where John was writing.

I, along with quite a few other scholars like the last explanation. John is writing to a church – the chosen or elect lady – and to the members of that church – the children.

And in that first verse, that opening greeting, John introduces the twin themes in this letter – the themes of love and truth.

It seems however, as if some were not following the truth. Verse 4

“It has given me great joy to find *SOME* of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us.” (2 John 1:4 NIV)

Some of the Christians were walking in the truth, which means that some were not walking in the truth. Why were they not walking in the truth? We need to look at verses 7-9

“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.” (2 John 1:7-9 NIV)

Jesus Christ was not being acknowledged as having come in the flesh. If Jesus did not come in the flesh – there is no incarnation. With no incarnation, there can be no life lived among human beings. With no life, there can be no death on the cross for the forgiven of our sins. With no death, there can be no glorious resurrection from the dead of which Jesus was the firstfruits – the one who shows the way to all.

But there have been those who are deceivers, there will be those who are deceivers and there are those now who are deceiving. I like the way the Message puts verse 9

Anyone who gets so progressive in his thinking that he walks out on the teaching of Christ, walks out on God. But whoever stays with the teaching, stays faithful to both the Father and the Son. (2 John 1:9 MSG)

Beware of those who **have gone out into the world**, who are **progressive in their thinking**, who have **run ahead**. But we live in a dilemma. We want to keep true to God’s word and also relevant to the age in which we live. The twin dangers we face are that we do not walk in the truth because we are wanting to be up-to-date and be so relevant to the society in which we live, or we can retreat into traditionalism where we retreat into the church and become totally irrelevant to the culture in which we live.

- Ultra -Trendy

With the first – the ultra-trendy one – there is the danger of not keeping to the truth, of watering down the truth, so it is not so challenging. This is when expressions come up like

‘Everyone is doing it, so we must go along with it’

Or

‘God is a god of love and so this must be OK because I am so happy and God wants me to be happy’

Or again the person who goes against orthodoxy by saying or at least inferring that they have a special hotline to the Holy Spirit and so knows better than the whole church!

There were the new kids on the block in the time of the writing of 2 John who were adding to the teaching of the Apostles, running ahead of the teaching given to the church.

- Traditionalism

The other extreme to this sort of spiritual attack, for that is what it is, is to go for traditionalism. Apparently around this time there was the ‘back to the Old Testament’ party. Sound familiar? We need to get back to being ‘a New Testament church’ – to what it was like in the New Testament. Another variation on this is, ‘all we need to do is preach the gospel and people will come and be converted’. Yes, I agree, and no I don’t. The New Testament was in a particular context at a

particular time, and we live in the 21st century and not the 1st century. Yes, the content of the message stays the same, and as Darren reminded us last week from Paul's speech at the tomb of the unknown god in Acts 17, the packaging of that message may change – to make it relevant to today's society. Also I agree that we do need to preach the gospel, but the person who usually says that does it in a very boring way and an irrelevant way to today's culture and so is not even listened to, let alone, heard.

Beware of people who run ahead, but also of those who hold us back several centuries.

So some of the Christian to whom John is writing were not walking in the truth and so were not living a life of love. Seems an odd combination. Love and truth. What you believe and put your life in affects how you love others. How did John define love? Verse 6

“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)

We have a circular argument. Love is obedience to God's commands and his command is to walk in love. This is like when Jesus was asked to define the greatest commandment and Jesus said

“...‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’”
(Luke 10:27 NIV)

The greatest commandments are to do with love. When we love God, we will want to follow his commandments, we will want to walk in the truth, the truth of God's word. So we have to know it, to study it, to make it totally our lives. This is loving God with everything, heart, soul, strength and mind. How can someone say they love God and also know they are breaking his heart by not obeying his commands – but it can so easily happen.

And when we love God, loving others as we love ourselves follows on. When we love someone we do not intentionally want to hurt them, but going against them. We want to do all we can to please, but we also can know forgiveness from God and from others because this is another part of love. Love is ready to forgive us, although we may have to live with the consequences of some sin, but there will always be forgiveness and this can also be when we ask for forgiveness from other people. Forgiveness can be given, but the action that led to the hurt may have ongoing consequences.

But interestingly the question of love and truth came up in another way. What do we do when someone come to us who is not teaching the true, who is a deceiver? As Christians, in love they needed to be hospitable to him or her, they needed to treat them with love. But on the other hand they had to be careful of them. So what were they to do? What does John tell them? Verses 10 and 11

“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 1:10-11 NIV)

That seems a little unkind and goes against our Christian grain. Some Christians do take these verses in 2 John to mean that they will not let someone like a Jehovah's Witness or Mormon into their house, although on a summer's day they will entertain them in the back garden!

Surely we need to welcome these people because as Jesus said

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:34-35 NIV)

Do we say we do not need to love them because they are not a disciple, but then we know we have to love our neighbour as our self – and our neighbour is everyone! Again the Message gives us a way forward which is agreed by many

If anyone shows up who doesn't hold to this teaching, don't invite him in and give him the run of the place. That would just give him a platform to perpetuate his evil ways, making you his partner. (2 John 1:10-11 MSG)

Don't invite the person to speak in a public meeting. Remember the context. The church was probably a house church and so inviting him into your home was giving the person a platform from which to speak and as you have sanctioned it, you are equally culpable.

I can remember one Sunday morning here when a gentleman came in and spoke to me some two minutes before the service was due to begin and asked if I would give him five minutes to speak from the platform. I said no because as I explained the service was just about to get underway and it had already been mapped out and I would speak to him after the service to hear what he wanted to say and he was welcome to stay for the service. He stayed and we spoke afterwards and he told me that he had some testimonials from a Baptist minister in an Australian Baptist Church and that he was going round telling church that they had to preach the gospel and go and evangelise to non-Christians. I asked him if he knew we did not do both of those things. He said he did not know but had this mission for God. We continued the conversation but needless to say I did not really want to put him the platform and told him that, but that he was welcome to come anytime to worship with us - he has never been again.

We can be loving, but also be bearers of the truth. And finally John shows this in his closing remarks. Verse 12

“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 1:12 NIV)

John so much wanted to be with them, talking to them face to face, rather than using paper and ink. I wonder if today he would have said

“I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use *email*. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face or *on the phone*, so that our joy may be complete.” (2 John 1:12 NIV)

So many people today will use email for messages that should be done on the phone or face to face. Let us not be those who do this. At times emails and letters can be hidden behind as the proper thing to do, but love means we meet face to face and talk things through.

Truth and Love – the twin themes of 2 John – they need to be the twin themes of our lives too.