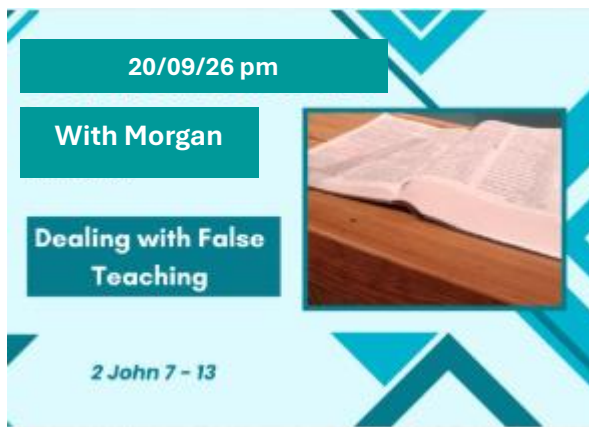




What we're looking at tonight, is how to deal with false teaching. 'Hold to the truth', (v7-9). It's very clear that John hates false teaching. "I say this because many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world." John calls such a person 'the deceiver' and 'the antichrist.' which means against Christ, a deceiver who will set themselves up in place of Christ, as an alternative. In other words, they're a false Christ. John is saying 'be on your guard. See to it that no one deceives you. Test

everything new you hear against the Scriptures. (also see Mk13:23) So, root yourself in the word. And the importance of being watchful is put both negatively and positively. The negative: 'Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked for'. All that labour on John's part, and all the church's progress of maturing would be in vain if in a few generations time this church had abandoned the truth.

And then the positive comes, (v)8 "Watch out...that you may be fully rewarded ." There is a reward at the end for the one who perseveres to the end, which the true believer will. We must hold fast to the truth, don't buy into the lie of the false teachers, and if you do, come back, and you will be rewarded as a faithful servant of the Lord with an eternity in heaven with Jesus. That is why our beliefs matter. That's ultimately what John wants to see. He wants to see the children of this chosen lady, whom he has worked hard for in the gospel, persevering in the truth so that he will see them in heaven on that final day. That would be his reward. Think maybe of a schoolteacher whose worked with a particular class since year 7. And then they leave after their GCSEs eventually to get married, have two kids, and a well-paid secure job. All that work has paid off and seeing how well they've done is a reward. This challenges us to disciple others faithfully and prayerfully, even when we don't see the fruit of that work immediately. Like the teacher who invests years into a pupil and later rejoices to see how that work has borne fruit. Christian evangelism and then discipleship can involve years of patient teaching, encouragement, correction and prayer. Ultimately, the goal isn't simply that people become better people, but that they remain faithful to Christ and persevere in the truth. That gives eternal significance to the seemingly ordinary work of discipling others.

John could not be clearer "Whoever runs ahead...does not have God. Whoever continues...has the Father and the Son."... This phrase 'Whoever runs ahead' is actually a metaphor because that is what the false teachers claimed they were doing. They claimed to have progressed or run ahead to a superior knowledge to that of the apostles. In fact, they were so far ahead that John Stott says that they had advanced so far that they had even left God behind. And when we leave God behind, we leave the gospel behind. Friends, we never move beyond the truth. Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, came as an atonement for our sins and rose again, so believe in him. if we move beyond it, we do not have God. Notice what John calls the gospel in this verse, not the truth, not the gospel, but the teaching of Christ, highlighting that what the message the apostles called 'the truth,' wasn't made up by them. It was authentically from Jesus himself. And whoever continues to carry on believing and living it, has both the Father and the Son, both from whom, (v 3), grace, mercy and peace come. So, continue in the truth.

John tells us who we should not fellowship with. (v10-13) Very simply, you are not to welcome them into your house. If someone comes, and they claim to be a teacher, and the teaching they bring is not the teaching of Christ, do not offer hospitality. The culture back then was people would travel around with teachings. Paul himself did it. And they would rely on strangers to offer them a base while they taught. And again, Paul benefitted from this throughout Acts. In the New Testament Christians are often commended for their hospitality and are commanded to show hospitality. When we offer hospitality to people, we do so with a welcome, with an extension of friendship and fellowship, in agreement with them. And so that's why the people of this church

weren't to show it to these false teachers because it would publicly endorse them and express agreement with them. And that's why, John says: 'Anyone who welcomes them shares in their wicked work.' You can't be seen as advocating for a agreeing with error if you're meant to be holding to the truth.

We are very careful that the people we partner with are on the same page as us, not necessarily on every single matter. There are open-hand and closed-hand issues. It's the closed hand issues that are the important ones; the Trinity, the person of Jesus and his work, how we are saved. We need to be sure that the people we are giving money to are using it to share the teachings of Jesus and bring people to eternal life and not deceiving others with heresy leaving them on the broad road that leads to destruction. It impacts who we give a platform to at the front, who we have to preach and lead worship on a Sunday. Are they someone who is going to teach the truth? Who we do mission and outreach with? Who do we have joint services with? And maybe the biggest one which applies to this evening, who do we share the Lord's Supper with? Who do we welcome around this table? We cannot be seen to share fellowship with those who do not believe the truth for we do not have fellowship with them. Those that John was writing about denied that Jesus came in the flesh. How can you share the body and blood of Christ with those who do not believe that his death on the cross wasn't a real human bodily death! And it's important to note, this isn't because of any snobbery. 'We're better because we believe this'. It goes back to our love of the truth and our love for others. We can't love the truth if we are compromising it. And we can't love others if we are making out that their error isn't a big deal to God when it is. Do not share fellowship with those who oppose the truth. Talk to them by all means, pray for them, but do not welcome them or share fellowship with them as brother and sisters until they slow down, and stop running ahead.

But, for those who do believe in the truth of the teaching of Christ, John wants to see sweet fellowship. (v 12-13). John writes, "I have much to write to you..." implying this could have been a much longer letter. But John's desire is not to write letters. It's to come and see them face to face, and to actually talk to them. It's clear that he wants to teach and encourage them in the truth, something which sets him apart from the false teachers. They were only out to deceive and increase their numbers. John wanted to get alongside and encourage. It also implies that there was more for him to teach. But not in the way the false teachers claimed. For John, his desire was to see the church grow deeper in the truth of Christ's teachings, not away from it. And that would be much better to do in person. So often we find that things get misunderstood when we just send a message. It's far better to communicate in person. But his true desire is to fellowship with them. Again, something which set him apart from the false teachers. They had no desire for such fellowship, but John did. To fellowship is to meet together, to encourage one another, to grow in Christ together, to pray for each other, to unite around the Lord, and to find joy in each other. And that would be the goal of John's coming to them, (v 12).

Do you find fellowship as we gather on a Sunday, meet in our homegroups, show hospitality, as we gather around the Lord's table and remember the death of Jesus, as we drink the wine together as a sign of our unity and fellowship together in him. What a joy, what a privilege it is to be in fellowship with others who love Jesus and walk in the truth.

Christian fellowship is felt even at a distance, (v 13). John is writing here on behalf of another church. And they send their greetings. Our local church here, in Mold, isn't isolated we are part of a world-wide church, a world-wide body of believers with whom we have fellowship in the truth, even if we are separated geographically. Providing they hold fast to the truth, 'we are all children of the same Father, members of the same family,' as David Jackman puts it.

So, hold fast to the truth. Don't compromise on the truth. Believe it, live it, pass it on. And enjoy fellowship but be careful. Not everyone out there believes what we believe and holds to the same teachings as we do. But when we do find someone who holds to the teaching of the Lord Jesus, and we can have fellowship with them, what a beautiful thing it is. Walk in love, hold fast to the truth, and enjoy fellowship. That is the message of 2 John!