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The Priorities of Truth and Love 2 John

Introduction:-

In our post modern world today, truth is a slippery word, because we are told that there is no such thing as absolute truth, or a truth that everyone should live by. Rather, truth is your truth and my truth, relative to our own experiences, and situations in life. And so truth is not something that can be imposed upon another person from the outside, but is rather relative to each person's changing situation in life. We may call this existential truth, that is not determined by any external point of reference. Thus, we live in a world where truth has lost any absolute force, and where the word itself dies the death of a thousand qualifications. Some may therefore argue, why use the word "truth" at all, if it no longer carries any absolute meaning? But against our culture, the Bible wants to insist that there is such a thing as absolute truth, which is found in the truth of God's plan for the Universe, found in Christ, when he came in the flesh, to die for our sins. But 2 John reminds us that it is tragically possible to lose this wonderful truth and gift from God, if we decide to be enticed by the novel teachings of the false prophets, which abound around us. Let us now see how the short epistle of 2 John begins to address this problem.

1. First we are confronted by a statement of Priorities (verses 1-3).

The second and third letters of John, along with Philemon, are the nearest we approach, in the New Testament, to a conventional piece of first-century correspondence. Their length indicates that they were written on a single sheet of papyrus, and their content suggests that they are dealing with a particular set of circumstances, and therefore have a specific destination. And as far as 2 John is concerned, its background is already familiar to us through our study of 1 John, and the major concerns or themes of this second letter remain the same as 1 John - with the priorities of truth and love. Further, the gospel was continuing to spread rapidly, and house churches were springing up quickly throughout the Greco-Roman world. Also, John may well have been the only surviving member of the original Apostolic Band, and with the rise of increasing numbers of travelling preachers and missionaries, with some claiming new insights, beyond the Apostolic testimony, which was caricatured as primitive and unsophisticated, there was need to keep the young churches pure and strong in the faith. This was no doubt John's burden in writing 2/3 John, and so his chief desire was to inspire the need for maintaining their priorities with both unswerving orthodoxy and vigorous spiritual life. And so whereas 1 John was written to assure the Elder's own community that they, and not the false prophets, were the anointed ones, and as a result, walk in the truth; 2 John seeks to warn a house church in another town that these deceivers are now on the loose. At this point, we may also notice that 2 John verses 10-11, anticipate the concern over hospitality, that will be raised in 3 John, indicating a common concern at this level. Thus 2 John begins with the words of the Elder, John the Apostle (cf. Peter at 1 Peter 5:1= "a fellow Elder), who addresses the Elect Lady (Kurial = Feminine) and her children, which most likely refers to a church, whose members are the children. Note that John begins in verses 1-2, by saying, that he loves this church "in the truth." What does he mean by this? Possibly it means the truth internalized within us, which alone can

generate God's agape "love" within us, as the end of the benediction at verse 3 indicates, concluding with the words, "in truth and love." Also at John 14:6, Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, except by/through me." And so John may mean here in verse 2 that Jesus as the truth lives in us and shall be with us forever. It is also instructive here that John speaks about the Word in the same way that the Lord Jesus spoke to his disciples about the Spirit: "He lives in you, and will be with you" (John 14:17). And because the Spirit is the truth (1 John 5:7), this is a natural equation to make (1 John 3:24; 4:13 = The Spirit bears witness that Christ lives within us). It serves to remind us how unbiblical and fruitless it is to seek to polarize Word and Spirit, or to opt for one or the other. The teaching which separates Word from Spirit, truth from love, mind from heart, doctrine from experience, destroys not only personal Christian integrity, but the whole fabric of the apostolic testimony. And so to be loved "in the truth", says that truth alone is the foundation and the fabric of the Christian Church, that will enable God's agape love to be generated amongst all Christians, as well as to the wider world. And if we are loved and defined "in the truth", do we make the pursuit of God's truth our chief passion in life, as distinct from the novelties and fashions of our world that seek to parade themselves as false fabrications of the truth? Truth matters to God. He died for it. Does it matter as much for us today?

2. Next we discover how to Live by God's Priorities (verses 4-6)

As we have seen under the previous point, truth is the church's greatest priority. John's greatest joy was to find Christian disciples, who are continuing steadfastly in the truth, as children of God who are demonstrating the family likeness (verse 4). In fact, this may have prompted John to write this letter in the first place. If it is a fact that the truth lives in us forever, as verse 2 has told us, then it is the Christian's unavoidable duty to walk in the truth (verse 4). Paul says something similar at Galatians 5:25 when he says: "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." There can be no option about this, for it is the main ingredient about our discipleship. The truth of God, revealed supremely in the living Word, and recorded unerringly in the Written Word, provides the route by which the Christian is travelling from earth to Heaven. This is the road we are to follow. If we want to make a journey we need to read the map and carry out its instructions. It is not a matter of choice. You cannot reach the East by travelling West. And as this passage develops, it becomes clear that possibly only some of the church were following in the right way, indicated by the words, "as the Father has commanded us" (verse 4b). Perhaps John also wrote this letter in order to correct a loose attitude of obedience toward the truth, which was already infecting some members of the church. Finally, John reminds the church of the commandment that Jesus once gave his disciples, to love one another (John 13:34), for by this action, all people would know that they were Jesus' disciples. And now love is here defined as obedience to Jesus' commands, which suggests a daily disciplined concern to fulfil God's will as completely as possible. This may be a reflection on John 15:10, where Jesus said, "If you keep my commandments, you shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love." And yet, which of us, as Christians, does not find it a continual struggle to walk consistently along the path of obedience? Sometimes we separate obedience from love, so that it hardens into a grinding duty, a ritualistic keeping of the rules. And so it is hardly surprising that we eventually lose heart, and give up the struggle. But if we work from the vantage point of love for God, as John did, then we will find in the words of 1 John 5:3, that his commands are not burdensome. Love for the

Father and Son then becomes the great incentive to obedience and to moving on along the narrow path of the truth. But what if our love is weak and faint? How do we increase our capacity to love God? Again, the first letter at 1 John 4:19 has answered the question. "We love God because he first loved us." We then go to the cross where this love was supremely displayed for us, and we come to the conclusion that God could not possibly love us more than he does, and that he will never love us less. Let us find great help and assurance for our souls in this thought today.

3. Finally, how do we resist False Teaching ? (verses 7-13)

Although the NIV begins a new paragraph at verse 7, the verse actually begins with the word "because", thus linking this whole section with all that John has written in verses 4-6. This then comes to mean that a failure in love usually indicates a failure to know and practice the truth. One cannot suffer without the other suffering too, just as each will also strengthen the other. It is because of the crisis of truth, which the church is facing through the inroads of the deceivers or secessionists, with their false teaching, that John wants to stir his readers up to be more determined in their Christian love for one another. Love like that can be one of the church's strongest defences against heresy, just as holding to the truth is the greatest bastion against error. The word for "deceiver" (planoi) is related to a verbal root meaning "to lead astray" or "to cause to wander", the verb itself being used at 1 John 2:26. Two things characterize them. First, they do not recognize Jesus as coming in the flesh. They thus denied that the divine and human natures were united in the one person within the womb of Mary, never to be separated. Secondly, they have gone out into the world, meaning they have gone out as missionaries do, propagating their heresies, with missionary zeal. Another meaning is their secession from those who hold orthodox views. They cannot exist in the environment of truth, because they deny its essential doctrines. Thus they are enemies of Christ, meriting the term "antichrist." Thus a warning is sounded in verse 8, "Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked for, but that you might be rewarded fully." There is a reward for faithful and loyal service, and John wants his readers to receive their full pay. Running ahead by leaving behind gospel truth and adopting new and spurious teaching, will result in departure from God. As Acts 17:21 reminds us, with the pagan philosophers at Athens, new ideas and language has an irresistible fascination for most of us. Wasn't that the angle from which the Serpent first approached Eve at Genesis 3:1-6? The danger comes when we imagine ourselves to be moving ahead of God, to have pressed on so far, that we no longer need him. then our new ideas become fantasy images, which bear no relationship to reality as God has determined and constructed it. For as soon as we leave the basis of god's revealed truth, we begin to venture into fantasy and unreality, away from the pattern of sound teaching and the good deposit spoken of by Paul at 2 Timothy 1:13-14. The criteria for welcoming people with hospitality, is determined by their status as teachers. If they are false teachers, they are not to be welcomed. How might this relate to members of false cults who might land on our doorsteps today? The answer to this question might relate to our preparedness to be able to witness to them. But not everyone might be in the position to do this. Finally, the end greeting from "the children of your sister", most likely refers to the members of John's local church, rather than the children of a particular Christian woman.

Conclusion:-

What does it mean for us as a church to be "loved in the truth?" Is living for the truth of the gospel the great passion of our lives today? May we too find a great reward for proving faithful to the sound deposit of God's Word in our lives today. Amen.