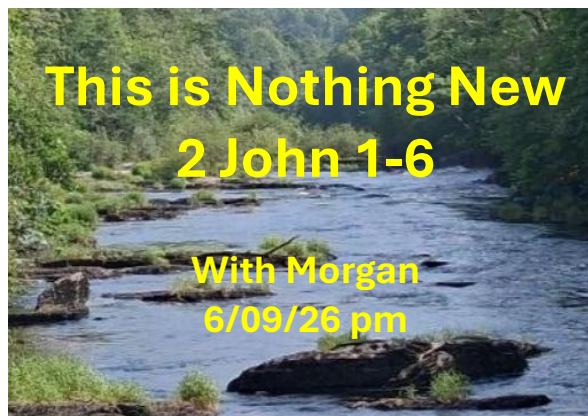




As we read 2 John just a few moments ago, I'm sure most of us thought (assuming we remember 1 John) that this really is nothing new; walk in the truth, love one another.

Formalities. When we receive a letter the first thing we tend to ask is 'who's it from?' And we normally have to flick to the end to discover. In the ancient world you didn't have to flick to the end to find out who was writing to you, for the identity of the sender was usually the first thing on the papyrus. And the sender of this

letter is 'The elder.' Interestingly, we aren't told explicitly that this is actually from John, yet it is widely accepted it is John. The evidence being, firstly, that if you read the gospel of John, and 1 John, the style and language are very closely linked as too are the themes. Secondly, it's in the title 'the elder' which has a double meaning. It's not only his position of authority in the church, but also his identity. It could also mean 'old man.' And that gives us a clue that John is writing quite late in life. John was the last of the twelve apostles to die, which is why he refers to himself as 'the elder.' So John is most likely the author. The recipient of John's letter is called 'the lady chosen by God.'

Some have suggested that 'the lady' is a literal woman and her children are her physical biological and adopted children. She's a close friend of John and he's writing to her and to her family. My view, and the view of most others is that 'the lady' is a personification of a church and her children are the members. The church is often referred to in the New Testament as a female person, bride of Christ as we read in Ephesians and Revelation. So, I'm taking the view that John is writing to the church at large or a local body of believers. Although when it comes to the application it doesn't change anything. John loves this fellowship, in the truth, the truth here being the gospel. Christians are of course united in this message in both belief and purpose. The message that the Eternal Son of God, became flesh in the man, Jesus of Nazareth, who lived a sinless life, died on the cross as an atonement for our many sins. And then came to life again and ascended back to his Father. And all who believe in him and call on his name have eternal Life. The truth of the gospel is the great theme of this short letter because the second half is taken up with warning the church about false teachers (vs 7-11), seemingly the same group that we meet in 1 John, who denied that Jesus came in the flesh. Not only did they deny the truth but they tried to draw believers away from the truth. In fact, everything he says in verses 1-6 he says because of the false teachers and their lies. It's not just that they believe the wrong stuff, they are actively deceitful with it.

Good Wishes. The next verse, (v3), is again about this great truth that is the gospel. Now, so far, if you were to read many of the other New Testament letters you will find that this is a typical structure. Most New Testament writers of the Letters Christianized 'Greetings' with the 'Grace and Peace to you,' or something like that. And that's what John does: 'Grace, mercy and peace'. Each of these words is worthy of some attention. This word grace then is charis. It's a Greek blessing. It is God's undeserved kindness poured out into our lives in abundance. And none of us deserve it. That's why it's grace. We are all guilty condemned sinners, but God is a God of grace who doesn't treat us as our sins deserve. Instead, he shows kindness to us. And John follows the word 'grace' with a closely related word, mercy. We are weak and mortal sinners who stand before a sovereign holy God who must punish sin! We are at his mercy. God is merciful. He delights to show mercy to the weak and powerless when we cry out to him.

If grace and mercy are ours, then so is the third thing we read here. Peace. Peace was a Hebrew blessing, shalom. We desire peace in this world, as we watch the news and see the ongoing wars in Ukraine and the Middle East. As we see political unrest and riots in our own country, we want it to be resolved in a way where there is no more conflict or anger. And one day when Jesus returns, we will experience that peace. But this shalom that John has in mind, and indeed the other New Testament writers meant is salvation; a restored harmony with the God who has created us to know

him and love him by faith and be known and loved by him through grace. In fact, at one time, we were alienated from him and at enmity with him, enemies because of our sin and evil behaviour. But this peace is ours now. These three things don't come because we've earned them. They come from God the Father and from his Son, our Saviour and Lord, Jesus Christ. These three words fully depict for us, undeserved kindness, mercy from a far greater being, harmony with God our creator, through his Son Jesus, belongs entirely to the Lord. The Father sends Jesus to be our Saviour and draws us in by his Spirit. He authored it. It's his gift to us, and all we did if we are participants of it was to humbly accept it by faith. But quite differently to most of the New Testament letters, John emphasises that these things 'will be with us in truth and Love.'

These are the two themes of 2 John: truth and love. And there can be no doubt that John's emphasis on truth and love is intended to reassure these believers. They have believed the true gospel and the truth about Jesus, but false teachers are troubling the church and trying to lead them away from that truth. John therefore reminds them to remain confident in the gospel they have received and to continue walking in truth and Love. And this should reassure us completely. You see we might not be under pressure from the same group of false teachers or be tempted to join them, but we do live in a pluralistic society with many conflicting ideas. Many think we waste our time by coming to church because God is a delusion and the subject of stand-up comedy routines, maybe many think it doesn't matter what you believe because if God is there then he loves and accepts you anyway, so be who you want to be. It can be tempting to just give up. But John would say to us, no! Don't give up! Don't listen to any voice, don't be drawn away from the truth of the gospel and of who Jesus Christ is. Keep believing in him, trust him, and in the end grace, mercy and peace is ours and will be ours.

Christians must live in truth. Now, I wonder what brings you joy? Your family, your job, nature? For John, what caused him to rejoice was hearing that some of the children were continuing to walk in the truth. They have not been drawn away and deceived by the lies of the false teachers. They are living in obedience to the Lord. Remember, by walking in the truth, you abide in the Father and the Son, (1 John 2:24). Second here, we are to Live in love. (v 5). We are to love one another. Jesus commanded his disciples to live like this just before he died. Very simply, if you Look at verse 6, love is expressed through obeying the Lord in every aspect. If we love we will show it by obedience, and if we live in obedience, we live in love. And so, this love in which we walk is both practical and discerning. Practical in that our love must be directed towards others. Love must have an object, We must love our neighbour as ourselves. We must love as God himself has loved us. That's a radical call to self-sacrificial love which we are called to imitate in our lives together, We must forgive and we must serve. This love is also a discerning love. In other words, our love for others is directed and shaped by the truth of the gospel which we believe. Love is expressed through obedience to God and by holding firmly to the truth. Truth and love are not enemies who compete; they belong together. We cannot truly love someone by encouraging them to believe what is false, nor can we claim to stand for the truth while refusing to love the people around us. This is where the false teachers were so wrong. Their rejection of the truth about Jesus wasn't simply a doctrinal error; it undermined the very foundation on which Christian love is built.

We see it today. People today distort the truth as they always have done; they make light of sin, they neglect the call to repentance, they claim you don't need to be changed, they do theological gymnastics to make out the Bible doesn't really mean what it appears to be saying to make it more palatable to modern people. And they claim it's in the name of inclusivity and love that they deny these things. But it can't be the case because gospel truth and gospel love cannot be separated. If you don't truly walk in the truth, you don't truly walk in love.

Conclusion This is nothing new. 2 John 1-6 encourages us, as Christians, as children of God, to walk in the truth of the gospel that we were taught and have believed. And we need to hear it because in this world there are many who are out to deceive. What makes us different is that we keep loving one another and do so continuing to obey the commands of God the Father. May he help us as we do that! AMEN