

**Sunday evening July 22<sup>nd</sup> 2018 at CBC**

**Sermon outline: 2 John**

**How do you know if you are a Christian?**

If we are going to persuade anyone else that the question is important, we had better ensure that we here, at least, know why it matters. In Acts 25-26 we have the account of how the missionary/apostle Paul had the opportunity, while a prisoner, to speak with King Herod Agrippa 2 and his wife (actually his sister) Berenice.

*‘Do you believe the prophets? I know you do.’*

*‘Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?’*

*‘Short time or long – I pray to God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains.’*

### **[1] RECEIVING TRUTH IN THE HEART- personal experience**

No-one can read this letter without noticing the emphasis on truth in verses 1-4. The word appears five times in those four verses.

The truth being spoken of here is connected with, and arises from, the existence of God the Father and his son Jesus Christ. Further, it is clear that both the writer of the letter, John, and the recipients of the letter, the ‘lady’ and her ‘children’ have had a profound personal experience of the truth that comes from God the Father and the Son. This experience is initiated by God (‘chosen by God’ [1 and 13]) and results in his truth living in them (the lady and her children) and being with them for ever.

It is clear from the letter that this obedience is to be expressed in an attitude of love towards God and also towards others who walking in the same truth.

So, putting all this together so that we can begin to answer our question (How do you know if you are a Christian?), the first thing we can say is that a Christian is someone who has been impacted by the truth of God, and thus by God's truth about His Son Jesus, which brings grace, mercy and peace into their lives and which enables them to walk (live and behave) in obedience to God's commands and this life will be characterised by love – for God and for others.

## **GRACE**

In his letter to Titus, Paul writes about the grace of God which *“teaches us to say ‘no!’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope – the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.” [Titus 2:121-4]*

## **MERCY**

*“Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief.” [1 Timothy 1.13]*

## **PEACE**

*6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to*

*God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. [Philippians 4:6-7]*

## **[2] PROMOTING TRUTH IN THE WORLD – corporate identity**

‘Promoting truth’ sounds very positive, and ultimately that is indeed the case. Bringing Christian truth to bear on the minds and hearts of our fellow human beings is a very positive thing indeed. But there are times when promoting truth means combatting error. And it is that aspect of promoting truth that John highlights in the second part of his letter. He mentions a problem, a danger and a response.

### **[a] the problem – deceivers**

At this time, there were obviously a number of travelling preachers and evangelists purporting to belong to the Christian community. The test that John gives here relates to the reality of Jesus, the son of God, taking real human form. The false teachers denied this reality, the true teachers proclaimed it.

### **[b] the danger – losing what you have gained**

The danger is that people might be taken in. You see, the false teachers would claim that they were the leaders of a new wave of thinking. They were ahead of the curve and if you wanted to be really contemporary you should follow them.

But the reality was that such people were not ahead of the curve, they had gone ahead on a path of their own. They had actually lost connection with the truth as it is found in Jesus. And when you lose touch with the truth as it is found in Jesus, you lose touch with God himself.

### **[c] the response – avoid sharing in wicked work**

How were John's readers to deal with these false teachers? The answer may seem harsh. They were not to be welcomed or taken in and given hospitality. To welcome them was to affirm them and to share in their wicked work. We should be clear that this refers to teachers, preachers, evangelists claiming to speak in the name of Christ and seeking the financial and practical support of Christians.

Such people must be resisted and given no encouragement to continue their ministry. Now it may not fall to us actually to have to do this ourselves. We may never have to confront a false teacher and refuse to accept them or have anything to do with them. *But we may have to be willing to support and encourage those who do.* It is because of this 'worship' of tolerance that this letter speaks to us today and reminds us of what it means to be a Christian.

### **CONCLUSION**

So here are two marks of authentic Christian faith:

[1] Receiving God's truth (revealed as grace, mercy and peace) in the heart – personal experience

[2] Promoting God's truth in the world – which in this context means the church community actively standing against false gospels and views of Jesus – corporate responsibility

Do we pass the test?