

# The Second Epistle of John

Much of John's writing was for the purpose of combatting the error of false teaching. The **gospel** of **John** was written to combat the error of *Ebionism*. They taught that the Lord Jesus was not the Son of God. **1 John** was written to combat the error of *Docetism*. They taught that the Lord Jesus didn't come in physical form or die a physical death. He merely appeared to be physical. **2 John** was written to a *sister* to encourage her to *shut* the door to such deceivers. **3 John** was written to a *brother* to encourage him to *open* the door to true believers who teach the truth.

**Gospel of John** = *pronouncement* of divine truth (Christ is the Truth). **1 John** = *practice* of divine truth (evidence is expected in the lives of those who profess to know the truth). **2 John** = *protection* of divine truth (the door is to be closed to false teachers). **3 John** = *propagation* of divine truth (the door is to be opened to those who further the truth).

## 2 John 1-4: Her Commendation

**2Jn 1:1** *The elder unto the (an) elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth; 2Jn 1:2 For the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever.*

John writes as 'the elder' or a man of spiritual maturity (not a local church elder). This is most appropriate given the personal nature of the letter and subject matter being discussed (i.e. instructions about home and family life). He refers to himself as 'the' elder which signifies his unique position of dignity and authority; he was the last surviving apostle. Note. Paul writes his letters as an apostle; Peter as an apostle and elder; John as an elder only. Apostolic authority was now fading given that the foundation of the church had been laid (Ephesians 2.20). Note. John refers to himself as 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' (*Gospel*), an 'elder' (1 & 2 John) and a 'servant' and 'brother' (*Revelation*).

John is writing to 'an elect lady and her children'. Some believe this is figurative language for a local church, however, she has children (v.4), a home (v.10) and a sister (v.13). John desires to speak with her 'mouth to mouth' (v.12) and rejoices that her children are 'walking in the truth' (v.4). If this was a church, it would be very strange for John to rejoice over a divided company with some not walking in the truth! This woman was 'elect', i.e. one who genuinely belonged to God (in contrast to the deceivers). The word 'lady' is a respectful title using the word *kuria* which is the Greek version of the Aramaic name **Martha**. She was clearly well known amongst believers and was probably a widow of some means, having a house large enough to entertain travelling preachers. Note. John writes to this lady and her children concerning their home. When he writes concerning the local church (3 John) he writes to a brother. John writes of his *agape* (not *phileo*) love for both the lady and her children. This is divine love produced in the heart by the Spirit of God and resulting in self-sacrifice for the benefit of others and glory of God. Both John and other believers loved them 'in truth' and 'because of the truth' (v.2). Our common bond in the truth (and in Christ) assures our love for one another. We do not love fellow saints because they are kind or rich but because we hold the same precious truth. This truth 'dwelleth in us and... with us', i.e. it is hidden in our **hearts** (not heads), as an **active** companion/principle that controls our lives. We may change but the truth never changes; it abides and shall be with us forever. Note. The same two prepositions are used of the Holy Spirit (John 14.16-17); He is *in* us and *with* us.

**2Jn 1:3** *Grace ~~be with you~~, mercy, and peace (shall be with you), from God the Father, and from ~~the Lord~~ Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love. 2Jn 1:4 I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father.*

John's salutation is a word of assurance that grace, mercy and peace will 'continue to remain' with them. 'Grace' is the full manifestation or activity of God's love. God is gracious (character) *because* He is love (attribute). 'Grace' is favour conferred upon us freely with no expectation of return. 'Mercy' is compassion towards an individual in distress and need. 'Peace' is what God imparts to us as the result of His grace and mercy. Peace comes from the verb *eiro*, 'to join' suggesting the binding together of believing sinner and a holy God resulting in an inner sense of tranquillity and well-being. These blessings flow down *upon* us from *alongside* the divine presence. They flow from the Father (source) through Christ (the channel) who here is described as 'the Son of the Father', that is, the fullest expression of all that the Father is. These graces are experienced by believers as they walk in the sphere of 'truth and love'. Note the balance! One cannot overemphasise love at the expense of truth, nor truth at the expense of love. v.4: John reports that he has found real joy in observing some of this lady's children 'walking in truth', i.e. this was their *character* and *habitual course of life*. They had been found committed to the truth and the commandment of the Father. *1 John 3.23: And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another.* What brings us real joy and satisfaction in life?

## **2 John 5-6: Her Command**

**2Jn 1:5** *And now I beseech thee, lady, (not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning), that we love one another. 2Jn 1:6 (And this is love, that we walk after his commandments.) This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.*

John now turns to the matter in hand. He 'politely requests' (beseeches) that we (all Christians) continue to 'love one another'. This was not a 'new' commandment (unlike the deceivers who offered 'new' and 'higher' truth), but one which had always been constantly reaffirmed and taught as part of the original apostolic message received from Christ (John 13.34). **v.6:** In parenthesis, the apostle reminds the elect lady that *agape* love is characterised *by*, and must be manifested *in obedience* to the **truth**. One cannot love the Lord and not keep His commandments. Our conduct (walk) should be dominated by obedience to the word of God. The elect lady was quite clearly demonstrating *agape* love through her practical service of hospitality **yet** love must be tempered with **truth**. She could not overemphasise love (hospitality) at the expense of truth (receiving false teachers). Therefore the Apostle concludes by emphasising the importance of 'walking in it', i.e. living one's daily life in the sphere of both **love and truth** (both being antecedent feminine nouns).

## **2 John 7-11: Her Caution**

**2Jn 1:7** *For (Because) many deceivers ~~are entered~~ (went forth) into the world, who confess not ~~that~~ Jesus Christ is come in ~~the~~ flesh. This is ~~a~~ (the) deceiver and ~~an~~ (the) antichrist.*

The importance of walking in truth is explained by John in v.7. There are many 'deceivers' or 'wanderers' who have 'gone forth' into the world in order to corrupt with their false teaching. The wording suggests they were once part of local Christian companies but now were denying the teaching they once professed to hold. *1 John 2.19: They (antichrists) went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. Do we have convictions?* How would the elect lady know if they were false teachers or not? She must listen, not so much to what they **do** say, but to what they **not** say. They would **not** 'confess' or 'agree' that 'Jesus Christ come (*present* tense) in flesh'. This is a flat denial of the manhood *and* deity of Christ. They reject the possibility that God could be manifest in a physical body at any time and/or that He chose to 'come' rather than being born (pre-existence and omnipotence). In these deceivers there is the spirit of the coming Deceiver and Antichrist.

**2Jn 1:8** *Look to yourselves, that ~~we~~ (you) lose not those things which ~~we~~ (you) have wrought, but that ~~we~~ (you) receive a full reward. 2Jn 1:9 Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.*

Consequently the lady and her children should ever keep a 'watchful eye' upon those who come to the door. To welcome them and imbibe their false teaching would be catastrophic. It would lead to 'losing', 'destroying' or 'un-doing' all their 'labour' for the Lord thus far, as well as the loss of reward. **v.9:** The deceivers were 'transgressors' in relation to the 'doctrine of Christ'. They had 'gone beyond' the truth revealed concerning Him. What a danger! There is **no** new truth. All has been revealed in the word of God which is complete. The Gnostics claimed to have progressed to a higher understanding of God (a super knowledge). This was heresy which still abounds today. Such deceivers were unregenerate having no spiritual relationship with God. In contrast, true believers 'continually keep' all the teaching of the apostles in relation to the Person and work of Christ thus showing that they possess the Son and therefore have a vital relationship with God (John 14.23, 1 John 2.23). Let us stand firmly for the truth of Scripture, and not go beyond the bounds that it sets.

**2Jn 1:10** *If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: 2Jn 1:11 For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.*

'If' does not imply doubt but rather certainty, i.e. '**when** they come'. It may not be the *presence of false teaching* so much as the *absence of the true* ('bring not this doctrine'). Such are not to be 'received' into the elect lady's home as this would suggest agreement *with* and promotion *of* the false teaching. One must not 'speak' any 'farewell greeting' or confer upon them 'God-promoted success' (*chairō*, 'God speed'). **v.11:** The one who does such is sharing with them or 'co-operating' in their 'evil work'. Note. This is a category of person who is hostile or opposed to the truth, knowingly promoting error. Those who don't know the truth and need teaching should not be treated in such a manner.

## **2 John 12-13: Her Comfort**

**2Jn 1:12** *Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink: but I trust to come unto you, and speak ~~face to face~~ (mouth to mouth), that our joy may be full. 2Jn 1:13 The children of thy elect sister greet thee. Amen.*

John has much to write, which after 'mature consideration' he thought it best to share with the elect lady when he saw her. The particular matter outlined in this letter could not wait. It was of great urgency and importance (cf. 1 Corinthians 11.34). Their eventual meeting would bring 'fullness' of joy, the joy that is the result of Christian fellowship. **v.13:** Finally, John passes on the greetings of her sister's children. As the sister herself does not send greetings It is possible she had passed away.