

2 John

WHAT'S THIS BOOK ABOUT? This is a "camouflaged" note from John to a group of Christians being harassed by some false teachers.

WHO WROTE IT? The apostle John.

WHEN DID IT HAPPEN? About A.D. 85.

WHERE DOES THIS BOOK FIT? During the early life of the church.

THE BREAKDOWN

- 1:1-3: Greeting
- 1:4-6: Admonition to love each other
- 1:7-11: Warning about false teachers
- 1:12-13: Closing remarks

KEY CONCEPTS

- Joy
- Truth
- Love

SCORECARD

"The chosen lady and her children": Who is she? We don't know. Perhaps John didn't want the Roman authorities to identify her.

READING TIME :05

IN HOURS	:30	1:00	1:30	2:00	2:30
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WORTH MEMORIZING

- 1:4 How happy I was to meet some of your children and find them living according to the truth, just as the Father commanded.

THE MASCULINE PERSPECTIVE

- **STAY ALERT.** We need to be on guard against people with harmful teachings, just as John encouraged his audience to be.

WHAT'S THE POINT OF

2 John?

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Not every

polished speaker

knows what he's

talking about.

INTRODUCTION TO
2 JOHN

BACKGROUND

Like 1 John, 2 John deals with the issue of false teachers. Having departed from the community (1 Jn 2:19), these teachers now seek hospitality from the audience of 2 John (verse 10). The author of 2 and 3 John refers to himself only as "the elder" (verse 1). The second-century Christian writers Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria believed that the apostle John wrote these letters. Second John is addressed to "the elect lady and her children," (verse 1) which could be literal or metaphorical; one can similarly understand the reference to "the children of thy elect sister" (verse 13) either as the nieces and nephews of the woman or the members of another church.

MESSAGE

In this brief letter, John models and en-

OUTLINE

- I. Greetings
- II. God's Commandments
- III. Avoid False Teachers
- IV. Conclusion

encourages the love Christians are to have for one another. He also demonstrates a great concern for knowing the truth, and shows the intimate relationship between truth and love. While Christians are called to love one another, John advises believers to avoid giving hospitality or support to those who do not teach the truth "that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh" (verse 7). The loving thing is to deny these teachers support, showing that they advocate a false gospel. Paul makes a similar point about the immoral behavior of professed Christians in 1 Corinthians 5:9-13.

TIME

This letter is probably contemporaneous with or slightly later than 1 John, originating from Ephesus around A.D. 90.

- 1-3
- 4-6
- 7-11
- 12-13

John's Farewell Greeting

¹²Having many things to write to you, I did not wish to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, that our joy may be full.

¹³The children of your elect sister greet you. Amen.

JOHN writes this third letter to commend a church leader for his hospitality and to warn against another one who is unfriendly and even cruel. As you read this book, think how you can act as a friend toward other Christians.



strange thing has happened to the concept of "tolerance." It once meant we accepted the fact other people had a right to their own views, even if those views were different from ours, and even if they were wrong. But culture now defines tolerance as accepting all other views as being equally valid to our own.

The Bible proclaims an objective truth and an exclusive Gospel. As a result, Christians are sometimes accused of being unloving and intolerant. The message of 2 John is: We should love one other deeply, but we cannot tolerate error and evil in our homes or churches.

John addressed this short note to a woman and her children, which metaphorically may indicate a church and its members. He reminded them of the command, both old and new, to love one another. But in plain language he also warned his readers to reject the false teachers who were traveling about. Anyone who doesn't acknowledge Christ as coming in the flesh, John said, is a deceiver and an antichrist. We mustn't accept such people, he wrote, for "anyone who welcomes them shares in their wicked work" (2 John 1:11, NIV).

What a vital balance! We're to be loving, but discerning. Every day we come face-to-face with a world God loves; but we also daily encounter a world in which we must stand for the truth. Only John could have articulated such a delicate balance; and only 2 John explains it so concisely and plainly.



KEY THOUGHT:

While we must love one another deeply, we cannot tolerate error and evil in our churches.



KEY VERSE:

"Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son."

2 John 1:9



KEY ACTION:

If we're vigilant against deceivers and deception, we will receive a full reward without losing the things we've worked for (see 2 John 1:8).



KEY PRAYER:

Lord, help me to have a discerning mind and a loving heart.

BASIC SURVEY

2 JOHN

AUTHOR: The apostle John, according to church tradition. The author is identified only as “the elder” (2 John 1:1 KJV).

DATE: Approximately AD 92.

IN TEN WORDS OR LESS

Beware false teachers who deny Jesus’ physical life on earth.

DETAILS, PLEASE

Addressed to “the elect lady and her children” (2 John 1:1 KJV), perhaps an actual family or, figuratively, a church, 2 John tackles the heretical idea that Jesus had not been physically present on earth. The letter was most likely a reaction to the Gnostics, who taught that Jesus was spirit only and just appeared to suffer and die on the cross. This teaching, of “a deceiver and an antichrist” (1:7 KJV), should be avoided at all costs—to the point of barring one’s door against those who believe it (1:10).

QUOTEABLE

> Now I ask you, lady, not as though I were writing to you a new commandment, but the one which we have had from the beginning, that we love one another (1:5 NASB).

> This is love, that we walk after his commandments (1:6 KJV).

UNIQUE AND UNUSUAL

Second John, one of the New Testament’s four single-chapter books, is the shortest by verse count: 13.

SO WHAT?

Just as in John’s time, false teachers spread dangerous ideas in today’s world. Every teaching should be weighed against scripture. 2 John says, “He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son” (1:9 KJV).

READ 2 JOHN 1 AND PSALM 8.

- One-Month Course: your next reading is on page 276. →
- Three-Month Course: your next reading is on page 276. →
- Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 276. →

HIDDEN TREASURE

REPEATING BASIC TRUTHS

John wrote to a friend, “And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another” (2 John 1:5 NKJV). Why did John feel it necessary to tell her something so very basic—which he admitted they’d all known from the beginning? Because this truth is so important and foundational that it was important to always seek new ways to obey it. For this same reason, the apostle Peter wrote, “I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. I think it is right to refresh your memory” (2 Peter 1:12–13 NIV).

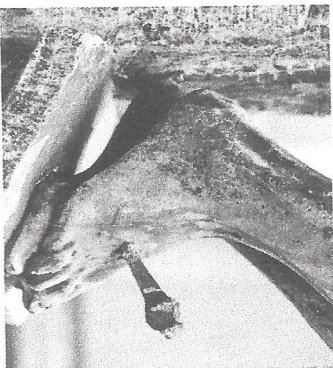
READ ISAIAH 51 AND 54.

HIDDEN TREASURE

DEALING WITH HERETICS

John wrote that a so-called Christian who denied that Jesus had a physical body and died on the cross was actually an antichrist (2 John 1:7). He warned, “Do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds” (2 John 1:10–11 NKJV). How then do we obey Jesus’ command to “love your enemies” and give food to our enemy if he’s hungry (Matthew 5:44; Romans 12:20 NKJV)? Well, we can still give him food, but we’re not to invite him into our home to eat and to fellowship with us. Paul listed other serious sins of people who claimed to be Christians, then said, “Don’t even eat with such people” (1 Corinthians 5:11 NLT).

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 5 AND ISAIAH 56.



John warned against receiving or enjoying fellowship with those who do not believe that Jesus had a physical body and died for our sins.

2 John

BOOK INTRODUCTION

Throughout the pages of the NT, John is portrayed as a faithful and constant follower of Christ. The hallmark of John's constancy is found in 2 John 5: "And now I plead with you... not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning; that we love one another."

By the time of Jesus, that important command—"You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18)—had been altered by religious leaders to say, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy" (Matt. 5:43). But Jesus transformed the command "hate your enemy" to love your enemies. Love your enemies as well as your neighbor (Matt. 5:44-48).

John focused on this love in his Gospel account and three letters, mentioning it more than 100 times in one form or another. Near the end of his life—when he wrote all four documents within a span of a few years—he was still focused on what he had heard Jesus say decades before: "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). For him, "love one another" is not a matter of commanding something new but of commanding something old: the timeless instruction of Jesus.

WHAT IT SAVS | *A Note of Caution on Hospitality*

Second John is more like a personal note than a letter. Within this brief epistle are two primary subjects: the identity of the recipients and John's pointed message.

John calls his recipients "the elect lady and her children" (1). But who is this "lady"? She may have been an actual Christian woman and her children—a literal reading of the text. Another possibility is that John refers to a local church as "the elect lady" and its members as "her children"—a metaphorical reading. (The fact that a "sister" church later sends her greeting [13] suggests the latter.) And some scholars believe the phrase was used to address the entire church in Ephesus. Fortunately, whether John is writing to the church as a household of faith, or to one individual household, his teaching applies equally.

The message itself is unmistakable: you must remain faithful to the teachings of Christ that you have received and have been walking in. John comments the "lady" for walking in the truth (4), but he warns her as well. When exercising her generous gift of hospitality, she must not support erroneous teachings.

2 JOHN

In the first century, traveling apostles, teachers, and emissaries of the faith commonly secured lodging with fellow Christians as they passed through town after town. For example, Lydia hosted Paul and his coworkers in Philippi (Acts 16:15, 40). And because churches usually met in homes, hosting a traveling teacher often meant welcoming that individual into an assembly of believers.

False teachers, however, were journeying through Asia Minor, spreading the growing heresy that Christ did not come in the flesh (7). John's instruction concerning them is clear: "If anyone comes to you and does not bring [the] doctrine [of Christ], do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds" (10, 11).

The elderly apostle does not tell the "lady" to hate or mistreat these false teachers. But if they will not embrace Jesus Christ as God in the flesh (John 1:14), then believers must have no fellowship (*koinonía*—commonality, oneness, union) with them. John's concern was to preserve the truth that they had already received (1, 2). God's people must love His truth first and foremost, and out of that love will flow the proper treatment of others.

WHAT IT MEANS | *This Is Love*

In this second epistle, John reminds believers to be especially mindful in three areas:

- **Discernment:** The church was less than one century old when John wrote this letter, yet false teaching was already common. Believers needed the ability to separate truth from error then, and they will need that ability until Christ returns (1-6).
- **Love:** According to John, no one can claim to love Christ or His church and then not walk faithfully in the truth (6). Love and truth distinguish God's people from those who do not belong to Him.
- **Hospitality:** The apostle Peter and John both agreed: hospitality is the Christian's duty and joy, as well as an act of love (1 Pet. 4:8, 9). But according to 2 John, hospitality has boundaries: God's people must not welcome, accept, associate with, or support anything or anyone who undermines the truth of the gospel (9-11).

WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU | *Love with Discernment*

John understood that the best way for the first-century churches to make Jesus known was for believers to show their love for one another. And opening our homes to people is an important expression of that love. God inspired and preserved this note from John to remind the church to be cautious. "If someone declares, 'I have something new from God' that does not conform to the gospel, be concerned," he warns. "Do not open wide the doors of your home—or your heart—to such a person."

Every believer is responsible for lovingly guarding and carefully upholding God's eternal Word. His truth is that precious.

"LET HIM WHO THINKS HE stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). These words of the apostle Paul could well stand as a subtitle for John's little epistle. The recipients, a chosen lady and her children, were obviously standing. They were walking in truth, remaining faithful to the commandments they had received from the Father. John is deeply pleased to be able to commend them. But he takes nothing for granted. Realizing that standing is just one step removed from falling, he hesitates not at all to issue a reminder: "love one another" (v. 5). The apostle admits that this is not new revelation, but he views it sufficiently important to repeat. Loving one another, he stresses, is equivalent to walking according to God's commandments.

John indicates, however, that this love must be discerning. It is not a naive, unthinking, open to anything and anyone kind of love. Biblical love is a matter of choice; it is dangerous and foolish to float through life with undiscerning love. False teachers abound who do not acknowledge Christ as having come in the flesh. It is false charity to open the door to false teaching. We must have fellowship with God. We must have fellowship with Christians. But we must not have fellowship with false teachers.

The "Elder" of verse 1 has been traditionally identified with the apostle John, resulting in the Greek title *Ioannou B*, the "Second of John."

WATCH WORD

■ *antichrist* (one opposed to or the opposite of Christ)—7

2 JOHN 10



Some Christians believe this verse means we should not invite Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormon missionaries into our homes. Others say we must not even open the door to *anyone* who believes wrong teachings. Examination of the immediate and broader context shows that this is not John's meaning. Recall that in 1 Peter 3:15-16 we are told to "give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you" and to do so "with gentleness and respect." Since this requires having relationships with non-Christians, and since the Bible cannot contradict itself, we can be sure that John is not commanding us to be unkind to non-believers. We must also note that in the first century there were no church buildings, so Christians met in private homes. Second John 10 warns first-century readers that they should not let a false teacher, posing as a Christian, teach heretical doctrines at their official house-church gatherings. In our day, we must prevent false teachers from occupying a church pulpit, but the Bible does not allow us to refuse to be hospitable toward people of other religions.

2 JOHN

- A. SALVATION (1-3)
- B. LOVE AND OBEDIENCE (4-6)
- C. TRUTH AND VIGILANCE (7-11)
- D. FINAL GREETINGS (12-13)

Essential Facts

PURPOSE:

To commend some faithful believers and to encourage them to continue teaching others about Christ.

AUTHOR:

The apostle John.

AUDIENCE:

"The lady chosen by God and ... her children" (2 John 1), possibly referring to a church and its members.

DATE WRITTEN:

Probably before 1 John, sometime near AD 90.

SETTING:

As with his first letter, John was possibly the only surviving apostle when he wrote this letter, which circulated among the churches of Asia Minor. He lived in Ephesus at the time, supervising the churches of Asia Minor.

KEY VERSES:

"Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them" (9-10).

KEY PEOPLE AND RELATIONSHIPS:

John with his Christian readers, a "sister, who is chosen by God" (2 John 13) and "the lady chosen by God" (2 John 1).

THE BIG PICTURE

Spiritual growth is a fragile process. Without vigilance and encouragement from others, we can easily slip back into sin. Knowing this, we need help from others who possess courage and sensitivity about our situation. Harsh condemnation will not help us, but neither will friends who flatter us with falsely positive words. Diligence together with faithful support is what we need to maintain our spiritual growth.

John's letter is a highly personal one, dealing with the kinds of issues that are addressed in a broader way in 1 John. The tone is warm and pastoral, and John even called himself "the elder" (2 John 1). He wrote this letter to commend and encourage "the lady chosen by God and ... her children." Whether this designation refers to an actual believer and her Christian children or to a church and its members is not certain. These believers had already demonstrated their faithfulness to God; there was no need for correction. But John did not want them to trip over the obstacles ahead that might threaten their continued service to God.

In balancing commendation and encouragement, John proved himself to be a wise counselor and a splendid example to all of us. We need to recognize each other's past successes, affirming one another. At the same time, we must be willing to point out the hazards ahead when we see them, sharing our hard-won wisdom as a warning for the unwary. Pointing out the obstacles ahead and encouraging one another to be careful are the loving things to do. Thus, this letter underscores the critical importance of sharing the hope of spiritual renewal with others.

SPIRITUAL RENEWAL THEMES

THE IMPORTANCE OF GUARDING AGAINST HERESY

John urged his readers to be careful about those they invited into their homes for participation in the church's worship. John's words resemble the caution of David, who in Psalm 101 vowed not to allow deceitful people in his house. John instructed his readers not to encourage these false teachers in any way. Sometimes we believe that in order to be fair we need to listen to everyone's point of view, but there are dangers in such an attitude. We must set limits on what we listen to if we are to protect our own spiritual growth.

THE CHALLENGE TO LOVE

Loving one another is the most basic act of obedience to God and an important element of our spiritual growth. At times, we may focus inward or become self-centered. Remembering to love others will not only please God, it will also help us to think of others and build good relationships.

As the word suggests, an *antichrist* is any person actively working to attack the person and work of Christ (Mark 13:22, 23; 2 Thess. 2:3, 4) by deceiving His people. This spirit of deception is what qualifies false teachers to be labeled “antichrists,” because the same spirit at work in the end-time Antichrist is already at work in those who currently deceive others into denying the truth.

All the references to “antichrist” are found in the writings of John the apostle (7:1, John 2:18, 22; 4:3). In this particular case, however, John is not referring to the Antichrist of the end times but to gnostic-type teachers.

Gnosticism did not emerge as a full-blown religious movement until the second century AD, but its teachings were already present when John wrote at the end of the first century. Gnosticism is a mystical religious system whose proponents teach that salvation comes from a secret, special knowledge available only to an initiated few. Its adherents also believe that the flesh is evil, thus God would never take on human flesh; consequently, they deny Jesus’ humanity. (The view that Jesus only appeared to be human but never actually assumed a physical body was known in the early centuries of Christianity as *docetism*.)

In combating these false teachers, John emphasizes the humanity of Jesus Christ while never letting his readers lose sight of Christ’s absolute deity. Teachings that deny the incarnation of Christ negate His work of salvation and His ongoing work as our High Priest (Heb. 4:14–16), for only a perfect Man could save us, and only God is perfect.

2 JOHN

¹The elder,

To the lady chosen by God and to her children, whom I love in the truth—and not I only, but also all who know the truth—²because of the truth, which lives in us and will be with us forever:

³Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father’s Son, will be with us in truth and love.

⁴It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us.⁵ And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another.⁶ And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.⁷ I say this because many deceivers, who

do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist.⁸ Watch out that you do not lose what we⁹ have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully.⁹ Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.¹⁰ If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them.¹¹ Anyone who welcomes them shares in their wicked work.

¹²I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete.

¹³The children of your sister, who is chosen by God, send their greetings.

Why Loving Our Neighbor Means Obeying God’s Commands

Read: 2 John 4–6 | Habit: Obedience

Throughout the New Testament we are told to love our neighbor. But how do we go about that task? John explains: “It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us. And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love” (2Jn 4–6).

The effects of our own sin have an effect on our neighbors, so when we refuse to obey God’s commands, we will indirectly affect their lives.

John’s twin commands to “walk in truth” (obey God) and “walk in love” (love our neighbors) are inextricably tied together. Just as we show our love for God by obeying him, we show our love for others—particularly our brothers and sisters in Christ—by keeping God’s commandments.¹

Here are two things we should know about love and obedience:

► *We need both love and truth*—Christians are often tempted to focus on one or the other to the exclusion of both. But we need both together to truly love our neighbors. If we do not, as Paul told the Ephesians, speak truth in love (see Eph 4:15), we are not modeling Christ. Similarly, if we withhold the truth about what God requires, we are not expressing love but showing hate for someone.

For instance, when we share the gospel we can’t give people the impression they can continue to engage in their favorite sin and still be a follower of Jesus. You do not love your neighbor by encouraging them to engage in actions that invoke God’s wrath (see Ps 5:4–5; Ro 1:18). At times we might need to put up with ungodly behavior, but the moment we begin to endorse it then we, too, have become suppressors of the truth. You cannot love your neighbor and want to see them excluded from the kingdom of Christ (see Eph 5:5).

► *Our obedience prevents “spillover” effects*—Every sin affects other people because there are no sins that do not transform us into ungodly, unloving creatures. The effects of our own sin have an effect on our neighbors, so when we refuse to obey God’s commands, we will indirectly affect their lives.

PRACTICAL TAKEAWAY: Loving our neighbor requires that we submit to God’s truth and obey his commands.

VERSE FOR THE DAY:
2 John 9

AUTHOR:
David Wiersbe and
Warren Wiersbe

PASSAGE FOR THE DAY:
2 John 8-9

On Gains and Losses

IN THESE two verses, the aged apostle John pointed out two special threats to the church: the danger of losing what we have gained, and the danger of making gains that are really losses. You and I certainly need discernment and wisdom to detect these dangers and overcome the enemy.

As to the first danger, John tells us, "Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully." Sometimes we are so anxious to move forward in God's work that we fail to conserve and protect the blessings we have already received . . .

The second danger is that of making gains that are really losses. Verse 9 reads, "Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God." This is a warning against the "progressive theology" that abandons "the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3) and ends up denying Jesus Christ. Over the centuries, more than one ministry has gone backwards by trying to move "forward" in developing a so-called up-to-date doctrinal position.

To be sure, there is always more to be learned from the Bible! And the unchanging Word of God must constantly be related to whatever new insight men discover in Scripture. But to go beyond the fundamental truths that the church holds dear is to make "gains" that are really losses. We must know the truth, live the truth, defend the truth and share the truth with others. But we must never go *beyond* that truth . . .

This is why God's work is so important, and why it demands the very best that we can give it. We are on guard duty for God, staying alert to protect our gains and rejecting profits that are really losses. If you ask, "Who is equal to such a task?" (2 Corinthians 2:16), the answer is clear: "Our competence comes from God" (2 Corinthians 3:5).

Additional Scripture Readings:
John 8:31-38; Hebrews 10:35-39

Go to page 1380 for your next
devotional reading.



LIFE LESSONS: Don't trust teaching that contradicts the Bible (verse 7).

AUTHORI! AUTHORI!

John wrote five books of the New Testament: his Gospel, three letters and Revelation. Only Paul wrote more.

2 JOHN

BELIEVERS VS.
DECEIVERS

DID YOU KNOW?

John included in this letter both encouragement for believers (verse 4) and warnings against deceivers (verse 7).

- ▶ John and his brother James were among the first disciples called by Jesus to follow him. Jesus referred to them as the "sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17).
- ▶ John is the only Biblical author who wrote two books containing only one chapter.

BY THE NUMBERS

CHAPTER 1
VERSES 13
WORDS 302

KEY PASSAGE

"And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love" (verse 6).

LIFE LESSONS: Don't support wicked, false teachers or false religions (verse 11).