

## Little Letters with Big Messages The 2<sup>nd</sup> Epistle of John

**Intro:** Another one of the short letters of the NT is the epistle commonly called 2 John. Though a short letter, it has produced lengthy discussions about its canonicity, authorship, and the identification of its recipients because of its mysterious introduction:

*The elder to the chosen lady and her children... (2 John 1-2)*

**Who is “the elder”? Who is “the chosen lady and her children”? And most importantly, what is the message sent to the recipients of this epistle; and how can we benefit from it?**

### Authorship and recipients

#### *Who is “the elder”?*

“The elder” is the apostle John acknowledged by many early church writers as the author of more than one epistle. Since it was carried by someone to its destination, the identification of the author would have been clear to the destination audience. Thus, John’s choice to describe himself in this way may be to affirm his age (the old man) or his position (as elder of a congregation, Cf. 1 Pet. 5:2). Either would have given his letter a more sympathetic ear by his readers. Readers of the works attributed to the apostle John (The Fourth Gospel, 1<sup>st</sup> Jn, 2<sup>nd</sup> Jn., and 3<sup>rd</sup> John & the Revelation) will immediately see the shared vocabulary and principles common to all the works that suggest a single author.

#### *Who is “the chosen lady and her children”?*

This phrase has generated vigorous debate and discussion.

*Some regard the letter to a Christian woman and her children who live in her house. It is also possible that this family also hosted the church in the place where they were.*

*Others suggest that the expression is a figurative expression for a local congregation and its members. It may seem a stretch until one remembers that the Greek work for “lord” is kurios; and that “lady” translates is a feminine form “kuria”. Throughout history such female designations had been used for the people of God (daughter of Zion, bride of Christ). Here the additional adjective “elekte” may gives special emphasis to the church as Christ’s chosen bride.*

Take your pick.

***Some might wonder why not “The apostle John to the church at \_\_\_\_\_”. That would have cleared things up for us; but there may have been reasons why a more anonymous salutation was used (for example, the problem of persecution and the identification of those who were disciples).***

## Analysis of the book

### ***Salutation, v. 1-3***

*The elder to the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in truth; and not only I, but also all who know the truth, for the sake of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever: Grace, mercy and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love. (2 John 1-3)*

The introduction itself sets the tone for the whole book by its repetition of the word “truth”.

*John loves “in truth”.*

*Others “who know the truth” love the elect lady.*

*John writes “for the sake of the truth which abides with us and will be with us forever”.*

*The blessings of grace and peace will be with the recipients “in truth and love”.*

John writes out of concern for the truth which the church knows and in which it abides and which unifies the church and motivates the brotherly love within it.

### ***The exhortation to walk in brotherly love (v. 4-6)***

*I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth, just as we have received commandment to do from the Father. And now I ask you, lady, not as writing to you a new commandment, but the one which we have had from the beginning, that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it. (2 John 4-6)*

John’s exhortation to brotherly love stresses two important things:

The common to love our brethren originated with Christ from the beginning.

For John this command comes from his own experiences with Christ in the upper room:

*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. (John 13:34)*

The old command to love one’s neighbor had been made “new” by Christ’s self-sacrificial love in giving himself in behalf of His disciples.

The command to love is guided by the commandments of Christ.

For John, love is not mere sentimental feeling for others; but a reasoned and deliberate love guided by one’s understanding of what the Lord has commanded.

*“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. (John 14:15)*

Likewise, love’s guidance by Christ’s commands prevents it from being shown in improper ways toward those who undermine the truth.

### ***The exhortation to watch against error (v. 7-11)***

*For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves that you might not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds. (2 John 7-11)*

The command to let love be governed by the principle of truth had special application to those who taught false doctrine. Yes, we should love all men but we must not support those whose teaching would destroy the souls of men.

John identifies a group of false teachers, deceivers, he calls them who would lead God's people away from the true gospel and its teaching about Christ (thus, antichrists).

Most commentators suggest that John in his epistles deals with some pre-Gnostic heretics whose views of God and matter would not allow them to believe that God truly came into flesh.

Thus, John gives two important exhortations:

*Do not be influenced by the false teachers.*

For John to believe the teaching of the Gnostics was not to merely embrace a harmless philosophy; it was to deny one of the essential doctrines of salvation, namely, that God in the person of Christ came into the world of flesh that he might give His life a ransom for many. If the false teachers are right, then there was no atonement made for the sins of the world. For the merits of the sacrifice of Jesus are that He, as the Son of God (deity Himself), died for the sins of mankind.

*Do not support these false teachers.*

The language of this text seems to address the problem of thinking that love should be shown indiscriminately; but here there are clearly implied limits. The elect lady from understand that love for God and others would cause one not to support those who would lead them into sin.

The actions John forbids involve giving our support and blessing to the false teacher.

*Do not receive him into your house*—is probably to be taken as a statement of not providing support or an audience to be influenced by false doctrine

*Do not give him a greeting*—is likewise an encouragement not to verbally support the ministry of those would lead others astray.

***Final greetings, v. 12-13***

**The Big Message of this little epistle**

***The epistle is about maintaining the truth in love.***

“2 John is written, therefore, to warn “the elect lady” not to show hospitality toward itinerant preachers who cannot confess that Christ has come in the flesh” or he later affirms: “Believers are warned to exercise discernment and not to invest in the work of heretical propagandists by showing them hospitality. Put briefly, “Warning: Do not house false teachers.” (Daniel Wallace, bible.org)

***Sidlow Baxter’s interesting summary focuses on the messages of the two main sections:***

Love is the centre-test of Christian practice.

The person of Christ is the centre-test of Christian doctrine.

***There must be a balance between love of others and love of the truth.***

“Our love grows soft if it is not strengthened by truth; our truth grows hard if it is not softened by love” (Stott, Tyndale Commentary on 2 Jn)

***Though showing hospitality is a commanded application of loving our brethren, we cannot show hospitality to those undermine the gospel and destroy the souls of others.***

John’s intention is not to precipitate endless church rifts by the belief that everyone person who expresses a viewpoint different from our own is a false teacher.

Instead he warns about those who deliberately leave the faith and seek to take our disciples with them by denying truth essential to salvation.

The distinction is at times a difficult one; but we must avoid either extreme separatism that makes every disagreement a matter of fellowship or the extreme liberalism that compromises essential Christian doctrine for the sake of man-made union.

**Conclusion: John’s warning has lasting relevance for the church. We must protect ourselves against and withhold support for those who “go too far” and no longer abide in the teaching of Christ.**