

2 John

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Quote

“Faithfulness in little things is a big thing.”

Chrysostom

BOOK PROFILE: 2 JOHN

- Sent to Christians near Ephesus, in Asia (western Turkey)

- The “chosen lady and her children” might refer to an actual family, or perhaps is a metaphor for a church, possibly near Ephesus, a sister church to the church that received 1 John
- Probably written approximately the same time as 1 John, perhaps slightly later
- Written to encourage and strengthen these Christians to walk in love toward one another and to resist false teaching. Very similar to 1 John
- Emphasizes the need to obey God’s commands
- Refutes false teachers who denied that Jesus was truly God and truly man
- A highly personal letter reflecting John’s affection for these believers and his deep concern for their welfare

AUTHOR PROFILE: JOHN

- Author is identified only as “the elder,” traditionally identified as the apostle John. “Elder” probably does not refer to an office in the church, but rather is a term of endearment and veneration, similar to an “elder statesman”
- The apostle John, one of the original twelve disciples of Jesus, who also wrote the Gospel of John
- The disciple whom Jesus loved ([John 21:20](#), [24](#))
- One of the two sons of Zebedee, the brother of James
- Along with James, nicknamed the “Sons of Thunder” ([Mark 3:17](#))
- Formerly a follower of John the Baptist
- Wrote this letter in his old age
- Known as the “Apostle of Love,” since the theme of love is so prominent in his writings

IN A NUTSHELL

Many deceivers are around, so I am glad to hear that some of you are walking in the truth, for God commanded that we walk in love. Be on guard against their teaching. Do not be taken in by them. Do not give them hospitality or aid in their damaging activity.

Love and Resist

I. INTRODUCTION

Dependable as the Morning Mail

How faithful do you have to be in order to be faithful? If your car starts two out of three times, do you think it's faithful? If your newspaper boy skips delivery once a week, is he faithful? What if you don't go to work twice a month? If you miss a couple of house payments a year, does the bank say, "Ten out of twelve isn't bad"?

No, a great deal more "faithfulness" is required in these areas. How faithful do we have to be in our Christian walk? Or how faithful do we have to be to the fundamentals of the faith? The apostle John wrote a letter to either a lady or a church (scholars are divided) commending them for their faithful Christian walk, and exhorting them to resist false teaching. He wanted his readers to be as dependable as the daily mail in both their actions and their beliefs. That's faithful.

II. COMMENTARY

Love and Resist

MAIN IDEA: *Christians are to walk in love toward one another, obey God's commandments, and be alert not to assist false teachers—those who deny Jesus.*

A. Salutation (vv. 1–3)

SUPPORTING IDEA: *May God's blessings be upon the people I love—people who let the truth live in them.*

1–3. John writes to a **chosen lady and her children**. Bible scholars are divided as to whether this refers to an actual family whom John knew, or whether it refers to a church. The lack of any personal references in the letter, in contrast to 3 John, suggests to many that it is addressed to a church. In that case, it might be a sister church to the church John wrote to in his first epistle. This commentary will intentionally leave the question open.

John stated his love for the chosen lady, acknowledging that every person who loves truth loves her. This suggests she was well known in Christian circles. **Chosen** means one of God's elect, a true Christian.

The relationship John had with her is founded on truth. That relationship is shared by all who know the truth, that is, all true believers. If it were not for Jesus, they would not have a relationship. Truth is the basis of all true love. It is not simply an intellectual property. It is that which lives in and directs life. Jesus is the truth that creates such love. This truth is eternal and must be guarded carefully.

John wished them **grace, mercy and peace**, common words in ancient Christian greetings. He also blessed them with the less common **truth and love**, two themes that form the foundation for the letter to follow.

B. Christians Must Practice the Truth (vv. 4–6)

SUPPORTING IDEA: *It is a joy that some of you are walking in the truth. We are commanded to love one another and to walk in obedience to God's commands.*

4. When people we mentor and disciple are **walking in the truth** as God has commanded, we are filled with joy and pleasure. Pointing out some obedient people does not necessarily indicate that others were disobedient. Rather, John only knew about some of them.

5. This presents not a new command, but an old one, that we **love one another** (1 John 2:7–8). Followers of Jesus had this truth from the beginning of Jesus' ministry (John 13:34–35; 15:9–17).

6. What is love? It plays itself out in the real world in obedience. The essence of love is that we keep God's commandments. This glorifies God, is best for others, and is best for us. Everything God asks of us is intended to give something good to us or keep us from harm. First John presented the same emphasis on love and the same link between love and obedience.

C. Christians Must Protect the Truth (vv. 7–11)

SUPPORTING IDEA: *We must not be led astray by the world's deceivers, those who do not acknowledge Jesus. Nor should we assist them in any way, thus participating in their evil.*

7. The deceivers going **out into the world** may refer to their leaving the church in Ephesus to found their own movement. Their very numbers, plus the magnitude of their error, made them dangerous people. They did not understand and believe correctly about Jesus. They denied that Jesus came in the flesh. Some people taught that he only appeared to be in the flesh. This strikes at the heart of true belief about Jesus (Col. 2:9; 1 John 4:2). It marks these people as antichrists, people who deny fundamental truth about Jesus (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3).

8. To heed the teachings of these antichrists results not in the loss of salvation but in the loss of spiritual reward. God would not forget what they had done for him: "God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people" (Heb. 6:10). Yet, to depart from the rewardable path is to lose the full reward coming to those who do not follow such false teachers (1 Cor. 3:8, 11–15).

9. The antichrists—the false teachers and false prophets talked about more thoroughly in 1 John—were running ahead, and were not continuing **in the teaching of Christ**. **Runs ahead** is also translated "goes too far" (NASB) or "transgresses" (NKJV). These give a more complete understanding of the danger. The teaching of Christ may refer to the teachings of Jesus or to teachings about Jesus. In either case, it refers to orthodox truth established and accepted in the church.


The text seems to center on defection from the truth by those who had once held to the truth. Some teachers believe this refers to Christians who depart from the faith. If this is the case, to deviate from the truth would be to leave God behind. In the sense of fellowship and blessing, the person who defects from the faith **does not have God**. According to this position, it does not suggest loss of salvation, but points to doctrinal deviation and disobedience.

Other Bible teachers believe the one who **runs ahead** is not a true Christian. He may have given every appearance of being a true Christian, but his defection from the faith proves he never was a true

believer. This seems more in keeping with the teaching of 1 John.

Scripture seeks those who learn and practice the true teachings, those who have a full understanding of who Jesus is. Jesus is equal with God the Father. To have Jesus is to have the Father, and to have the Father is to have Jesus (see commentary on [1 John 5:20](#)).

10–11. These verses seem harsh. Those who remain faithful to the teaching of Christ must resist those who do not. If a person did not teach truth about Jesus, these believers were not to practice hospitality toward him. This does not suggest that we are not to be cordial to false teachers, or that we cannot invite a member of a false sect into our home to talk with him. Rather, it refers to a level of hospitality that helps the false teacher spread his or her false doctrine.

In  the first century, traveling was difficult. The traveler could not find hotels and restaurants. Traveling teachers and missionaries depended on others to house and feed them. John urged his readers not to “fund” these false teachers by housing and feeding them. To do so would be to share **in his wicked work**. In our day, when people of all sorts of religious belief use the media to plead for financial support, we need to be careful what kind of doctrine we fund.

D. Farewell (vv. 12–13)

SUPPORTING IDEA: *Face-to-face fellowship often brings more joy than written correspondence.*

12–13. John had **much to write** to them, but he wanted to communicate with them **face to face**. He anticipated a **visit** to them soon and would say more then. This would make his **joy ... complete**. We do not know what more he wanted to say, but we might speculate that he wanted to deal in greater detail with the problems at hand. Second John is a condensed version of the issue the apostle dealt with in 1 John, and we might imagine that he would cover the things in 1 John that we do not see in 2 John.

The unusual farewell can be understood as addressed either to a lady or a church. If it was to an individual lady, then the apostle had apparently met her sister’s children, who sent their greetings. If the “lady” was a local church, then **your chosen sister** was also a local church. It suggests that the members of the church from which John wrote sent their greetings to the church to which the letter was addressed. It testifies to the interest and concern that different churches had for one another.

MAIN IDEA REVIEW: *Many deceivers are around, so I am glad to hear that some of you are walking in the truth, for God commanded that we walk in love. Be on guard against their teaching. Do not be taken in by them. Do not give them hospitality or aid in their damaging activity.*

III. CONCLUSION

Standing at Your Post

Excavations at the ancient city of Pompeii have revealed many historical insights and some stirring examples of faithfulness. When Mt. Vesuvius erupted and destroyed the city, many people were

buried in the ruins. Some were found in cellars, as if they had gone there for safety. Some were found in the upper rooms of buildings, probably for the same reason. One Roman sentinel was found standing at the city gate where he had been placed by the captain, with his hand still grasping his weapon. There, while the earth shook beneath him—there while the floods of ashes and cinders covered him—he had stood at his post. There, after a thousand years, his faithfulness was revealed.

That is how faithful we are to be to Jesus and his truth. We are not to be deceived by those who would sway us from the truth. We are to stand firm, strong, and resolute. When Jesus comes, or when we go to meet him, we are to be found at our post with our weapons in our hands, believing the truth and living the truth.

John focused on faithfulness in his letter to the **lady and her children**. He commended them for faithfulness in their actions (walking in the truth) and exhorted them to be faithful in their belief (watch out for deceivers). He wanted them to stand, fixed, at their assigned post in life.

PRINCIPLES

- When we walk in truth, it makes other people happy. When others walk in the truth, it makes us happy.
- To love God is to obey him.
- Many deceivers in the world tempt the church in every age.
- Only alert believers are safe from deception.
- If we support evil workers in any way, we participate in their evil work.

APPLICATION

- Show your love for God not by warm, fuzzy feelings on Sunday morning, but in gritty obedience Monday through Saturday.
- Evaluate the television preacher, the author of the book you are reading, and the church you belong to and support by their faithfulness to who Jesus is and to their personal integrity.
- Give support to ministries that demonstrate integrity in character, holding to historic Christian truth.

IV. LIFE APPLICATION

The Liar's Club

I read once of a liar's club in Burlington, Wisconsin. You could join for one dollar—and a lie. Some of the stories people used to get into the liar's club were “doozies!” One man said his wife's feet were so cold that every time she took her shoes off the furnace kicked on. Another man said he was fishing one day where the fish were biting so well he had to stand behind a tree to bait his hook. Someone else said he cut a tree down on a day when it was so foggy that the tree didn't fall over until the fog lifted.

One farmer said his wife was so lazy she fed the chickens popcorn so the eggs would turn themselves over when she was frying them in a pan.

A gentleman from Alabama looked over the national registry of the liar's club and discovered liars from every state in the country except Alabama. He wrote to the liar's club, pointed this out, and then added that this was because there were no liars in Alabama. The liar's club was so impressed that they gave him a free lifetime membership.

These aren't really lies, of course. They are tall tales. The difference is that no one is supposed to know that a lie is a lie, but everyone knows that a tall tale is not true. Lying is wrong. Tall tales are just fun.

While outrageous stories and tall tales are fun and harmless, lies are no fun—and they are very harmful. One of the pressing problems seen throughout the New Testament is false teachers. The faithful are warned about people going around trying to get others to believe their teaching, which is different from the teaching of Jesus or the apostles. Perhaps they could not be accused of lying, because they apparently believed what they were teaching. But their teaching certainly was not true, and we must treat their teaching as a lie.

The problem is not restricted to New Testament times. Lying is also with us today. Alan Bloom, in his masterful work, *The Closing of the American Mind*, states that the single most agreed-upon truth on the American college campus today is that truth is relative—that there is no such thing as absolute truth. Rather, each person is free to determine what is true for himself or herself. You may believe one thing is true, while another person believes the opposite. This is okay because each thing is true to the person who believes it.

This perspective is wreaking havoc with business, our education system, government, the family, morals and values, and everything else in American life. As a result, every person is doing what is right in their own eyes (see [Judg. 21:25](#)). When every individual does what is right in their own eyes, the social structure begins to break down. And this viewpoint is also creeping into the church, because all people in the church are influenced by society at large.

We are becoming sick because we are drinking from a polluted supply of truth. Into that supply have been dumped lies, inaccuracies, misconceptions, runaway individualism, the demand of rights without responsibilities, selfishness, sensuality, and a conviction that “my happiness is more important than yours.” As we drink from this polluted supply, we are becoming morally ill, just as we would become physically ill if we were drinking water from a reservoir that contained filth, waste, and disease.

We may have little influence over what the world's values are, but we have great influence over the values in the church. There, we must raise the call for absolute truth. Truth is what God says it is, regardless of what we believe or what we feel. The church must stand firm on this point.

When we as believers make a skillful, pleasing defense of what we believe in and then back it up with good works, we create a wonderful message. We need to argue forcefully and candidly while demonstrating the love of Christ to the world. The world is so hardened to the Scriptures and so confused by the issue of truth that it cannot accept our message. When our message comes through the love of Christ, then people tend to accept the reality of what we say.

Like the readers of John's second epistle, we must practice the truth, and we must protect the truth. We must stand firm against the false teachers of our day, and we must live out our faith. In doing so, we remain strong; the church remains viable; and the lost are shown an accurate picture of Jesus.

V. PRAYER

Dear heavenly Father, help us to remain strong in our Christian walk, and help us to be alert to false teaching—to recognize it and to stand against it. Help us to pass on to future generations an accurate record of biblical truth and a good example to live by. Amen.

VI. DEEPER DISCOVERIES

A. Jesus Christ ... in the Flesh (v. 7)

Scripture describes the devil as a deceiver and a destroyer. The many **deceivers** who **have gone out into the world** are playing into the hands of the great deceiver—Satan. His goal is to destroy. He wants to keep people from eternal salvation. He can encourage this in many ways. One way is to pervert the accurate picture of who Jesus is. If he can get people to accept an inaccurate understanding of Jesus, he can keep them from experiencing salvation. Therefore, distorting the accuracy of who Jesus is becomes a prime method of operation for the Evil One.

Two balanced truths about Jesus usually get distorted: he is fully God; he is fully human. It is critical to believe both these concepts, for two reasons. One is that Scripture teaches both truths. The second is that both are necessary for our salvation.

Jesus had a human body. He was born physically ([Matt. 1:18](#)) and he grew normally as humans do ([Luke 2:52](#)). He referred to himself as a man, and others recognized him as a man ([John 8:40](#); [1 John 1:1](#)). As all people do, he got hungry ([Matt. 4:2](#)), became thirsty ([John 19:28](#)), grew tired ([John 4:6](#)), felt love and compassion ([Matt. 9:36](#)), wept ([John 11:35](#)), and was tempted ([Heb. 4:15](#)).

He was also God. He existed before he was born as Jesus of Nazareth ([John 8:58](#)), was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary ([Luke 1:31, 34](#)), claimed to be one with the Father ([John 5:18](#)), called himself the Son of God ([Matt. 26:63–64](#)), and performed miracles to prove that he could forgive sin ([Mark 2:1–12](#)). He was worshiped by men and angels ([Matt. 14:33](#)), and his name is mentioned with other members of the Trinity ([2 Cor. 13:14](#)). All the fullness of deity dwells in him ([Col. 2:9](#)). [Philippians 2:1–11](#) refers to the relationship of his humanity and his deity and how these two facets of his being are related to each other.

Jesus brings salvation. If Jesus were not human, he could not have died for our sins. If he were not God, it would not have mattered if he had. He had to be sinless and human, or his death could not have counted for ours.

If we accept the clear testimony of Scripture, we must accept that Jesus was both fully human and fully divine. To deny either truth is to strike at the heart of the New Testament teaching, presenting a

Christ who cannot save us from our sins.