

2 John

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2John 1:1-3

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.

There have been a lot of discussions about the author since he is only identified as “the elder”. Elders were established at local congregations but if this author were just one of the local elders the designation would not have been so restrictive as “**the** elder”. He obviously was not a member of the church but must have been so well known by the members that he could identify himself only as the elder. Most interpreters then think the author is the same as for the other epistles and the gospel John. The recipient is identified as “the chosen lady” and such has also been the subject of considerable speculation. It could be addressed to some special lady but the context of the letter indicates that it was written to a group. The name is probably a designation for a local church with “her children” being the members of the congregation. The name chosen for the addressee could have been a means of protecting the church from persecution since if it fell into the wrong hands it could have been interpreted as just a letter to a female friend.

The truth that they all share is the truth about Jesus as the Christ and the Son of God. People sharing this truth also share in the love that God has demonstrated by His grace in granting them this truth that permeates their being. This truth will be with all God’s children forever and so is not dependent upon any emotional context. Rather than asking for special blessings to be with the recipients, John states that grace, mercy, and peace will be with them forever because they are all from God the Father and from Jesus Christ who gives them freely in truth and in love.

2John 1:4-8

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. 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.

The phrase “some of your children” refers to members of the congregation. John was very pleased to know that some of them were walking in the truth as “we” (the apostles) had been commanded by the Father. It is likely that the church had suffered a split of membership as John addressed in his first letter and that the word “some” refers to those who remained among the true believers and were not deceived by the false teachers. John used the same Greek word for “walk” as in 1 John 1:7 that describes the entire spectrum of one’s life reflecting the true teachings of the Gospel. This is a standard way that John writes as indicated in John 8:12; 11:9; 12:35, 1 John 1:6-7 and elsewhere. If the Gospel message has not transformed a person’s “walk” then he should wonder if he has been born again. John also stated in 1 John 2:7 that he was not giving them a new command concerning love. I repeat my comments here:

“John tells the congregation that he has not been given a new gospel or changes in the gospel as did the false teachers. He is reminding them that the commands as given by Jesus and recorded in the gospel messages is true and complete. However he is giving them a new commandment that is based upon the truth given by Jesus Christ. That new commandment is to love the brothers and sisters who are in Christ. This had already been given by Jesus: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35). John gives this as a new commandment in the context of his overall message concerning how one may know that he is a child of God. The person who has been truly regenerated and justified will find a love for other Christians growing in his heart. If a person claims to be a Christian and is cold toward other Christians then he should doubt his salvation. This is an old command in that such was mentioned in the Old Testament also: “You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.” (Lev 19:18). But the Jews took this to mean their neighbors were fellow Jews and they were to hate their enemies (all who were not Jews). However Jesus took this commandment to a new level when He commented as recorded in Matt 5:43-47.”

The love that Christians have for each other transcends any emotional base for it reflects the love that Jesus has for His people that led Him to complete His mission on earth for the Father. Not to love as Christ loves means to remain in darkness (1 John 2:11) and in death (1 John 3:14).

John then relates to them how many deceivers have gone out into the world. What marks them as deceivers is that they deny that Jesus came in the flesh. Either some of these deceivers had left their congregation or they had heard about what happened at another church. As noted above, it is likely that this congregation had also suffered a split with the deceivers leaving. In verse 8 John tells them to persevere in the true Gospel. If they do not then two losses will occur. One loss will be the work done by the apostle in either maintaining and/or establishing the congregation. Of course John does not mean that they would lose their salvation. The other loss will be some of the rewards that believers have based upon their works (Matt 5:12; John 4:36; 1 Cor 3:8; Rev 11:18; 22:12).

2John 1:9-11

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.

There are some “tells” a person could have if he is really not born again but is only pretending to teach the Gospel. One would be that the person elaborates beyond what is exegetically allowed in his teaching. Eisegesis is reading into Scripture what is not said or even implied and a genuine Christian could get “carried away” with his teaching. However a true child of God would gladly repent from his false teaching when confronted with love and with Scripture proof that what he was teaching was too far away from the teaching of Christ. John is not saying that the person could lose his salvation but that false teaching that does not abide in the teaching of Christ indicates that the person may not have ever been born again. Certainly the false teachers of whom John has been referring do not have God. Anyone who abides in the teaching will not deny the deity of Jesus Christ and so will have both the Father and the Son:

John 5:23 in order that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.

John 14:6-7 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me. "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him."

One method of testing the spirits (1 John 4:1) involves knowing the Scriptures and judging a teacher’s message by the truth. This relates to John’s third test of salvation regarding proper doctrine.

Verse 10 has received a lot of attention among interpreters. It is important to note the context in that the false teachers were not in disagreement among some trivial matters such as the color of the carpet. They were denying the incarnation of the Son of God, which is basic to the Gospel message. If anyone comes to the church wanting to teach a doctrine not rooted in the Gospel then they should not receive any hospitality or even greeting. Thus it is critical that pastors properly determine a person’s doctrine before letting them “have the pulpit” during some worship service. The false teachers should have been told that they could not teach in the congregation of believers. A worship service is not a debate! There is a proper format for debates among people of different beliefs but that is not during a time of worship of God. Many churches also offer books for sale during revivals or other times of worship with outside speakers and the books should also be properly screened since members of the congregation could assume that the books have been approved. This same approach should be practiced regarding relatives who have moral standards opposite to those of Christianity and thus could damage the ethical development of children in the household.

2John 1:12-13

Having many things to write to you, I do not want to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, that your joy may be made full. The children of your chosen sister greet you.

It is easy for written communications to be misunderstood so it is best to discuss important matters “face to face” if possible. John wants their joy to be made full by knowing as much about the truth of the Gospel and its proper applications. The children of your chosen sister would be members of another congregation who are sending their greetings. Again if this letter were to fall into improper hands someone might just think that it is all about correspondence between two sisters and their children.