

THE BOOK OF 2 JOHN

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INTRODUCTION

The Books of 2 and 3 John are believed to be written by the same author and most scholars believe the author is John the Evangelist. The date of writing 2 and 3 John would most likely be at about the same time as John's other letters, between 85-95 A.D.

The language and words used in 2 and 3 John are similar to the other works by the apostle John and there are several similarities in the context between 2 and 3 John with those found in the Gospel of John. Therefore, the evidence of the similarities of the context points that the author of the books of 2 and 3 John is John the beloved disciple who also wrote the Gospel of John.

Here are a few examples. 'If you love me, keep my commands.' **John 14:15**. 'Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.' **John 14:21**.

'If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love.' **John 15:10**. 'You are my friends if you do what I command.' **John 15:14**.

You will clearly see that the same context of the above verses is also presented in 2 and 3 John. '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.' **2 John 6**. 'Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God.' **3 John 11**

2 John is addressed to 'the elect lady and her children.' Much discussion is centred on the identity of the recipient. Was it actually an individual or was it a church? An obvious keyword in the short letter is 'truth', which appears five times in the first four verses.

A very important emphasis of the Book is the necessity of 'continuing' in the teaching of Christ. To go beyond that body of teaching places one out of fellowship with God and with Christ. Lending support to false teachers causes one to become guilty of the same error that the false teacher to whom you have lent support was guilty of teaching.

THE TEXT

'The 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— because of the truth, which lives in us and will be with us forever: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, will be with us in truth and love.' **2 John 1-3**

John addresses this letter of his to the 'elect lady'. Who this 'elect lady' is, is uncertain. It could be a special sister that John refers to or it could be a figurative expression regarding the local church of Christ. For those who might wonder how it can refer, in a figurative way, to the church just remember that the church is the bride of Christ, **Ephesians 5:23-33**.

In either case, John addresses this letter to encourage her. I'm inclined to think John is addressing the local church, and the children of that local church would be the individual members.

John identifies himself as 'the elder.' Should we understand this as a 'church office' or merely John, the aged? Some people think it refers to John, the apostle as the Presbyter, one who is 'pastoring' the churches in the area, other people think it's possible both, John is writing as a church elder but also John the elder because of his age. However,

it's worth noting that 'pastoring' churches, was the function of the elders in each church, it wasn't the 'job' of the preachers, Acts 14:23. Philippians 1:1 / 1 Peter 5:1.

I don't want to minimise the role of the preacher, and neither do I want to minimise the role John served. However, biblically speaking, the preacher was to preach and teach God's word, 2 Timothy 4:2 / Acts 20:28.

John, the elder, genuinely loves the church because of the church's love of the truth of God, 2 John 1. Because of their love for the truth, the truth lives in them and will be with them forever, Colossians 3:16-17.

Those who love God will love the truth of God, those who love God will love God's church. This is important because we cannot separate Christ from the church. To be in Christ is to be in His church. Ephesians 1:18-23 / Ephesians 5:23-32.

With John's greeting, he affirms the standing of Jesus with God, the Father, and His authority. In other words, John has attributed his authority in writing this letter to the church to be from God, both the Father and the Son, 2 John 3. As someone once said, 'grace is the favour of God, mercy is compassion of God, and peace is the result when God removes guilt and misery'.

There is a lot in this statement because as the Christian walks each day, some days are better, far better, than other days. It might be that all he or she can ever think about is that God loves him or her.

'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. 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. Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully.' 2 John 4-8

John, the elder, is very pleased that those who are members of the local church are doing as they should be, 'walking in truth'. The meaning of this phrase simply means that they are walking in accordance with God's will, Philippians 1:27 / 1 John 1:5-9.

Walking in truth doesn't mean, in the context, walking in a genuinely spiritual way apart from hearing and obeying the commandments of God, 2 John 4.

All too many times, many people feel that if they walk in accordance with what they think is God's will in contrast to what God has revealed things are well, this isn't the truth. Things are well when we first hear God, and then obey Him, when we listen to God and obey Him, in truth, we are showing our love toward both God and man, 2 John 5-6. To God first, because He first loved us and we now understand love, to man because as we listen to God, we will desire to be an asset in the life of others. Of course, there will be no compromising of God's will, for that isn't even an acceptable option, but we will seek to be good to our neighbour, Matthew 7:12.

Can we sum up God's law in a single sentence? The Lord seems to have thought so, He said we are to love God and love our neighbour as himself. The Law of Moses hangs on these two precepts, Matthew 22:34-40.

Under the new covenant, can we summarise the Gospel of Christ? Well, I am not sure, perhaps we can consider Matthew 11:28-30, and couple that with Matthew 7:12.

In both cases, I'm not sure that would be a good summary, probably it would still be best to sum it up as the Lord did when the question was asked to Him. Regardless of covenants, the sentiment would hold true, when we love God, we will listen and obey. When the love of God transforms us, our neighbour will be a beneficiary.

While John was pleased with those who walked in the truth, he was very mindful that some weren't interested in the truth at all, much less walking in accordance with it, verse 7. No one can get anywhere with God if there is a denial of the incarnation, God becomes flesh, of Jesus Christ, John 1:14.

John doesn't attribute anything positive to them, they may have been sincere, but as far as the Holy Spirit was and still is concerned, these people are nothing more than deceivers, liars, and the antichrist. They are workers of Satan and they need to be exposed!

And so, John says, always be on guard, **2 John 8**. If the guard is let down, there is a real possibility of being duped by one of Satan's workers and losing those things we worked for.

Things we worked for? I thought there were no 'works' in a godly religion? Let us consider this for a moment, the vast majority of those in the religious world have been told for years that 'works' play no role in salvation and it plays no role in one's standing before God.

Concerning salvation this is most certainly correct, we cannot 'work' or earn salvation. Salvation is the result of God's love for man, and man obeys God's requirements to receive that gift.

When God set forth His commands, and man obeys those commands of God, for anyone to attribute 'works to this obedient person is the height of being uninformed about the nature of God and what significance God has assigned to those commands.

After salvation has been received, God has created us to be His workman, **Ephesians 2:10**. In other words, we are to glorify God in what we do, **Titus 2:11-14**.

Some believe that the 'things we worked for' probably refer to pastoral and missionary efforts being accomplished, these things would be lost. This could be true but the problem is that one must be cautious in limiting the words of John to only this.

Look at the verse again. John says we are to look to ourselves. Why? If the one who is charged to look at self, doesn't do so, then that person will lose the reward, the reward for which one worked, **2 Corinthians 13:5**.

Exactly what it is, isn't stated, but it will be lost just the same. It could be that John is warning them against loss in both worlds.

THE ANTI-CHRIST

Some religious people believe that the Antichrist is a man, now living, who will soon rise to the position of a worldwide dictator but this isn't what the Bible teaches. The term 'antikristos' is found five times in four New Testament passages, all in John's epistles, **1 John 2:18 / 1 John 2:22 / 1 John 4:3 / 2 John 7**.

First, there is no one specific person denominated 'the antichrist' in the New Testament. Rather, John declares that 'many antichrists' have arisen, **1 John 2:18 / 2 John 7**.

Second, the Bible doesn't suggest that a mysterious antichrist is some sinister personage who is to appear in the late twentieth century. There were many antichrists in the first century as **1 John 2:18** and **1 John 4:3** tell us.

A careful study of John's references to 'antichrist' reveals that the term is a general designation employed to suggest a spirit of unbelief that can be manifested in a variety of ways, both in the past and present, it's not a specified person.

'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. Anyone who welcomes them shares in their wicked work.' **2 John 9-11**

What would be the full reward, **2 John 8** isn't explicitly stated, but we can see that in the remainder of the context something more than an earthly accomplishment is in view. John was concerned about those who denied the incarnation of the Lord, he was also pleased that the children, members, were walking in the truth.

Contextually, we have both ideas before us to help us understand what John refers to in **2 John 9**, when the phrase ‘teaching of Christ’ is used. The foundation upon which one walks in the truth of God is the incarnation of the Lord Jesus. Thus, when one transgresses, goes beyond, the revealed will of God, that person doesn’t have God. It’s not a matter of merely denying the fact that God became flesh, but it’s also a matter of going beyond the teachings of the New Testament. Consider what Paul said about his teaching in **Romans 15:18**, or what Peter said about speaking in **1 Peter 4:11**.

God has revealed His will for man and the preacher is to preach it, **2 Timothy 4:2 / 2 Timothy 3:16-17 / Romans 15:4**. In order for this to be accomplished, it is to God’s revealed will one must turn. If we don’t turn to God’s revealed will, it’s opinion. It’s quite possible that our opinion can become tradition, which can hinder our understanding and relationship with God, **Matthew 15:7-9**.

Note what John says; when we go beyond the will of God, we don’t have God, the Father, nor the Son. If someone comes to us with these sentiments, that person is to be refused. This is serious!

Consider the seriousness of the matter. If someone comes to us and brings a doctrine contrary to that which is read in the New Testament, that person is to be refused into your home and not welcomed. Why?

Because the doctrine of Christ isn’t taught, and it’s not in the heart of the person who is teaching, **Colossians 3:16**. In point of fact, anyone who doesn’t have God’s Word in their heart has a higher regard for the ideas of man! Because this is so important it’s good to get a proper understanding of what John is saying. It’s not a mere matter of denying the incarnation of the Lord, though this is bad, it’s a matter of rejecting the teachings of the New Testament.

I think there needs to be some balance in this. Before a Christian refuses, rejects, another person, truth must be known on the topic. Simply because one doesn’t agree with the preacher, teacher or elder doesn’t make it the case that the other person is rejecting the teachings of the New Testament, and so, to be refused.

Another point to be emphasised here is the one who is coming with a contrary doctrine is a teacher. When a teacher spreads untruths, that person is to be opposed. If a Christian receives them, then, as the Holy Spirit said, that person shares in his evil deeds.

Shares in what way? That person is involved in the person’s teachings and encourages the error to be promoted. The Christian is to refuse anyone who comes with a contrary doctrine, refuse in what way?

Refuse to receive him into your home, that is, refusing to open your home to him. Interestingly, Paul told the Corinthians that if a brother is immoral, the brother is to be refused also, **1 Corinthians 5:9-13**.

In that passage, it refers to eating with a brother who rejects Christ and His way. The balance we need in this is, let’s be sure we know what the Bible teaches, and let’s be slow to move.

It would be better to err on the side of caution than to overreact. However, Christians have a responsibility and to refuse to obey is to sin, not to mention that harm we may allow to come to others!

Those who denied the incarnation were taking advantage of the hospitality of the saints, **Romans 12:13 / 3 John 5-8**. They were going about from house to house, teaching against the foundation upon which the church was built. They were denying the incarnation of Christ.

The elect lady shouldn’t give these antichrists any hospitality. John’s warning is that the faithful should do nothing that would encourage these false teachers in their works of denial, **Titus 1:10-11 / 1 Timothy 1:6 / 2 Timothy 3:6 / Romans 16:17**.

COMMON SENSE

Someone once said, 'common sense is not so common'. Ask yourself, if you're a Christian and your spouse or son or daughter, holds a different religious belief about Christ from you, what do you do? Is it possible not to welcome them into 'their' own home? What if they had been disfellowshipped from the church, what do you do?

I haven't got answers to these questions but common sense would tell me I can't refuse them entry into 'their' own home. Maybe some scenarios aren't so easy to answer!

'I 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. The children of your sister, who is chosen by God, send their greetings.' 2 John 12-13

John closes his short epistle by expressing his desire to be in their presence and enjoy the fellowship Christians have with one another. On the subject of the incarnation, he revealed no more truth in this letter than what he wrote in his account of the life and teachings of Jesus in the record of the Gospel, **John 20:30-31**.

He was planning on visiting the elect lady, and so, there was no reason to write a lengthy letter. We could assume, therefore, that all that God wanted to be revealed to us concerning the nature and truth of the incarnation of Jesus had already been revealed and written by the time this letter was written.

There was no need for the Holy Spirit to repeat Himself. The children or your sister refers to the children of the sister of the woman to whom John wrote.

CONCLUSION

Let's continue to walk in the truth, let's continue to walk in love and let's be very careful about those teachers to whom we give our support.