

That You May Know

*And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.
(1 John 2:3 ESV)*

*We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers.
(1 John 3:14 ESV)*

*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God,
that you may know that you have eternal life.
(1 John 5:13 ESV)*

Close The Door

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2 John

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone! I hope you brought your Bible with you and that you are able to open it now to 2 John verse 1. 2nd and 3rd John are really SHORT letters and their content is directly related to the content of 1st John so it makes sense to cover them all together.

I mentioned in the introduction to this series that 1 John was a circular letter – meaning that it was written to a cluster of churches in Asia Minor who were all associated with the Apostle John. Well this letter - 2nd John appears to be a sort of cover letter that he sent to one congregation in particular. In it he summarizes and reinforces some of the main lessons in the circular letter and he gives some practical instructions as to how to apply those lessons in an actual congregation. And then at the end of the letter he promises to visit them in person as soon as he can.

Now, I'm thinking that if you get a personal follow up letter and a personal follow up VISIT from the Apostle John, then your congregation must have been particularly hard hit by whatever it was that devastated the churches in this region. So this is a bruised and battered church in need of some extra pastoral care.

Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 1.

¹ The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all who know the truth, ² because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever:

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

⁴ I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father. ⁵ And now I ask you, dear lady—not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning—that we love one another. ⁶ And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it. ⁷ For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. ⁸ Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward. ⁹ Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰ If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, ¹¹ for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.

¹² Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead I hope to come to you and talk face to face, so that our joy may be complete.

¹³ The children of your elect sister greet you. (2 John 1:1–13 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

Reinforcing A Few Key Ideas:

Well as I mentioned, the content of 2 John is directly related to the content of 1 John. The old Apostle is highlighting and reinforcing a few key ideas that this church in particular needed to hear. The first one I'm sure you noticed was this:

1. The idea that perseverance is proof of life

Listen again to the carefully worded greeting:

The elder to the elect lady and her children,

That's a particularly INTIMATE and encouraging way of referring to a local church. Churches are "shes" because Jesus described himself as the Bridegroom. So John is telling this church that that they are the woman – the bride – the elect lady chosen by Jesus himself. Let me start again:

The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all who know the truth,² because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever:

³ Grace, mercy, and peace **will be** with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son, in truth and love. (2 John 1:1–3 ESV)

Commentators note here that whereas most Apostles begin their letters with a prayer for these various things, John here asserts their inevitability for these dear people.

He doesn't say: MAY you have these things – he says you WILL HAVE THESE THINGS because you have abided in the truth. You stayed; you stayed with me so:

Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son, in truth and love. (2 John 1:1–3 ESV)

The fact that you stayed, tells me who you are, John says. We know who they are:

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. (1 John 2:19 ESV)

So it is plain that THEY are not born again – just as it is plain that you who remained ARE born again. John says that in the circular letter:

But you have been anointed by the Holy One (1 John 2:20 ESV)

So perseverance on the old Gospel path IS A PROOF OF LIFE. Real believers persevere. Not because they are better or smarter – but because of what abides IN THEM. That's what John says here in verse 2:

because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever (2 John 1:2 ESV)

Again – just like he says in 1 John, perseverance in the faith, GROWTH in the faith is either INEVITABLE or IMPOSSIBLE depending upon whether or not you have the SEED OF GOD in you.

And you do, John says. You have something living in you that has kept you on this path and therefore grace, mercy and peace WILL BE WITH US because what Jesus saves, he blesses, protects and keeps – thanks be to God!

The second thing that John just wants to underscore here is:

2. The idea that love and obedience go together

You can see that in verses 5-6. John has affirmed these folks who have stayed behind – who did not participate in the recent schism and then he says:

And now I ask you, dear lady—not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning—that we love one another. ⁶ And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it. (2 John 1:5–6 ESV)

From the beginning John has insisted on the connection between LOVE and OBEDIENCE. In the Gospel of John, chapter 15 verse 10 he records Jesus as being the original SOURCE for that connection. Jesus said:

“If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.” (John 15:10 ESV)

And then he doubles down on that in John 15:14:

“You are my friends if you do what I command you.” (John 15:14 ESV)

So the intimate relationship that Jesus has with his disciples is of a particular character. Put simply Jesus is on intimate terms **ONLY WITH THOSE** who trust him and obey his commandments.

That's what Jesus said - so that's what John has been teaching since the beginning. And that is one of the main ideas in the circular letter. In 1 John 5:3 John says:

“For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.” (1 John 5:3 ESV)

F.F. Bruce says here:

“We have the same emphasis on love as in the first epistle, the same identification of love and obedience, the same insistence on what has been held ‘from the beginning’.”¹

So this is **CLASSIC JOHN** - and classic Paul too for that matter. The Apostle Paul in Romans 13:10 says:

“Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.” (Romans 13:10 ESV)

Christians today need to hear that. Love for the NT Apostles was not sentimental love - it was not warm feelings - it was **BODY AND BLOOD LOVE. IT WAS ACTION LOVE, TANGIBLE LOVE and OBEDIENT LOVE.**

Love may be a natural impulse for the true believer - but it is an impulse that must be constrained and directed by the law.

That is what you have been taught from the beginning, John says, but that is not necessarily the message that you will hear out in the world.

And that leads to the third thing that John wants to reinforce:

¹ F.F. Bruce, *The Gospels & Epistles Of John*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 140.

3. The idea that many false teachers have gone out into the world

He says that very thing in verse 7:

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. (2 John 1:7 ESV)

Even the language here is similar to the language used in 1 John. In 1 John 4:1 he says:

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.” (1 John 4:1 ESV)

So this is John warning THIS PARTICULAR church to take THAT GENERAL WARNINGS very seriously.

Not all who say they are Christians really are.

Not all those who claim to be speaking in the power of the Spirit really are.

Some of these people - MANY of these people - are actually speaking and ministering under the power and influence of the devil. They are filled with the spirit of antichrist and so you need to be on guard.

If you careless here, you risk losing your reward.

That’s the fourth thing that John wants to reemphasize.

4. The idea that listening to false teachers will lead to losing your reward

Look at verse 8:

Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward. (2 John 1:8 ESV)

Remember John is writing this letter to people that he credits as real believers. The fact that they did not participate in the schism, the fact that these people remained on the path that leads to eternal life – under pressure – is taken by John as proof of life. So he assumes their final perseverance – but that doesn't mean that he assumes their full reward.

There will be saved but unrewarded people in heaven – the Apostle Paul talked about that. In 1 Corinthians 3:14-15 he said:

“If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.” (1 Corinthians 3:14–15 ESV)

That appears to be the exact same danger that John is warning about here. John Stott for example says:

“The thought is not of their winning or losing their salvation (which is a free gift), but rather their reward for faithful service.”²

You see, our OUTPUT as Christians is directly connected to our INPUT. The Bible makes that very clear. Ephesians 4:11 says:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:11–12 ESV)

So the job of the Apostles – the job of the Apostle John – was not to DO the work of the ministry it was to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry. And the same applies to every prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher that follows.

Our job as pastors and teachers is not to DO the ministry – that's your job. Our job is to feed you and to fuel you. We teach. We train. And if we do a good job then the members of this church should serve in such a way as to win their reward.

² John R. W. Stott, *The Letter of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 19 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 213.

But the converse is true – dangerously true. If the teachers you listen to are giving you bad fuel; if they are giving you watered down gas – then your service will inevitably suffer.

So be careful who you listen to, lest you find yourself entering into heaven like a naked man escaping from a fire. That’s the lesson that John is eager to reinforce for these people.

And that brings us to the unique content in this letter. You can see it there in verses 10-11:

If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works. (2 John 1:10–11 ESV)

In a sense this is a continuation of the closing note of the circular letter. You may remember that 1st John ended rather abruptly. John said:

Little children, keep yourselves from idols. (1 John 5:21 ESV)

Don’t leave the path. Don’t drink the Kool Aid. Don’t get involved with any new or novel versions of Christianity. Just keep walking on the old, old Gospel path.

John Calvin used that verse to give a pastoral charge to his own people, he said:

“Let us then remember that we ought carefully to continue in the spiritual worship of God, so as to **banish far from us** everything that may turn us aside to gross and carnal superstitions.”³

So that’s what John wanted to expand on here in this unique section of this personal letter. He wants them to BANISH FAR FROM THEM voices and influences that could conceivably turn them aside.

How To Block And Banish Unhelpful Voices

The first thing John says in this new section is that they need to:

³John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries (Complete)*, trans. John King, Accordance electronic ed. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), paragraph 98887.

1. Close the door

“do not receive him into your house” (2 John 1:10 ESV)

In the early church showing hospitality was one of the main jobs of the local elders. It is one of the main qualifications mentioned for the office in 1 Timothy 3. Paul says:

Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach (1 Timothy 3:2 ESV)

So it's listed even before the ability to preach! You had to be willing and able to host other Christians in your home. Again, understanding the times helps us appreciate why this was so important. Most local churches were small and had very limited resources so 3 Sundays out of 4 one of your local pastor/elder guys delivered the sermon as best he could and then maybe if you were fortunate, 1 Sunday a month a travelling teacher – or maybe even an Apostle would stop by and the local elders would need to provide food and lodging and support for him – that was all part of the deal.

But in that culture to provide sanctuary and hospitality meant far more than it does today. The Pillar New Testament Commentary says here:

“To appreciate the force of this exhortation it is necessary to understand the norms of hospitality operative at the time, which involved hosts in guaranteeing their guests as worthy individuals to the rest of the community”⁴

So when an elder gave hospitality to a teacher he was effectively endorsing that teacher to the entire community.

You can't do that, John says.

The elders need to take the lead in marking and isolating false teachers. Close your door to them so that they have to move on.

⁴Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 213.

And make sure they move on as quick as possible. He says in verse 10 do not receive him into your home and do not give him any greeting. Close the door – and turn away.

2. Turn away

In essence this is the opposite of what Jesus told his true Apostles to expect. When he sent them out he said:

“Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road.” (Luke 10:4 ESV)

So there Jesus told his Apostles to expect hospitality. Don’t take any money with you. Don’t sleep in hotels. Don’t take a change of clothes. Expect churches to indicate their approval of your ministry by offering hospitality and support. And be urgent and focused on your task – don’t stop to receive warm greetings from everyone you pass on the road.

Leon Morris says here, commenting on Luke 10:4:

*“Salute no one on the road is not an exhortation to impoliteness: it is a reminder that their business is urgent and that they are not to delay it by dallying with wayside acquaintances. Eastern salutations can be elaborate and time-consuming.”*⁵

Alright, so if you want to know what John is saying here in verse 10, then just reverse all that. If the church gives a FALSE teacher hospitality they are in essence endorsing him as if he were an authentic messenger of Jesus Christ. He is not. So don’t support him and don’t delay him in any way as he passes through your town. Keep him moving, hurry him along, BANISH HIM FAR FROM YOU lest he turn you aside and lead you into ruin.

Contemporary Application

So that is 2nd John – now what in the world does a letter like that have to do with people like us? Well, actually, I think it has a great deal to do with people like us. Because of the internet we have more false teachers passing through our little town than at any point in Christian history.

⁵Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 3 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 201.

There are good teachers passing through as well – praise the Lord!

But on any given day, there are hundreds and thousands of unhelpful teachers, erring teachers, ignorant teachers and full-on heretical teachers passing through our town and sadly receiving a very warm welcome in our homes, in our cars, in our ears and in our hearts. And many people in this town – many people in this church – are being led down the path to loss and ruin.

So – actually – it is hard to think of a MORE relevant letter in the New Testament than 2 John.

Now, we are almost out of time for today. But we have two more sermons in this series – one on 3rd John which was written to an individual pressing on this EXACT same issue of supporting true and false teachers and then we also have the excursus sermon on discerning the spirit of antichrist, so I feel like we can handle this issue in a couple of bite size chunks.

Today I just want to end with a few words of pastoral encouragement.

First of all:

1. A word to husbands

I'm going to be careful here, but I'm going to be faithful as well. The Bible indicates that it is the husband's job to discern between true and false influences. The Apostle Paul extends that principle into the church when he tells the men that they need to discern the doctrine in the church. The women were eager to do that – and Paul tells them to stand down and he commands their husbands to step up. He says:

For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. (1 Timothy 2:13–14 ESV)

The whole human race got into trouble when ADAM was silent and Eve stepped forward to do Adam's JOB – let's not repeat that experience in the church, Paul says.

Men – step up and do your job.

You need to know what teachers your wife is listening to.

You need to know who she is following on Facebook.

You need to know what she is posting on Facebook.

You need to know what channels she is subscribing to on YouTube.

Now – listen, I know that sounds old fashioned. But it’s not my job to sound new fashioned – it is my job to give counsel from the whole Word of God. And this is in there.

Like it or hate it – the New Testament frequently suggests that when men are lazy or silent women are led astray by false teachers. The Apostle Paul said that **PRECISELY** to a young pastor named Timothy. He told him to be on the lookout for false teachers:

“who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions” (2 Timothy 3:6 ESV)

At the very least, Paul is saying there that a woman who is wrestling with guilt and who is subject to strong desires needs a **MATURE MAN** in her life to guard her from the deadly influence of false teachers.

I realize I have probably offended at least 50 people by saying that – but if I wake up 1 man to his duty it will have been worth it.

Husbands: Know your job. Do your job. Protect your household.

And then lastly, a word to all.

2. A word to all

This is why we all need to be under the authority of a group of local elders. On a sunny day – when all is well in the world, and we have fair and following seas in the culture – maybe we could walk this path alone.

But it is not a sunny day and these are not fair and following seas.

Therefore we NEED the protection of a group of sound and mature elders exercising a ministry of oversight and discernment with respect to our influences and exposures.

Again – I’m sure many people here find that offensive. And yet, it is regularly taught in the pages of Holy Scripture. Paul assumed that we would be exposed to a variety of voices – but he also assumed that there would be some process of judgment and discernment in the church. He said to the Corinthians:

“Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.” (1 Corinthians 14:29 ESV)

Spiritual safety is found only in the context of corporate discernment.

You and the internet on your own – is a recipe for disaster.

In a world like this – filled as it is – with false teachers and deceivers – WE ALL need the blessing and the protection of a plurality of elders. So if you have it – use it – and if you don’t have it, do whatever you need to do in order to find it.

The grass withers and the flower fades but the WORD of the Lord shall STAND forever. Thanks be to God, let’s pray together.