

WALKING IN TRUTH AND LOVE

Please do not read these comments until you have read the Scriptures for this lesson. Begin by letting the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

Summary and Historical Background

The Second Epistle of John is one verse shorter than the Third Epistle and these two are the shortest books of the New Testament. Even though they are short, they should not be neglected. Important truths for Christians are tucked away in these two inspired documents.

Second John is addressed to “the elect lady and her children.” There is a conflict of opinion about the recipients of the letter. Was it sent to an actual woman and her children, or was it a figure of speech for a local church and its members? Both sides of the question have many good arguments, but it seems that the figurative approach should be given the nod of approval.

The purpose of the letter was to warn the recipients of the danger of heresy being propagated by false teachers. John reminded the church (or lady) about the responsibilities that Christians have to God and to one another to get personally involved in defeating these deceivers. They were responsible to walk in truth and to love one another. Furthermore, they were not to help the false teachers or even bid them “God speed.”

Many of the things John said in his Second Epistle are an echo of what he had already said in his First Epistle. It is interesting to compare these statements and review what he had said earlier.

I. Introduction – 1:1-3

1:1 – “Elder” – This title is the only identification of the author given in this letter. As a result, some have said that John could not have written it because he would have used the title, “apostle.” However, Peter called himself an elder, too (1 Peter 5:1). Both of these men were probably official elders in the churches where they lived as well as apostles of the Lord. Also, John might have used this title because of his advanced age. However, this seems less likely.

“Elect lady: - Seems to be a figurative designation for a local church. Whether John wrote to a church or a lady is not known for certain, nor is it known to what church or to what lady he wrote.

“I love in the truth” – “Love” appears four times in this letter, and “truth” five times. Love and truth complement each other. Love keeps truth from being harsh; while truth keeps love from being sentimental. Although “truth” is without the article in this instance, and could refer to one’s sincerity, the next two references to “truth” (one in this verse and one in the next) do have the definite article (“the”) so all three references must refer to the Scripture. It is the Scripture which reveals the doctrine of Christ. Those who know the truth of God’s Word will love others who have embraced His Word.

1:2 – “For the truth’s sake” – John, the “elder,” loved this church (or lady) because it had embraced the truth of God’s Word.

“Which dwells in us” – When the Word dwells in the heart of the believer, he shall overcome the wicked one (1 John 2:14). Furthermore, he shall continue in the Son, and in the Father (1 John 2:24). Truth affects not only the mind, but it also affects one’s spiritual and physical life, yes, and every part of his life.

1:3 – “Grace be with you, mercy, and peace” – John is not expressing a wish or a prayer here, but he is declaring a statement of assurance. The verb, “be,” is in the future tense and should be translated “shall be.” John is saying, “Grace shall be with you,” because “grace” is receiving something good that you do not deserve. “Mercy” is not receiving something bad that is deserved. “Peace” is the result of God’s saving grace and mercy.

“The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father” – John adds another thought about Jesus Christ to counteract the teaching of the Gnostics. He is God, i.e., “the Son of the Father.”

“In truth and love” – The blessings of grace, mercy and peace are the believer’s because he abides in the sphere of Scriptural truth and divine love. Love and truth are never to be separated. A surrender of truth is a surrender of love. Love cannot increase when Scriptural truth is neglected or ignored. Love for others cannot undermine loyalty to the Word. Christian fellowship must be marked by both love and truth or else neither will be present.

II. Instruction – 1:4-11

A. Regarding True Believers – 1:4-6

1:4 – “Walking in truth” – The Christian life is repeatedly referred to as a walk (cf. Ephesians 2:10; 4:1; 17; 5:2, 8, 15). Walking in truth is significant for two reasons: (1) truth is the only legitimate **path** on which a Christian can walk – no lower road is acceptable; and (2) truth is the only ethical **practice** (“walking”) that a Christian can live – any lesser activity is a disgrace to the Lord. Truth must be believed and obeyed. It is a commandment from God.

1:5 – “That we love one another” – This is the second commandment in this short letter. It is not a new commandment, but one they had received from the beginning (cf. 1 John 2:7; 3:11).

1:6 – “Walk after His commandments” – This is like John’s earlier statement – “walking in truth” (1:4). It means obeying God’s commandments. No one can love the brethren by disobeying the Bible. Obedience to God and love for believers go together. Disobeying God will distress a true Christian. Love fulfills God’s law (Romans 13:10), and keeping God’s law blesses the believer (1 John 5:2).

“You should walk in it” – This means the Christian is to walk in love. He is definitely commanded to walk in truth and to walk in love. The keeping of these two commands is necessary to maintain good fellowship both with God and the brethren. If the Christian complains that he is no longer under the bondage of law, he needs to be reminded that he was not made free to break the law, but was made free to keep the law.

In these verses John has reasoned in a circle to show that truth and love cannot be separated. Believers are commanded to walk in truth. Walking in truth demands that they walk in love. Walking in love is proved by walking after God’s commandments (1:4-6).

B. Regarding False Teachers – 1:7-11

1:7 – “For” – This indicates the statement that is to follow as the reason for obeying the previous verses (1:4-6).

“Deceivers” – These are false teachers that lead believers off the path of truth by their lies (cf. 1 John 2:26; 4:1).

“Confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh” – This was the error of the Gnostics. They denied the incarnation of Christ (cf. 1 John 4:3). Such a teacher was a liar (1 John 2:22).

“A deceiver and an antichrist” – All the false teachers are put together in one camp and are identified as “the” deceiver and “the” antichrist (the definite article is used in the Greek). Their work is of the same spirit as that of the final antichrist who all are controlled by Satan (cf. 1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; Rev 13:2-4).

1:8 – “Look to yourselves” – The believers were warned to watch, to be vigilant, because the error of the false teachers was very deceptive and they could easily be snared by it.

“Lose not those things which we have wrought (worked for)” – This is the negative reason for keeping alert. They could lose their rewards.

“We receive a full reward” – The word for “reward” is sometimes used for “wages” (Jn 4:36). The believers were not to allow false teachers to influence their thinking and cause them to lose the full payment of wages for the work that they have done for Christ.

1:9 – “Transgresses” – The idea inherent in this word is to go onward or to go beyond, that is, to progress beyond the truth. The Gnostics claimed that they had superior knowledge and had advanced far beyond the inferior doctrine of the incarnation. Such an advance, however, was really apostasy.

“Doctrine of Christ” – This does not have reference to the doctrine about Christ, but rather it is a reference to Christ’s doctrine. It is the doctrine that both He and His apostles taught. When the canon of Scripture was closed, the progress of new revelation was stopped. This doctrine is what they had heard from the beginning (1 John 2:7, 24; 3:11).

“Abides in the doctrine of Christ” – The person who dwells in the doctrines that Christ and His apostles taught, including the incarnation of Christ, has both the Father and the Son (cf. 1 Jn. 2:22, 23; 4:15). He who has the true doctrine, has the true God (1 Jn. 5:20). “Of Christ” is not found in many of the manuscripts, which, when left out, places special emphasis upon the whole of Bible doctrine and does not single out the doctrine of Christ’s incarnation as the only test.

1:10 – “If there come any to you” – The reference is to false itinerant missionary teachers who spread their heresies throughout the Roman Empire. John forewarned the church about the false teachers in their area and how they should treat them.

“This doctrine” – Has reference to the incarnation of Christ, but includes the doctrine that Christ and His apostles taught from the beginning (cf. Mt. 28:18-20).

“Receive him not” – This is a present imperative with the negative and should be translated, “Stop receiving him” They were to stop such a practice of so-called “love.” It was a love which was promoting the work of Satan. They were not to house such men, nor give them any opportunity to teach their false doctrine in the church.

“Neither bid him God speed” – Literally, “Stop bidding him to rejoice.” They were to stop the practice of encouraging or blessing false teachers. This greeting may have implied hospitality as well as encouragement. In no way were Christians to help heretics to rejoice.

1:11 – “Partaker of his evil deeds” – Those who gave encouraging words or hospitality to false teachers in the name of love, were actually sharing or partaking in their evil work. They were promoting the work of Satan against the cause of Christ.

III. Conclusion – 1:12-13

1:12 – “Paper” – This was papyrus.

“Face to face” – Words are sometimes misunderstood, whereas a face-to-face meeting usually clears up such misunderstandings. The reason for this is that a person communicates by gestures, by facial expressions, by tone, tension, inflection and pitch of voice, as well as by words.

“Our joy may be full” – Joyful fellowship was John’s expressed desire in his first letter (1 John 1:4). The only difference is that he desired that “our joy may be full.”

1:13 – “The children of your elect sister” – Probably should be understood as the members of the sister church where John was an “elder” (v. 1) were sending their greetings to the church receiving this letter.