

The Epistle of Second John

Introduction:

- I. Even though 2 John is very brief, it was clearly added to the canon of the Scriptures because of its contribution to our understanding of early Christianity.
 - A. It contributes several essential truths.
 1. This epistle gives us a unique glimpse of conditions in the Roman world at the close of the first century AD.
 - a. Divine truth was being polluted by the philosophies and false teachings of those who denied the divine nature of Jesus Christ.
 - b. Love among between the followers of Jesus was being undermined by those who were sowing the seeds of division, hostility, and hatred.
 - c. Some were taking advantage of the genuine hospitality of faithful saints and using that hospitality to their own advantage to further their false doctrines and evil intent.
- II. And yet, the themes of Christian love and the absolute nature of truth are prominent throughout 2 John.
 - A. Despite the internal and external threats facing first century Christians, the apostle John wrote words of encouragement to "the elect lady" and her children – a metaphor for a specific congregation and her members.
 1. The message was clear and concise.
 - a. They were urged to uphold and abide in the truth about the divine nature of Jesus Christ.
 - b. They were admonished against transgressing and going beyond the doctrine of Christ.
 - c. And they were encouraged to exercise wisdom and discernment in the matter of hospitality and fellowship.

- B. This brief letter from John to fellow believers speaks to us today as much as it did to saints over two-thousand years ago.
1. The truth of God's divinely inspired word and the truth about the divine nature of Jesus Christ is under assault today as much as it has ever been.
 2. Therefore, we are the ones who bear the responsibility of defending that truth against all error and sharing that truth with all humanity.

Discussion:

- I. The elder (v 1).
- A. The exact meaning the phrase "the elder" is not entirely clear.
1. There are two possibilities:
 - a. Reference to the office of an elder.
 - b. Reference to age (see the expression of Paul in Philemon 9 "Paul the aged").
 - (1). The Latin Vulgate (one of the translations on which the KJV is based) substitutes the word "ancient" for "elder" in this passage.
- II. The elect lady and her children (vs 1-2).
- A. Is John writing to a particular lady and her physical children or a local congregation and its members?
1. The reasons for suggesting John was not writing to an individual are:
 - a. If this lady is so well known by Christians everywhere why is she or her children not mentioned by name?
 - b. Why is the sister and her children (v 13) also not mentioned by name?
 - c. Christians and the church are both called "the elect" (Col 3:12; 2 Tim 2:10; 1 Pet 1:1-2).
 - d. Personifying the church in the feminine form is in harmony with other New Testament passages (Eph 5:29f; 2 Cor 11:2f; and 1 Pet 5:13).
 2. It is generally accepted that the "elect lady" is referring to a local community of believers rather than a particular woman.
- B. John loves the elect lady and her children "in the truth" – concerned they were vulnerable to false doctrine.

1. John distinguishes between those faithfully serving the Lord versus the "many deceivers who have gone into the world" (v 7).
 2. John loves them "in the truth" because they are associated with the truth and with those who hold to the truth.
- C. John loves the elect lady and her children "because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever."
1. Christians love one another because the truth abides in us – truth that will always be with us.
 2. How does the truth abide in us (cf. Jn 17:17; 15:26. 16:13).
 - a. What is said of the Word or the Truth in one place is said of the Spirit in another (cf. Eph 5:18-19; Col 3:16; also Gal 3:2; 3:5; Eph 3:5; 6:17; 1 Jn 5:6).
- III. John's three-part greeting (v 3).
- A. John saw grace, mercy, and peace as blessings these faithful saints were already enjoying.
1. Grace is the favor of God toward unworthy sinners – often described as unmerited favor.
 2. Mercy is the compassion of God toward the sinner who is lost in sin.
 3. Peace is the result of being free from the misery of sin through the blood of Jesus Christ.
- B. John stresses that the qualities of grace, mercy, and peace must be found in "truth and love."
1. When these factors are in balance in the life of the Christian the character of Christ will be the result.
- IV. John's cause for rejoicing (vs 4-6).
- A. John is delighted to know the recipients of his letter are "walking in truth."
1. John is speaking of a congregation and its members who were "walking in truth" – in keeping with the truth.

- a. They were living their lives in harmony with the teachings that had been delivered to them – the commandment about which John said we received from the Father.
- B. The "commandment" is not necessarily speaking of only one specific commandment (v 5).
1. It is the total of all commandments received from the Father, whether spoken during the personal ministry of Jesus, or through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit by the apostles and prophets.
 2. The phrase "not as though I wrote a new commandment to you" is an allusion to the Lord's comment regarding the "new commandment" in John's gospel (Jn 13:34-35; 1 Jn 2:7-8).
 3. This commandment was familiar to all – it was the hallmark of the true disciple of Christ.
- C. This is why John equates true love with keeping the commandments of the Lord (v 6).
1. John previously declared that love for God is inseparably connected with keeping God's commandment (1 Jn 2:3-4; 3:22-23; 5:2-3).
 2. John wraps brotherly love and obedience to all of Christ's teachings into a single package.
 - a. We cannot claim to love our brother and sister in Christ if we fail to adhere to the Lord's demands for our life.
 - b. Neither can we claim to be obedient to Christ if we do not love our brethren.
 - c. These two commandments – loving our brethren and keeping the Lord's commandments – are really one, when view in this light.
- V. Identifying deceivers (v 7-9).
- A. John was deeply concerned for the spiritual welfare of his readers.
1. The apostle made a similar statement in his first letter (1 Jn 4:2-3).

- a. The expression "antichrist" is not referring to some person who is going to rise to power and rule over the world (commonly believed among Premillennialists).
 - b. John is referring to a mindset (the spirit of the antichrist) which was common among those false teachers who denied the deity of Jesus Christ – that He came in the flesh.
 - (1). Gnosticism plagued the Lord's church toward the end of the first century and was foreign to the teachings of the inspired apostles (cf. Jn 1-3, 14; Col 2:8-9; Phil 2:5-8).
 - c. John warned against "many antichrists" (many false teachers who denied the deity of Christ) who were already in the world – who had gone out "from us" but were not "of us" because they had not continued "with us" (1 Jn 2:18-19).
2. John identified this kind of false teacher as "a deceiver."
- a. The word "deceiver" means "one who leads the unwary astray from the truth... to lead from the right way."
 - (1). The word is used to denote "a corrupter or deceptive person" (Thayer).
 - b. John said "This is a deceiver and an antichrist" – those who deny that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh are counted among those who have identified themselves as being against Jesus Christ and His claims to deity.
- B. In light of all he had said previously, John warns his readers of the potential of being deceived and losing their reward of eternal life in heaven (v 8).
1. Christians are urged to make a close, detached, inspection of our own life (cf. Lk 8:19; 1 Cor 10:12; 2 Cor 13:5; 2 Pet 3:17-18; Heb 2:1-3).
 2. If John's readers failed to heed this warning, the apostle John and his fellow-workers will lose everything they worked to accomplish.
 - a. All their efforts in changing lives will be lost to the religious error of the false teachers.

- (1). It was not John's full reward that he was worried about losing – the correct reading is "your reward."
- (2). John was concerned that his readers will lose the "full reward" if they are deceived into following this false teaching.

C. Transgressing and abiding (v 9).

1. We must always abide in the doctrine of Christ if we want to maintain fellowship with the Father and the Son.
 - a. This warning is similar to a statement made in his first letter (1 Jn 2:23-24).
2. The word "transgresses" means "to pass by anything, to go aside, to deviate, or to advance further, as in Mt 15:3 'to transgress the commandment.'"
 - a. When one goes beyond the limits of the doctrine of Christ and leaves the doctrine of Christ behind, they essentially abandon God.
3. What is "the doctrine of Christ?"
 - a. Is it the doctrine taught by Jesus and His apostles or is it the doctrine about the nature and character of Jesus Christ?
 - (1). The fact is that the Greek is capable of being understood subjectively (the doctrine which Jesus and His apostles taught) or being understood objectively (the doctrine about Christ).
 - b. The majority of biblical scholars believe the phrase should be read as subjective – the teachings of Christ and His apostles – especially since this is how similar statements are interpreted in the scriptures (i.e. Jn 18:19; Acts 2:42; Rev 2:14-15).
 - c. John's reference to "those who have known the truth" (2 Jn 1) and those "walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father" (2 John 4) seems to establish the context of John's remarks regarding "the doctrine of Christ" (2 John 9) as being one and the same.
 - (1). To John, those who denied the appearance of Jesus in the flesh were also denying the essential truth of the doctrine of Christ.

VI. Hospitality toward deceivers (vs 10-11).

A. What should the church do to protect itself from extending fellowship to those who do not believe and teach all the doctrine of Christ?

1. How does the local church handle situations where a new arrival comes, claiming to be a Christian, claiming to have been associated with the Lord's people in another location, but is not known well enough to determine his faithful to the Lord and His word?
2. Every congregation is happy to add new members to their number but must also be careful about being too quick to extend full fellowship.
 - a. How can we know whether someone is not being the doctrine of Christ?
Ask some well-thought-out questions.
 - (1). This seems to be the essence of what the apostle suggested previously in "testing the spirits" (1 Jn 4:1-3).
 - (2). Some may simply need to have the word of the Lord explained to them more completely (like Apollos), but others may be coming into a local congregation with a hidden agenda or because they were denied fellowship elsewhere.
 - b. There is nothing wrong with asking simple questions about a person's stand on particular doctrinal issues – and generally, no one will object to such questions.
3. Therefore, we must find some process of determining what others believe.
 - a. Failing to do so, and then finding out much later that they do not hold the same doctrinal views as we do, will only lead to heartache in the future.
 - b. Anyone who considers it to be cruel and heartless to turn away those who wish to be a part of a congregation need to remember what John said (vs 10-11).
 - (1). John is not saying we should refuse to invite unbelievers or those not strong in the faith into our homes to have Bible studies.
 - (2). Rather, we cannot harbor or sanction teachers of error and allow them to make our homes or local churches the base of their operations.

- c. We cannot give false teachers the impression by word or actions that we consider them to be a faithful brother in Christ, or a member in good standing among the Lord's people.

The Summary:

- I. One of the reasons John wrote this epistle was to give all believers confidence.
 - A. We can all stand together in perfect peace and unity if we stand together in truth.
 - 1. However, truth was under assault when John penned this brief letter.
 - a. It was a frequent practice in the first two centuries for certain evangelists and teachers to travel from city to city, preaching and teaching the gospel.
 - b. These itinerant preachers and teachers would stay in the homes of members, who would then give them provisions for their journey when they left to preach elsewhere.
 - c. Unfortunately, evangelists and teachers who held to the false teachings of the Gnostics also traveled from city to city in the same manner.
 - 2. Therefore, this letter was written to early Christians, warning them to exercise discernment in their support of traveling preachers and teachers.
 - a. Failure to do so might lead to supporting error rather than the truth.

Review Questions:

- 1. Why does John identify himself as "the elder"? (v 1).
- 2. Who was "the elect (chosen) lady and her children"? (v 1).
- 3. Why was John placing such a heavy emphasis on the word "truth" by its repeated use in verses 1-4?
- 4. How does the truth abide (live) in us? (v 2).

5. What does it mean to "walk in the truth"? (v 4).
6. What is the commandment "from the beginning"? (v 5).
7. How does John define love? (v 6). (Compare Jn 14:15 with 1 Jn 5:2-3).
8. Explain the term "antichrist" and how these false teachers fit that description. (v 7). (Also see 1 Jn 2:18-23; 4:1-6).
9. What was John's warning in verse 8?
10. Define the following from verse 9:
 - a. Transgress (literally "runs ahead"):
 - b. Doctrine of Christ:
11. Explain John's warning in verses 10 and 11, and the consequences of not heeding this warning.
12. In what way did John want to make their joy full? (v 12). Explain.
13. Who are "the children of your elect sister"? (v 13).