

# 2 John

by Daniel Steele

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*Daniel Steele's sermon on 2 John emphasizes the vital connection between truth, love, and obedience in the Christian life while warning against false teachings.*

**Scripture:** 2 John 1:6

**Topics:** "Christian Character", "Gospel Integrity"

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## Description

Daniel Steele delves into the Second Epistle of John, emphasizing the importance of truth, love, and obedience in the Christian character. John addresses the church or an individual, commending those who walk in truth and warning against deceivers who deny Jesus Christ's incarnation. He urges believers to continue in the doctrine of Christ and not to welcome false teachers into their homes, highlighting the need for discernment and protection of the Gospel's integrity.

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## Transcript

HALF-HOURS WITH JOHN'S EPISTLES

THE SECOND EPISTLE OF JOHN.

THIS Epistle is not catholic or general, because it is not addressed to the church in all lands, but either to an individual or, what is more probable, to a particular church. (See Introduction, John's literary activity).

1. "The elder." Probably on account of his advanced age he indicates more than official position and speaks of himself as "the old man." Says Dr. Farrar, "A credulous spirit of innovation is welcome to believe and to proclaim that any, or all, of St. John's writings were written by 'John the Presbyter.' They were; but 'John the Presbyter' is none other than John the Apostle." The belief that there were two Johns arose from a misunderstanding of a bungling sentence of Papias, a third-rate writer in the generation next after the five Apostolic Fathers.

"Unto the elect lady," ,or an elect lady, or the lady Electa, or the elect Kyria, or Electa Kyria," meaning either a person of whom nothing more is recorded, or a company of believers constituting a local church addressed as a lady, just as the general church is styled the Bride. The real meaning of this address will probably never be satisfactorily determined.

"And her children." Either the offspring of the person addressed or the members of some particular Christian society regarded as a mother, as in Gal. iv. 26.

"All they that know." Literally "that have come to know." (1 John ii. 3.) Here is a strong indication that a church is addressed, for how could the children of one woman be known and loved by the whole Christian world? Every true believer in Christ belongs to the Holy Catholic Church, which, according to the Apostles' Creed, properly punctuated, is defined as "the communion of saints," of which "the love of each for every other is the essential condition of existence." Christian love goes out towards Christian character wherever it exists.

2. "For the truth's sake." John has given in his writings two personal definitions of the truth: "I am the truth" (John xiv. 6), and "he shall give you another Paraclete, that he may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of truth," who vitalizes; the truth by identifying himself with Jesus, its author. In both cases it is said that abiding "in us" of the personified truth "shall be forever." This indicates that the Gospel of John and this Epistle flowed from the same pen.

3. "Grace, mercy and peace shall be with us." A prediction and assurance, rather than a prayer. With this triplet of divine graces, in the same order Paul twice salutes Timothy and once Titus. Jude makes a variation thus: "Mercy, peace and love." Grace is favor to sinners; mercy is compassion for their misery, and peace is the well-being which follows pardon and renewal.

"From God the Father." He is their source. The atonement itself did not originate with the Son to placate a wrathful God, as some falsely teach, but with God, the moral governor of the universe, that He might save all who would accept offered mercy.

God is the Father, in the evangelical sense, of all who have received the Son. (John i. 12.) The New Testament nowhere teaches the soft doctrine that God is the Father of impenitent sinners. He is the Father of the Divine Son and of all on whom the image of His Son is impressed by the Holy Spirit in the new birth. All who are morally like God, hating, what He hates, and loving what He loves, are figuratively called sons of God, and all who are like the devil in conduct and character are called the children of the devil. (John i. 12; 1 John iii. 9, 10, note.)

"In truth." Truth occurs five times in this brief Epistle.

"And love." Love is found four times, either as a verb or as a noun. These qualities are the essentials of the Christian character.

4. "I rejoice greatly." The epistolary aorist.

"Thy children walking in truth." Squaring their lives by the rule of Christian truth. The occasion of John's joy is cognate to that of the angels, as disclosed by our Saviour in Luke xv. 7. The phrase, "of thy children," would seem delicately to hint that not all the children of that mother, or members of that church, were walking in the highway of holiness.

"Even as we received commandment." This is another key-word of the Epistle, in which it occurs four times. Love, truth and obedience; these are the three leading ideas, which partly imply and partly supplement one another. "Obedience without love becomes servile; love without obedience becomes unreal; neither of them can flourish outside the realm of truth." (Dr. A. Plummer.)

5. "I pray thee." He entreats, to the exercise of the full privilege of Christian fellowship, implying that there are degrees of love. The new birth implants love. The fullness of the Spirit perfects love.

"New commandment." He prays rather than commands to love one another, as Christ taught.

"We had." In this entire Epistle John identifies himself with his readers, Christian with Christians.

"From the beginning." See I John ii. 7, note.

6. "And this is love." It is known by obedience, its fruit. "In verse 5 obedience prompts love; here love prompts obedience. This is no vicious logical circle, but a healthy moral connection." Love strives to realize in detail every single command, while love is the essence of them all.

"Even as ye heard." The allusion is to primary instruction in Christian morals.

"Ye should walk in it," i. e., in brotherly love. The second person is here used because in the beginning the persons addressed were the catechumens and the apostles were the catechists. "It" here refers to love, which is a safeguard against erroneous doctrine next named.

7. "Many deceivers." Wrong opinion respecting fundamental truth sooner or later begets wrong action.

"Are gone forth," or went out from the Christian society to do their evil work. The tense hints a definite succession of heretical teachers. This implies the existence of some form of church government in John's day.

"Into the world." Not into a rival religious organization. Their errors sapped their piety and made them worldlings and not saints.

"Who confess not Jesus Christ coming in the flesh." He is the object of their denial, the Incarnate Messiah. These deceivers are here described as denying not merely the fact of the Incarnation, but its possibility. Says Dr. A. Plummer on this text and on 1 John iv. 2, in both of which participle "coming" or "having come" is used, "In both passages the A. V. and R. V. translate as if we had the infinitive mood instead of the participle. The difference is, that with the participle the denial is directed against the Person, 'they deny Jesus'; with the infinitive it is directed against the fact, they deny that He cometh or has come. Note that Christ is never said to come into the flesh. This would leave room for saying that the Divine Son was united with Jesus after He was born of Mary; which would be no true Incarnation."

"The deceiver and the antichrist." The definite article is quite important. See I John ii. 18, note.

"Many antichrists." Many who exhibit the spirit of the antichrist may be spoken of individually or collectively as "the antichrist." There is reason for believing that this character will shortly before the end of the world appear in some remarkable person antagonizing Christ.

8. "Look to yourselves." Watchfulness and self-examination are required in view of the peril just announced. In the R. V. the pronoun "we" is changed to "ye" in the clauses "we lose" and "we receive." This would signify, "Take heed that these deceivers do not undo the work which apostles and evangelists have wrought in you, but that ye receive the full fruit of it" The apostate himself is the greatest loser.

9. "Whosoever goeth onward." The best manuscripts thus put "goeth onward" in place of "transgresseth." All Christians are exhorted to go on unto perfection in the application of gospel truth to the extinction of depravity and the development of Christlike characters, but not to advance beyond the limits of revealed truth. "These antichristian Gnostics were advanced thinkers," regarding themselves as "the illumined" who had outgrown the Gospel, which was all very well for the ignorant masses, the unwashed mob, but they

could appreciate a speculative philosophy far above the trite and narrow truths of Christianity. "There is an advance which involves desertion of first principles; and such an advance is not progress, but apostasy."

"The doctrine of Christ." Truths revealed in His own person, words and works and through the lips of His apostles and the pens of His evangelists and the characters of His saints.

"Hath not God." Hath no saving knowledge of Him whom he claims to know more perfectly.

"Abideth in the doctrine." Regards Jesus Christ as an infallible Teacher and trusts in Him and in Him only for salvation. Hath the Father and the Son. Through the Spirit of adoption He cries, Abba, Father, for the first time, and recognizes Jesus Christ as both Saviour and Lord. "No man knoweth the Son but the Father, and no man knoweth the Father but the Son and he to whom the Son may reveal Him."

10. "If any one cometh unto you." As a teacher to point out the way to eternal life in the light of the glow-worm of human philosophy, instead of Jesus Christ, the Light of the world.

"Receive him not into your house." He is on the devil's errand, do not help him along. "St. John is at once earnestly dogmatic and earnestly philanthropic; for the Incarnation has taught him the preciousness of man and the preciousness of the truth." (Liddon.) In declining to receive an erroneous religious teacher we must be quite sure that he is overthrowing doctrines essential to salvation, doctrines which weaken the motive to immediate repentance, which lessen the turpitude of sin, or detract from Christ's divinity and His power to save. We must make it plain to the man concerned and to the public that our coldness toward him is not prompted by personal ill-will, but it is designed as a safeguard against giving a quasi endorsement to a teacher who is subverting the fundamentals of the Gospel and destroying the souls of our own children by the infection of his errors. There is this limit to Christian charity: it must not be shown to one man in such a way as to be morally and spiritually harmful to others, possibly to our own household; still less must it be shown in such a manner as to do more harm than good to the unwelcomed teacher. The problem is quite difficult. Yet it is obvious that were the pronounced heretic treated as if he were a true believer his opportunity of doing harm by perverting souls would be greatly increased, and the errorist might be confirmed in his fatal departure from saving faith. Says Clement, in an interesting picture of family devotion, "But I think that it is not proper even to pray with such persons, since in prayer which is made in the Rome after they arise there is a salutation, a token of gladness and peace."

11. "Partaketh in his evil works." This implies that the doctrinal errors in question are of such a character as to bear the fruit of sinful conduct. The original word for "partaketh" implies more than sharing in definite acts. "It suggests a fellowship with the character of which they are the outcome." It is quite evident that John forbids the evangelical believer making his house a home and headquarters of false teaching.

12. "Not with paper and ink." "Perhaps we may here trace a sign of the failing powers of an old man, to whom writing is serious fatigue." (Dr. A. Plummer.) The paper is the Egyptian papyrus, which was costly. Hence, possibly, the brevity of John's Epistles. Parchment was still more expensive. Ink in those time was a mixture of soot and water, or of lampblack and gall juice.

"Face to face." "Mouth to mouth" is the Greek.

"Joy may be full." Says Bishop Alexander, "The high associations with which this phrase is connected lead us to suppose that it would scarcely have been applied by St. John to any meeting but one of peculiar solemnity, after a cruel and prolonged separation, which had threatened to be eternal."

13. "The children . . . salute thee." The absence of any salutation from the elect sister harmonizes with the theory that "elect lady" is not a person, but a particular church. But it fits the other theory just as well, for Kyria's sister may be dead or absent, and the nephews of Kyria may be in business in Ephesus and intimate with John.

"Short as the Second Epistle is and having more than half its contents in common with the First or the Third Epistle, our loss would have been great had it been refused a place in the Canon, and in consequence been allowed to perish. It gives us a new aspect of the apostle; it shows him as the shepherd of individual souls. It is for the sake of particular persons about whom he is greatly interested that he sends the letter, which is a less formal and less public utterance than the First Epistle. We see the apostle at home rather than in the church, and hear him speaking as a friend rather than a metropolitan. The apostolic authority is there, but it is in the background. The letter beseeches and warns more than it commands." (Cambridge Bible for Colleges.)

The Second and Third Epistles of John, together with those of James and Jude, 2 Peter, were at first antilegomena, spoken against as not worthy of a place in the sacred Canon. These two Epistles of John are not contained in the Peshito Syriac version, nor are they now accepted by the Syrian church. There is, however, very little ante-Nicene evidence against their authenticity. They were included in the Old Latin version. Clement of Alexandria wrote short notes upon them. The doubt about them probably arose from the fact that their authorship was at first ascribed to an unknown man, John the elder, and not to the apostle. This discredited them in the early centuries.

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