

SECOND JOHN

Chapter 1

Greeting

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.

1 *elder*. In his later years, John functioned as an elder, perhaps of the Ephesian church. The apostle Peter held a similar position (1Pe 5:1). (CSB)

Common title for the spiritual leaders of Christian congregations; used interchangeably with “overseer.” John wrote as a pastor to his own congregation, even though, as an apostle, he was the highest authority for all the churches during his later years. Luther: “‘Elder’ is ‘presbyter’ in Greek and is equivalent to ‘priest.’ So also Peter and John called themselves elders in their letters” (AE 10:19). (TLSB)

elect lady. Either an unknown Christian woman in the province of Asia or a figurative designation of a local church there. (CSB)

The Church is described as the chosen Bride of Christ (Eph. 5:22-33; Rev. 19:7; cf Gal. 4:26). Here, a specific local congregation is intended. (TLSB)

The Bible often refers to the church, to the people of God in feminine terms:

- The people of Israel were called a virgin (Lam. 1:115; 2:13; Amos 5:2), a married woman (Is. 62:4, 5), a mother (Is. 54:1) (PBC)
- The believers living in Jerusalem were called the Daughter of Zion (Zechariah 9:9; Is. 52:4). (PBC)
- When faithful, the believers were called the bride, when unfaithful, a prostitute (the whole chapter of Ezek 16 is dedicated to these metaphors). (PBC)
- Jesus called Himself the Bridegroom (Mt. 25:5); we are the bride (Rev. 21:9; 22:17). (PBC)
- Paul uses the same imagery: “I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to Him” (2 Cor. 11:2). (PBC)
- Paul describes the believers in feminine terms in Ephesians 5:26-27: “make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself. (PBC)

her children. Children of that Christian lady or members of that local church. (CSB)

If the “chosen lady” is a congregation, then her “children” are the members, and the children of the “chosen sister” (verse 13) must be members of John’s congregation in Ephesus. (PBC)

truth. Jesus, who is “the truth,” abides in it (v. 2). Cf. John 14:6. (TLSB)

John wrote also because he cared about the truth, and they did too. All truth comes from God. Truth is every expression of human language that conforms to the righteousness and goodness of God. Truth is really the same thing as God’s Word. God’s truth is not an abstract collection of facts, useful for playing religious trivia games. God’s truth is a living force that reveals us as we really are. It is a spiritual energy source, empowering us to think clearly, choose wisely, and act rightly. It is the church’s greatest treasure, for it reveals Christ to us and even gives us the ability to believe. (PBC)

2 *forever* - John speaks a promise of highest worth: that God's truth will be with us forever. Jesus Himself had promised that to His disciples: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away" (Mt. 24:35). God does not guarantee you wealth, fame, comfort, or power. But He does guarantee that He will never stop loving you and that His Word will always be there for you. (PBC)

3 *Grace ... peace.* God's truth is the source of God's peace. You cannot know God's true peace unless you let Him reveal it to you. God's Word is the only source of certainty about God's peace. All false teachers and cults attack God's Word in one way or another, trying to persuade people that the Bible is inadequate, incomplete, garbled, or antiquated. Love is important too - love to one another is Christian families and love among members of a Christian congregation are sure indicators that grace, mercy, and peace are live there. (PBC)

Father's Son - Jesus is God the Father's Son. There were false teachers at this time who taught that Jesus was only the son of Joseph and Mary and not the Son of God. (TLSB)

will be with us - As long as Jesus abided with them. (TLSB)

1–3 The apostle John and all who truly know Christ as the Father's Son in human flesh love one another in truth. False disciples refused to confess that Jesus was God in human flesh (1Jn 2:18–25; 4:1–6). They neither knew the truth nor loved the Christians to whom John wrote. Those who know Jesus know the truth and, along with Jesus, they have grace, mercy, and peace. • Heavenly Father, by Your own true Son, You have revealed the truth to us in love. Protect us from all who would take this truth and love from us by the deception of wise-sounding error. Keep us in Christ, who is the "way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6). Amen. (TLSB)

Walking 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.

4 John received a good report about some of the congregation. He rejoiced that his recipients supported those who taught about Christ in truth. (TLSB)

This verse shows how experienced and realistic John was. All congregations are collections of people in various stages of the Christian life. Some are babies who just barely get it; they don't have their lives under control yet, but at least the lights are on. Some people are spiritual teens, half-children and half-adults, and their behavior swings between maturity and childishness. And some are seasoned and mature, leaders, trainers and organizers of others. John chooses here to celebrate the victories that are being won through God's wonderful Word and working. His point is not to settle for congregational mediocrity or to ignore or write off non-functioning members. John knows that people in Christian congregations are works in progress. (PBC)

walking in the truth - Treating fellow Christians with brotherly love and supporting the preaching of the Gospel. (TLSB)

It is still the goal that all members should walk in the truth, by which he means living their lives in accordance with God's Word and will. It is the goal that all members will humble themselves before the Father's command and obey them. God commands our obedience as his right because he is our Creator; He commands our hearts as our Savior. (PBC)

6 *this is love* - See 1 John 4:19; love known only through Christ's love for us. (TLSB)

from the beginning. From the time the recipients were first given the gift of faith in Jesus. (TLSB)

After obedience to God's commands, the second component of living an authentic Christian life is love, the way we treat other people. Treating other people in love, instead of in meanness, revenge, gossip, backbiting, and abuse does several wonderful things: it pleases God, it gives expression to our faith and helps us grow and mature, it makes other people's lives better, and sends a powerful message to the community that God's power is real and working. Religious talk can be ignored, but a loving community can't be faked, and it will have an irresistible appeal to people who long for the true God. (PBC)

7-11 This section deals with the basic Gnostic heresy attacked in 1 John, namely, that the Son of God did not become flesh (Jn 1:14), but that he temporarily came upon the man Jesus between his baptism and crucifixion (see Introduction to 1 John: Gnosticism). (CSB)

7 *do not confess the coming Jesus Christ* - Not only do the deceivers deny the incarnation of the eternal Son of the Virgin Mary, but they also deny that Jesus Christ comes to us now through the Word and the Sacrament (means of grace) that Christ instituted. (TLSB)

coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Denial of the incarnation is a dagger at the heart of the saving Christian faith. It is a lie from hell, a lie that has been told by many deceivers and cult leaders for centuries. If Christ is not fully God and fully man, we have no Savior at all. Cerinthus taught and managed to persuade many to believe, that something divine came down upon an earthly Jesus for a while but left him before Calvary. (PBC)

Ignatius of Antioch: "They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer, because they confess no the Eucharist to be the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, which suffered for sins, and which the Father, of His goodness, raised up again. Those, therefore, who speak against this gift of God, incur death in the midst of their disputes" (ANF1:89). Luther: "I have also noticed that all error, heresy, idolatry, offense, misuse, and evil in the church originally came from despising or losing sight of this article of faith in Jesus Christ. And if one looks at it correctly and clearly, all heresies do contend against this clear article of Jesus Christ, as Simeon says of him, that he is 'set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for sign that is spoken against' (Luke 2:34)... For whatsoever stumbles, certainly stumbles on this stone, which lies in everyone's way and is rejected by the builders... St. John also gives no other or more certain sign for recognizing false and anti-Christian spirits than their denial of Jesus Christ (2 John 7). They have all wanted to reap honor at his expense and have instead garnered shame from it" (AE 34:207-8). (TLSB)

antichrist. Sometimes the deceivers telling those lies don't look like deceivers. They look like nice men and women, educated, thoughtful, and good citizens. They may use the name of Christ in their organization's name. They may use Christian hymns and employ Christian terminology. But people who deny the incarnation of Christ are part of the enemy. They are the deceiver and the antichrist, because their work undoes Christ's work. (PBC)

8 *worked for ... rewarded.* Work faithfully accomplished on earth brings future reward (see Mk 9:41; 10:29–30; Lk 19:16–19; Heb 11:26). (CSB)

Satan loves to come upon smug and complacent Christians, because they likely will not have put on their armor and their weapons are probably rusty and dull. Watch out! It is a distortion to look at God's promises of protection and then assume that we could never fall away. (PBC)

John and the other true Christian teachers spent their lives teaching them the truth in Christ so that those who believe might remain faithful unto death and finally receive the crown of life eternal. John did not want his life's work undone by deceivers who would cause Christians to lose their reward. (TLSB)

reward - Note from Matthew 5:12: Though Jesus used this term when referring to heavenly blessings, He taught that the reward would be based on God's goodness, not the amount of work done (cf. 20:1-15). Any reward our heavenly Father gives is an expression of His grace. (TLSB)

9 *goes on ahead.* A reference to the Gnostics, who believed that they had advanced beyond the teaching of the apostles. (CSB)

As Paul taught Christians "not to go beyond what is written" (1 Cor. 4:6), John also taught that Christians were to remain in the apostolic teaching and not to invent or allow any new teachings. (TLSB)

Unfortunately, some come to view security as boredom. To them Satan has had great success in marketing novelty, enticing them to "run ahead," that is, to grow restless in "standard" Christianity and become fascinated with new revelations. (PBC)

teaching of Christ. The similarity of this letter to 1 John, the nature of the heresy combated, and the immediate context suggest that John is not referring to teaching given by Christ, but to true teaching about Christ as the incarnate God-man. (CSB)

To remain faithful to His teaching was to remain in Christ Himself. (TLSB)

Father and the Son - The only way to God the Father was through Jesus Christ, God the Son. No one could have one without the other. (TLSB)

10 *this teaching* - That Jesus Christ was God incarnate, true God and true man in one person. (TLSB)

do not receive him into your house. A reference to the housing and feeding of traveling teachers (see Introduction: Occasion and Purpose). The instruction does not prohibit greeting or even inviting a person into one's home for conversation. John was warning against providing food and shelter, since this would be an investment in the "wicked work" of false teachers and would give public approval (see v. 11). (CSB)

Christian were to avoid giving welcome or aid to anyone who taught contrary to Christ's teaching. A Christian was commanded to rebuke a false teacher and to warn others against their deceptions. Eusebius of Caesarea: "John, the disciple of the Lord, going to bath in Ephesus and seeing Cerinthus within, ran out of the bath house without bathing, crying, "Let us flee, lest even the bath fall, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within" (NPNF2 1:187). Luther: "We learn from all these sayings how the ban (from communion or congregation) should be used. First, we should seek neither vengeance nor our own gain - as is now the shameful custom everywhere - but rather the improvement of our neighbor. Second, punishment should stop short of his ruin or death, for St. Paul limits the goal of the ban for improvement, that he be put to shame because no one associates with him; and he adds in 2 Thess. 3:(15), 'Do not look

on him as in enemy, but punish him as a brother.’ At the present time, the ruthless tyrants deal with people as if they wished to cast them into hell, and do not seek their improvement at all” (AE 39:9). (TLSB)

Providing personal hospitality to traveling teachers is not much of an issue in the 21st century. But providing support and money to anti-scriptural teachers is. Many biblical Christians today are members of church organizations that have lost their scriptural moorings. (PBC)

11 Normal Christian hospitality could not be extended to false teachers without giving the impression that there was agreement with their false teachings, which could cause others to be deceived and to fall from their faith in Jesus. The doctrines that people were taught and believed were the difference between everlasting life and everlasting death. (TLSB)

4–11 We walk in love and truth only by remaining faithful to Christ’s teaching that He is God in human flesh who came to save us. Those who depart from Christ’s teaching do not have God the Son or the Father or eternal life. Those who support them share in their wicked work and will share in their punishment as well. Cling to the truth that Jesus still comes to us in human flesh so that you may walk in love and in truth. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are ever with you to care for you. • Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, You come to us as true God and true man through Your means of grace: the Gospel, Baptism, Your body and blood given for us Christians to eat and drink in Your Supper. Grant us faith to remain in this teaching and never depart from it or go beyond it by holding any other teaching or supporting those who do. Amen. (TLSB)

Final Greetings

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.**

12 *paper and ink.* Paper was made from papyrus reeds, which were readily available and cheap. The ink (the Greek for this word comes from a word that means “black”) was made by mixing carbon, water and gum or oil. (CSB)

Communication would be better when face-to-face. Questions could be answered and clarifications given. (TLSB)

that our joy may be complete. When John would visit them, they would gain more understanding. Both John and his hearers would have certainty and joy that the truth had overcome to the threat of deception. (TLSB)

13 *elect sister.* May be taken literally to designate another Christian woman or figuratively to refer to another local church (see note on v. 1)(CSB)

The word “paper” is a bit of an anachronism. Paper, that is, thin writing sheets made of wood or rag pulp, was invented by the Chinese around A.D. 100 and did not really come into use in the Mediterranean world until many centuries later. The word in this verse refers to papyrus, which is a writing sheet made by stripping whitish pulp out of river reeds, laying the wet pulp first in vertical strips and then in horizontal strips on top of the vertical, and then pressing or rolling the pulp flat. After the pulp dries, you have a decent paper substitute. When a lengthy document was called for, longer strips were made, which could then be rolled up into scrolls. The ink was made from powdered carbon, water, and gum or oil. (PBC)

children. The members of the sister congregation in Ephesus from which John was writing. (TLSB)

12–13 The apostle is planning to come and set straight all outstanding issues. Until then, the congregation has his warning and admonition to stand firm in the faith. You, too, have the apostle's testimony and all of Holy Scripture. Abide in God's revelation and beware of strange teachings that diminish the person and work of Jesus, who is your salvation and joy. • Lord, grant us to remain faithful to Your teaching. Protect us from deception, and grant us fellowship with all faithful sister congregations so that at Your coming our joy may be complete. Amen. (TLSB)