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Title: “The 2nd Epistle of John”

Key verse: 2nd John 1-2 (NASB) – “The elder to the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in truth; and not only I, but also all who know the truth, ² for the sake of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever.”

Good morning, everyone. I have a question for you. When was the last time you heard a sermon on the 2nd Epistle of John? It’s small letter – just one short chapter. There are a few epistles in the New Testament which are just one chapter long, and they often get overlooked and we don’t spend much time studying them. That’s why I sometimes have a desire to introduce you to one of these letters, to have a look at the lesson that God wanted to teach us through one of these short New Testament letters. Last year, I shared with you a message on the Apostle Paul’s epistle to Philemon, a letter that is just one chapter long. Today, I would like to share with you the Apostle John’s second epistle. John’s first epistle is quite popular – it is five chapters long and packed with many important exhortations to God’s people, and I am sure you have heard some messages on that letter. But today, I want to take a look at John’s second epistle – all thirteen verses of it.

But before we do that, I would like to tell you about this man named John and his contributions to the New Testament. Do you recall who this man was? He was one of the twelve original apostles that Jesus chose. Matthew 10:2-4 gives a list of these twelve men. Let’s read verse 2 (NASB) – “Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother...” In every list of the twelve apostles that appears in the New Testament, these four names always appear at the top: Peter and his brother Andrew ... James and his brother John. Of these four men, three were especially important to Jesus: Peter, James, and John. Jesus took those three to the top of the Mount of Transfiguration, and later on, Jesus asked these three to accompany him during his time of great anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane.

John was the author of the Gospel of John. Interestingly, he doesn’t name himself in the book. Instead, he refers to himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” in places like John 13:23, 19:26, 21:20 and some other verses. Likewise, in the three epistles, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John, he does not name himself. The writing style of these epistles show some similarities to the writing style of the Gospel of John, so John is regarded as the author of these three letters.

Interestingly, the author of the book of Revelation names himself as John in several places in the first and last chapters of that book. There has been some discussion – in ancient times and in our present day – about whether the author of the book of Revelation is the same person who wrote the Gospel of John or if he is some other person named John. The writing style is quite different, and yet there are some thematic elements that Revelation shares with the Gospel of John and the three epistles, so, since very ancient times, the Apostle John has been regarded as the author of all five of these books. Together, they are referred to as the “Johannine literature” – the five New Testament books authored by the Apostle John. They were written toward the end of the first century A.D.

Do you remember the nickname given to John and his brother James? In Mark 3, we read another list of the twelve disciples, and that list gives a bit more information about James and

John. Let's read Mark 3:16-17 (NASB) – “And He [Jesus] appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom He gave the name Peter),¹⁷ and James, the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James (to them He gave the name Boanerges, which means, “Sons of Thunder”).”

Sons of Thunder. These brothers were two very passionate preachers (evangelists). Their passion sometimes went too far. We read an interesting story in Luke chapter 9, when Jesus was traveling to Jerusalem. He needed a place to stay for the night in a village along the way. Let's look at Luke 9:52-54 (NASB) – “And He sent messengers on ahead of Him, and they went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make arrangements for Him.⁵³ But they did not receive Him, because He was traveling toward Jerusalem.” (Remember: Samaritans and Jews generally did not like each other, and these Samaritans in this town did not like the fact that Jesus was headed to the capital city of the Jews, to Jerusalem). Let's continue with verse 54 – “When His disciples James and John saw this, they said, ‘Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?’” James and John were quite angry at the disrespect that the Samaritans were showing to Jesus, so the brothers imagined they could do something similar to what the Prophet Elijah had done in 2nd Kings chapter 1 and call down fire to destroy the enemies of God. But Jesus rebukes the brothers and tells them that He did not come into the world to destroy people. After these words, Jesus and the group of disciples simply move on to the next village to find accommodation there. We see from this story the passion of these two brothers and why they would be called “Sons of Thunder.”

In the early chapters of the book of Acts, we read what happens to John's brother James. In Acts 12:1-2, we read that King Herod had James executed. James, son of Zebedee, is the first of the twelve apostles to suffer martyrdom. Meanwhile, among the twelve, John, the other son of Zebedee, is the apostle who lives the longest. We assume that to be the case because his writings were likely authored toward the end of the first century. For these reasons, John is thought of as the youngest of the twelve disciples. According to tradition, in the later years of his life, John lived in the city of Ephesus and ministered in the surrounding region. The author of the book of Revelation said he was exiled to the island of Patmos, which is one of the islands in the Aegean Sea west of the province of Asia, where Ephesus is located.

Let us now proceed to a reading of the Second Epistle of John. Let's read 2nd John, verses 1-2 (NASB) – “The elder to the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in truth; and not only I, but also all who know the truth,² for the sake of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever.”

Most New Testament epistles begin with the name of the man who is composing the letter. Here, the author identifies himself as “the Elder.” This seems to be the way John prefers to refer to himself during this period of his ministry life.

Next, the addressee of the epistle is mentioned: “to the chosen lady and her children.” Who is this “chosen lady”? Other English translations of the Bible call her “the elect lady.” Is John writing to a particular woman and her kids? Actually, it has long been recognized that John here is not writing to a woman but to a church. The Greek word for “church” is *ekklēsia*, which is a feminine noun. Remember: in Greek and many other languages, nouns are classified as either masculine or feminine. The word *ekklēsia* is feminine, and so the author here decides to call the congregation he is addressing as “the elect lady.” Here, the Greek word “lady” is *kyria*. Of course, it is a feminine noun. But this word does not only mean “lady.” In the Greek society of that day, the word *kyria* was often used to refer to a social

subunit in a Greek city-state, a particular group of people. Because a church is a community, it would be quite appropriate for John to use this word *kyria* when addressing a community of Christians. So, this seems to be why John chooses to address this church as *kyria*.

But there may be yet another reason John uses this word “lady.” In the New Testament, the church is sometimes referred to as a “bride” – you can see that in Revelation 21:2 and 9, also 22:17. Since the church is the bride of Christ, you can see how John might have the image of a bride in mind when he chose to address a church as *kyria* (lady). By the way, the masculine form of the Greek word *kyria* is *kyrios*, which means “lord.” This is the Greek word the New Testament uses to refer to the “Lord” Jesus Christ.

John addresses the epistle to “the elect lady” (the chosen lady). Here, the Greek word elect/chosen is *eklektē*. A few weeks ago in a previous sermon, I told you that the Greek word for church is *ekklēsia*, and it means an assembly of people who have been called together ... an assembly of people who have been called together. The word for “elect” (chosen) is *eklektē*. John addresses his letter to *eklektē kyria*, “the elect lady” – a congregation of elect persons. In numerous places in the New Testament, we Christians are called “the elect.” This is the group of people to whom John addresses his epistle, the Christians of a particular congregation. The letter is addressed to “the chosen lady and her children” – the lady is the group (the congregation) and the children are the individual Christians in that group.

And let’s take a look at the last verse of this letter. When John closes his letter, he mentions the congregation from which he is writing. In verse 13 he says “The children of your chosen [elect] sister greet you.” This would be the author’s home church, another group of elect individuals. This letter is authored by a minister calling himself “the elder,” and he is relaying greetings from the members of his church.

Well, now I would like to read the entire epistle and then draw out a few lessons from this letter.

2nd John 1-13 (NASB) – “The elder to the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in truth; and not only I, but also all who know the truth, ² for the sake of the truth which 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 Son of the Father, in truth and love.

⁴ I was very glad to find *some* of your children walking in truth, just as we have received commandment *to do* from the Father. ⁵ And now I ask you, lady, not as though *I were* writing to you a new commandment, but the one which 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, that you should walk in it.

⁷ For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ *as* coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. ⁸ Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. ⁹ Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he 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, and do not give him a greeting;

¹¹ for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.

¹² Though I have many things to write to you, I do not want to *do so* with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, so that your joy may be made full.

¹³ The children of your chosen sister greet you.”

As I read this epistle, a few key words catch my attention. In verses 1 through 4, I see the word “truth” repeated several times. In verses 1, 3, 5, and 6, I see the word “love.” And then from verse 7, the tone of the letter changes and I see the words “deceiver” and “antichrist.” These key words suggest to me an outline for my message today:

Walking in truth.

Walking in love.

Warning against deceivers.

Part 1: Walking in truth

Look again at the opening verses.

Verse 1 – “whom I love in truth” ... “all who know the truth.”

Verse 2 – “for the sake of the truth.”

Verse 3 – “in truth and love.”

Verse 4 – “I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth, just as we have received commandment to do from the Father.”

In the Gospel of John, chapter 14, verse 6 (NKJV), we read this – “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’” Jesus is the way to God. Jesus is the truth. Through Jesus is the way to eternal life.

Acts 4:12 (NIV) – “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” No other name except the name of Jesus. He is the only way to salvation. That is the fundamental truth of the Christian faith.

Next, let’s read the last two verses of John’s first epistle. 1st John 5:20-21 (NASB) – “And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. ²¹ Little children, guard yourselves from idols.” The God we read about in the Bible is the true God ... and this book, the Bible, tells the way to have a right relationship with our Creator, which is through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. We should forsake idols, forsake any false religion, forsake any false philosophy that would turn us away from God.

As you know, I recently completed a series of sermons on the Statement of Faith of Osaka International Church. I told you that the reason for doing the series was to remind ourselves of the fundamental doctrines on which we stand, the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. Those are the truths on which we must stand. Those are truths by which we live our lives. Let us remember the desire of the Apostle John that we walk in the truth. We are to walk by the truth, and we are to let the truth of the gospel message dwell in our hearts.

In the 3rd epistle of John, verse 4 (NIV), he says this – “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.”

Let’s move on to Part 2: Walking in love.

2nd John 5-6 (NASB) – “And now I ask you, lady, not as though I were writing to you a new commandment, but the one which 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, that you should walk in it.

This is our primary commandment: to love one another. This is the commandment we have had “from the beginning,” says John.

Let’s read the Gospel of John, chapter 13. In one of the last things Jesus said to His twelve apostles before His arrest and crucifixion, he spoke these words, John 13:34-35 (NASB) – “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

This is the commandment that John refers to in his second epistle. It is the command that Christians are to love one another. It is by this love for one another that people will know that we are disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is an important testimony that we display before the world: that instead of discord, the relationships of the followers of Christ are marked by love.

And by forgiveness. Ephesians 4:32 (NASB) – “Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”

Colossians 3:13-14 (NASB) – “Bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. ¹⁴ Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.”

Love and forgiveness. Two hallmarks of the gospel message. God loves us. God forgives us. We are to reflect God’s love and forgiveness by putting these virtues into practice in our relationships with our fellow Christians and to our fellow human beings. In this way, we are a witness to the non-Christian world.

Let’s move on to Part 3. The tone of John’s epistle changes here.
Part 3: Warning against deceivers.

2nd John 7-8 (NASB) – “For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. ⁸ Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward.”

Unfortunately, there are many false teachers with distorted images of Jesus Christ. Some of these false teachers deny the full humanity of Christ ... others deny the full deity of Christ. We must guard ourselves against such false teaching – if we do not, we will lose the fullness of the gospel message and lose our effectiveness to witness to the world around us.

Let’s continue reading. 2nd John 9-11 (NASB) – “Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he 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, and do not give him a greeting; ¹¹ for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.

In verse 9, what does it mean to go “too far”? It means to go beyond the teaching of the apostles about Christ and bring some sort of new teaching. We must be on our guard about such teaching. Any teaching that is not in line with the apostolic teaching that we have already received is something we must treat as suspect.

Look at the second half of verse 9. The safeguard for us is that we “abide in the teaching” that we have already received about Christ. If we abide in the apostolic teaching, we remain in fellowship with God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. This is the safe place to be.

Let’s move on to the concluding verses of this epistle.

2nd John 12-13 (NASB) – “Though I have many things to write to you, I do not want to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, so that your joy may be made full. ¹³ The children of your chosen sister greet you.

Letters are nice, but a personal visit can be so much better. You have can personal interaction with each other, clarify points of discussion, answer questions, and encourage one another.

I have come to the end of my message today. Let me conclude with the three-point outline I gave you earlier, but in reverse order:

Beware of false teaching – stay faithful to the apostolic teaching you have received.

Walk in love and forgiveness. The love that we have for one another is a testimony to the world.

Walk in the truth. Stay anchored in the truth, as presented in here in the Bible.