

**SIMPLE STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES**

**THE SECOND LETTER OF JOHN**

**STUDENT'S STUDY GUIDE**



*“Grace be with you, mercy, and peace,  
from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ,  
the Son of the Father, in truth and love”.*

**1 John 1:3**

**DR. STANFORD E. MURRELL**

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## The Second Letter of John

Human Author: The Apostle John  
Divine Author: God the Holy Spirit  
Date of Writing: c. 60-95 AD  
Key Thought: Walking in love  
Key Verse: 2 John 1: 6

*“And this is love, that we walk after his commandments.”*

### Introduction

In order to appreciate the force of John's letters it is important to understand what was taking place in the first century. To put it simply, three different kinds of ministries emerged.

**First, there was the ministry of the apostles, which stood above all others.** The apostles had their opponents such as Paul found in Corinth but generally apostolic authority was recognized.

**Second, there was the ministry of the elders.** The elders were the officials of the settled local community. They were plural in number, appointed and had specific qualifications to meet and duties to perform. The plurality of elders is reflected in Acts 14:23. *“And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.”* The specific qualifications of elders are addressed in two passages of Scripture: Titus 1:5-9; Timothy 3:1-7.

**A third ministry found in the early church was the ministry of the prophets or wandering preachers.**

These individuals were not attached to any one congregation. Rather, they moved in the sphere of the Christian community claiming to have a message from the Lord. For the most part, the early Church honored them and gave these messengers a special place as illustrated in *The Didache*.

*The Didache* is the earliest book of Church order. In the *Didache* we find that the early Church recognized apostles, elders, and prophets. The early Church also recognized that each office was subject to abuse (*The Apostolic Fathers*, pp. 305-306; 316-317). Second and Third John focuses in on the abuse of the wandering preachers also known as prophets. These men had enormous prestige. They also had tremendous opportunity to abuse the name of Christ, the work of the ministry and to hurt individuals. John did not want the bride of Christ to be hurt and so he sat down and wrote a general epistle to the elect lady and her children.

## 2 JOHN 1

1 The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth;

1:1 **The elder.** Church tradition goes unchallenged that the elder here is none other than the apostle John. Like Peter, John calls himself a *presbuteros* because that denotes not only official authority but also age and experience. Some things in life can only be said from the vantage point of age and maturity. John is an old man. He has seen much, done much, and knows much. He has a right to speak and a right to be heard. The elect lady and her children would do well to listen to what John has to say.

1:1 **The elect lady.** If the identity of John is certain, the identity of the elect lady is not. There are those who believe that the elect lady is a particular person such as Mary or Martha. This would not be surprising for women have always played a vital part in the ministry of the Church. Others believe that the elect lady is not a particular person but a reference to the Church as the bride of Christ. In verses 4,8,10, and 12, the word "you" is in the plural which suggests more than one person is being addressed. In the final analysis, it does not matter. John feels that he has a right to give counsel and instruction to individuals and to the Church and so he takes pen in hand to write to all those who have known the truth. The great apostle is not writing without a purpose. There is a problem in the early Church. It is the problem of the wandering preachers.

2 For the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever.

1:2 **The truths sake.** The Elder says that it is in the sphere of truth that he loves the elect lady. This reminds us that Christian love is not indiscriminate. Christian love does have boundaries. The word for love here is agape. Agape is not passion per se which ebbs and flows. Nor is it an indulgent sentimentalism. Rather, agape is more mature. Dr. William Barclay describes it well when he writes, "*Agape is undefeatable goodwill; it is the attitude towards others which, no matter what they do, will never feel bitterness and will always seek their highest good. There is a love, which seeks to possess; there is a love which softens and enervates; there is a love which withdraws a man from the battle; there is a love which shuts its eyes to faults and to ways which end in ruin. But Christian love will always seek the highest good of others and will accept all the difficulties, all the hardships and all the toil which that search involves. It is of significance that John writes in love to warn*" (*The Letters of John And Jude, p. 139*).

3 Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

### 1:3 Grace, mercy and peace.

**Grace.** The word grace (*charis*) originally referred to a favor which was conferred freely, with no expectation of return. The generous nature of an individual was the motive. It was understood, however, that grace was always favor shown to a friend, never an enemy. Then came Christ and gave *charis* a new meaning. Towards a hostile world, toward a people full of bitter hatred for Him, God showed grace at Calvary (Rom. 5:8).

*“In looking through my tears one day,  
I saw Mount Calvary;  
Beneath the cross there flowed a stream  
Of grace, enough for me.*

*Grace is flowing from Calvary,  
Grace as fathomless as the sea,  
Grace for time and eternity,  
Grace, enough for me”.*

Edwin O. Excell

**Mercy.** And herein is mercy (*eleos*). As grace is undeserved favor demonstrated to the unworthy, mercy is the kindness and goodness of God. Mercy elicits divine pity so that God desires to do something to help man. God is not indifferent to the plight of man. He moves to help.

*The mercy of God is an ocean divine,  
A boundless and fathomless flood.  
Launch out in the deep, cut away the shore line,  
And be lost in the fullness of God.*

*Refrain*

*Launch out, into the deep.  
Oh let the shore line go.  
Launch out, launch out in the ocean divine,  
Out where the full tides flow.*

Albert B. Simpson

**Peace.** The loving mercy of God leading to His grace giving of His only Son allows man and God to be bound together again. In the words of Kenneth Wuest, *“Our Lord made peace through the blood of His cross when He made it possible for a holy God in perfect justice and holiness to bind together a believing sinner and Himself in an indissoluble, living union.”* Apart from Calvary there is no peace between God and man. There is only open conflict and warfare. John declares that grace, mercy, and peace will be with us from the ultimate source of God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father.

*“When peace, like a river,  
attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll;  
Whatever my lot,  
Thou has taught me to say,  
It is well, it is well, with my soul.*

*It is well, with my soul,  
It is well, with my soul,  
It is well, it is well, with my soul.”*

**Horatio Spafford**

### **The Story Behind the Song**

This hymn was written after two major traumas in Spafford’s life. The first was the great Chicago Fire of October 1871, which ruined him financially for he had been a wealthy businessman. Shortly after, while crossing the Atlantic, all four of Spafford’s daughters died in a collision with another ship. Spafford’s wife Anna survived and sent him the now famous telegram, “*Saved alone.*” Several weeks later, as Spafford’s own ship passed near the spot where his daughters died, the Holy Spirit inspired these words. They speak to the eternal hope that all believers have, no matter what pain and grief befall them on earth. Together the words, grace, mercy and peace declare the intimate relationship between Christ the Son and God the Father; the complete unity of the Triune God; and the very deity of Jesus for the Son possesses the essence of the Father. The great apostle covers much theological territory with so few words but always within the sphere of love grounded in truth.

4 I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father.

1:4 If John has a particular Church in mind then again he is found to be rejoicing that the members of the congregation are walking in, the truth. By using the word “*walking*” John, indicates a steady state of spiritual maturity. There are those who express their Christian life in a spasmodic way. Sometimes zealous for the Lord. Sometimes not. A Christian Sunday School teacher once told a student God would have Christians to be as stars continually shining. He does not want Christians to be comets which blaze across the sky and then is gone forever. The walk of Christians, says John, only has meaning in the sphere of truth. Pilate asked, “*What is truth?*” The *Bible* as a whole is the response. Do we want to know the truth? Then we must become diligent students of the *Bible*.

1:4 **Thy children.** The word “*children*” is a special word, *teknon*, referring to a beloved child. It is a tender word of affection. For those who walk in the sphere of truth there is the ability to elicit from others tender relationships in the family of God.

5 And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another.

1:5 **I beseech.** Though he possesses all apostolic authority, John does not thunder forth a command. Once, he might have done so but the Lord has changed his nature, subdued his heart, and sweetened his spirit so that John requests and entreats. The thing John is about to earnestly request is not a new thing, only that which he had received from the beginning of his ministry with Christ: *"that we love one another."*

6 And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.

1:6 **This is love.** What is this love that John has in mind? 2 John 1: 6 identifies it. *"And this is love, that we walk after His commandments."* It has been said that love is one of those words which is easier to demonstrate than to define. Looking at the life of Christ we find love defined by demonstration for in Jesus we find sacrificial giving. In Jesus we see wonderful acts of longsuffering, kindness, self-abasement, and humility. Therefore, we can observe and say that *love is not easily provoked, thinks no evil, does not rejoice in iniquity, rejoices in the truth, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things and never fails (1 Cor. 13:4-8).* John is determined that the saints he addresses should walk in it i.e., in the sphere of truth. The alternative to walking in the sphere of truth as defined and demonstrated by Christ, is to walk in the sphere of untruth and therefore spiritual darkness.

7 For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

1:7 **Many deceivers.** A deadly poison administered with kindness and concern still kills the body. Likewise, the wisdom of religious men, the philosophies of this world, no matter how gentle and loving, no matter how sincere and devout, will still destroy the soul and therefore is not authentic love. Authentic love is more cautious. Authentic love is not just sincere, it is safe.

### ***The Origin of Evil***

The reason for the presence of deceivers in the church can be traced back to Lucifer. As God demands love, Satan wants it too. Lucifer wants to be like God. Therefore, he duplicates or counterfeits religion and he counterfeits ministers of righteousness. The Evil One has alternative suggestions to all that God commands. He is the master of deception and he sends out his deceivers into the world (2:7). The deceivers of the devil do not necessarily know that they are motivated and empowered by him. It was Jesus who told the religious Pharisee, *"You are of your father the devil and the lusts of your father you will do."* The Pharisees would not for a moment have agreed to the proposition that they were motivated and empowered by the Evil One but Jesus said they were.

### ***Definition of a Deceiver***

The way that deceivers can be identified is explained in verse 7. They deny that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. The issue at state here is not the historical reality of Christ. The real issue is the denial of an advent of deity. There are those who deny that God was made man. To be sure, the concept of the incarnation defies all of human rational and natural belief. How can the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent Creator of the universe confine Himself to a human body? It seems impossible to many and so is denied. This denial of the incarnation is something that the Christian religious community has had to struggle with in every generation including our own. In theological classrooms across our nation, in prestigious colleges, the deity of Christ is questioned. Elaborate ways are found to dismiss the biblical revelation that Jesus is God. This is what makes the undermining of the Christian faith all the more subtle and deceptive. To deny the incarnation, to deny that Jesus has come in the flesh and that God has become man is to be a deceiver and an anti-Christ. There is no other way to state the conclusion.

### ***The Boundaries of Love***

To refer to a personality as a deceiver and an anti- Christ does not sound very loving. Where is John's gracious attitude? Where is the gentle spirit? The answer is that love has boundaries, as does truth. Loves moves to preserve and protect. Truth cannot be sacrificed in any way for a reason. To label is not libel. And this is love, to walk after the commandments of Christ. Christ has commanded us to believe Him, to embrace Him, to love Him. At a critical point in the first century a number of people broke with the commandments of Christ to enter into the Christian community and teach that which was contrary to the faith. For a variety of reasons they became deceivers. They were against Christ. It is possible that John knew some of these personalities who started out so well and ended up deceiving the flock of God and manifesting a spirit against Christ. Perhaps he even had fond early memories of them yet under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, John did not hesitate to renounce them. John did not hesitate to divorce himself from such people because they had divorced themselves from Christ.

### ***A Sober Situation***

There must be a sober realization that many deceivers have entered into the world of the professing Church. The deceivers can be identified because sooner or later they will begin to downgrade the deity of Christ. The Jehovah Witnesses, for example, believe that Jesus is the angel Michael. The Mormons believe that Christ is only one of many sons of God. The Muslims believe that Jesus was just a prophet. My God, deliver us from the deceivers. But we believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God and the only Saviour of the world.

8 Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.



1:8 Having described the spirit and deception of those who walk not in truth and love, John issues a word of exhortation saying, "*look to yourselves*" or better, "*even keep a watchful eye upon yourselves.*" From this apostolic imperative the following is learned.

**First, pure religion requires constant self-examination.** One godly author has observed that, "*Many professors revolt at the thought of such inward survey; they content themselves with looking (and that hastily) at external matters, but they will not look within, though this neglect be at the peril of eternal good*" (Matthew Henry).

**Second, pure religion is constantly concerned with guarding the truth not only in others but also in self.**

**Third, pure religion is extremely personal.** It is easy to stand in judgment on others. It is more difficult to bring the spotlight of Divine judgment on self. The reason why John desires self-examination is so the truths, which have been so diligently worked for, may pay off. The image presented is that of a workman who has put in a full days labor and receives a full days pay for a job well done. John speaks of a common effort of labor by the plural pronoun "*we.*" The Church as a whole has labored to preserve, protect, and present the wonderful doctrine of the deity of Christ. Much physical and spiritual labor has gone into the effort and the reward for truth is to be with Christ forever, to see new converts come to faith and to find comfort in the great doctrines of grace.

9 Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.

1:9 **Whosoever.** The word "*whosoever*" has reference to any professing Christian. It does not matter if a person is a minister, Sunday School teacher, a doctor, an elder or deacon, a prince or king. "*Whosoever*" is inclusive. The person that does not abide or that does not continue in the doctrine of Christ hath not God. There is no exception and there is no hope for apostate teachers. The *Bible* warns all who turn away from the Christian faith to embrace a lifestyle and faith contrary to the gospel. The question is not how well does the ship start out but how well does it reach its destination. Does it arrive with its cargo intact? The *Titanic* started out well but was destroyed and many on board perished. In like manner many a person starts out well. Gospel messages are heard, biblical principles are learned, spiritual songs are sung, and religious services are attended. But then the soul goes further then what is right or proper. There is transgression. "*Such souls,*" says John, "*have not God.*" In modern day movements we see this pattern not only in the established cults but also in modernistic preaching whereby Jesus is declared to be merely our Goal, our Pattern, or our Example. His deity, the Church is told, does not really matter. John says it does matter. Eternal salvation hinges on abiding in the truth. Assurance of salvation is found in part by abiding in the doctrines of Christ.

10 If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed:

11 For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.

1:10-11 John continues with practical and specific instructions in order to protect self against falling into error. Several elements are present in this passage. Observe first, the certainty of being subjected to false doctrine. "*If there come unto you.*" This is the "*if*" of a fulfilled condition. There were teachers who were circulating in the Christian community who were denying the deity of Christ as taught by the apostles and Christ Himself. What was the Christian to do? Two things are forbidden. First, "*receive him not into the house*", and second, "*neither bid him godspeed*". To not receive a person into one's house must be understood in the official capacity in which the wandering preachers would come with their false doctrines. There are those who believe this passage forbids even the witnessing to such people. For example, if the Mormons or the Jehovah Witnesses or the Moonies came knocking at the door, they should not be let inside. Others contend that every effort should be made to present clearly and forcefully the gospel of Jesus Christ. The context seems to support the former position of teachers who desire hospitality all the while denying the doctrine of Christ. Furthermore, a strong argument could be made that by way of extension today, this refers to not fellowshiping with those who are Liberal or Modernist.

12 Having many things to write unto you, I would not *write* with paper and ink: but I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face, that our joy may be full.

13 The children of thy elect sister greet thee. Amen.

1: 12-13 John has many other thoughts he wishes to convey to the Church but he deliberately decides to wait until he can speak face to face with the people he loves. For now John is content to issue a general principle involving two practical considerations. First, in applying the principle of 2 John, the Church must be careful to guard the heart against feelings of pride, arrogance, and self righteousness. Second, the Church must not expand the prohibitions against fellowship when Christians have legitimate concerns over non-essential issues. Christians must be sensitive enough to allow freedom for diverse opinions. True evil is limited and defined by God.

## **Student's Study Guide**

### **The Second Letter of John**

#### ***Questions and Answers on 2 John***

1. What is the purpose of John's letter? What problem did he address?

***Answer.***

2. Who is the elect lady of 1:1?

***Answer.***

3. Define the term antichrist according to a biblical definition.

***Answer.***

4. What is the boundary of love?

***Answer.***

5. Define love Scripturally.

***Answer.***

### ***Personal Application and Reflection***

1. Do you walk after the commandments of Christ? Is there any doctrine or teaching of Christ you do not endeavor to keep? Have you looked to yourself lately? Explain.
2. Comment on the statement, “*The question is not how well does the ship start out but how well does it reach its destination. Does it arrive with its cargo intact?*” Is a works salvation or works for the soul’s security suggested by such a concept?
3. The divine prohibition of 2 John 1:10 has caused concern for many pastors and Christians about close involvement with those who tolerate a widespread Ecumenical spirit. Many conservative believers feel uncomfortable with an indiscriminate policy and for this reason, according to 2 John 1:14, to officially endorse those who deny the cardinal doctrines of Christ is to partake of their evil deeds. The cardinal doctrines of Christ include His deity, virgin birth, substitutionary death, bodily resurrection, sinless perfection, and true humanity. In the sight of God, evil deeds include the proclamation of a teaching contrary to sound doctrine. Alongside of murder, rape, stealing, and lying, partaking of evil by official association with teachers not of Christ seems to be included. Do you agree? Defend your answer with a biblical example.
4. There are many major religious groups in the world such as the Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons, Christian Scientists, Islam, Judaism, and Hinduism. Does embracing the ideas of these religions mean a person has stopped walking in the sphere of Christian truth and love? Why or why not?
5. To what extent would you be involved in an ecumenical crusade or Christian service?

### ***Hiding God’s Word in My Heart***

*2 John 1: 7 For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.*

## *Student's Supplemental Material*

1:1 **The elect.** The word "*elect*" brings before the mind the Doctrine of Election, and what a wonderful concept it is.

1. God the Holy Spirit wants the Church to know that "*election on the part of God in eternity is the source from which the process of salvation springs and it is the ultimate reason for the salvation of men*"(Matthew Henry). 2 Thessalonians 2:13 plainly states, "*We are chosen by God unto salvation.*"
2. Election is not salvation. Election is merely the divine initiative whereby God chooses those whom He will certainly save. This election took place in Christ before the foundation of the world. "*According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love*" (Eph. 1:4).
3. Election was based solely upon the sovereign will of God and not on the will of man. The election of Jacob over Esau illustrates this truth. Romans 9:11 says, "*(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth).*" Speaking to Jeremiah God said to him, "*Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations*" (Jer. 1:5). And John 1:13 states plainly that men are born "*not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*"
4. Election was to the end that the elect should be holy and without blame. *1 Thess 4:3 For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication:*
5. Any man, woman, or young person, can know if they have been chosen by God in at least two different ways.
6. A person can be part of the elect body by believing the gospel. "*But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believed on his name*" (John 1:12).
7. A person can know they are part of the body of the elect by manifesting the fruits of righteousness, which accompany salvation. In 1 Thessalonians 1:3,4 Paul writes that he remembers the labors of the saints in the city. He has thought often about their "*labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our faith.*"
8. In 2 Peter 1:10 commands Christians to make their calling and election certain. "*Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.*" A person's calling and election is fortified mentally when the doctrines of sovereign grace are embraced.

9. Knowing basic biblical theology is essential for authentic love can only exist in the sphere of truth. Arguments and divisions come when the church sets aside apostolic doctrine and substitute for truth the errors of wandering preachers.