

## A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

### 64. THE BOOK OF 2 JOHN

Reading: 2 John 1-13

Most ladies agree that the best presents come in small packages. Also some of the choicest pieces of literature could be written on a postcard. The 2<sup>nd</sup> epistle of John has often been referred to as a postcard for it is short enough to fit on a single sheet of papyrus. It is one of five single chapter books in the Bible, we have the prophet Obadiah in the Old Testament and Philemon, 2 John, 3 John and Jude in the New Testament. *These books have often been described as God's special post-it notes to his people.* They are short yet significant, they are brief yet beneficial. Now the 2<sup>nd</sup> epistle of John may be the most neglected book in the New Testament. I can never recall hearing a message preached from this book. Have you ? Yet the Lord used the apostle John to write about the essentials of the Christian life. Now when we come to this postcard of 1 John there are several matters we need to keep in mind.

#### 1. There is the Question of Identity:

Who wrote this little letter and to whom did he write it ? Almost all scholars agree that the human author of this postcard epistle is John. This book was freely quoted by the early church writers and also the language and style confirms that it was written by John who wrote the gospel

and the first epistle of John. Lamoyne Sharpe makes the point that “ *this epistle very closely resembles John's first epistle and eight out of the 13 verses of this epistle are in substance found in the first.* ” ( v 1 1 Jn 1:3 v 4 1 Jn 4:21 ) But to whom did John write ? Who is the “ *elect lady and her children* ? ” Some have supposed that “ *the elect lady,* ” was a figurative term to denote the Christian church in general, others have suggested that it was sent to a particular but unnamed church, but if that were so, John would have clearly stated it in his epistle. Is it not better to understand this phrase in a normal plain sense referring to a particular woman and her children rather than interpreting it in a non-literal sense as a church and its membership. This would mean that the last verse of the letter “ *the children of thy elect sister greet thee,* ” ( v 13 ) would mean the nephews and or nieces of the person addressed in ( v 1 )

Now it is accurate to say that John does address a group in this letter, for we find the *plural tense* used in ( v 6, 8, 10 and 12 ) but it is also true that he addresses an individual as is clear from verses ( 1, 4, 5, and 13 ) Maybe the solution is that a Christian assembly was meeting in this home along with the family of “ *the elect lady,* ” so that John had both the family and the congregation in mind. I mean where there not similar situations in other places ? Do you recall Paul's recurring phrase ? “ *The church in thy house.* ” ( Philemon 2 Rom 16:5 1 Cor 16:19 Col 4:15 ) So here is John addressing a Christian lady and her children and the church which met in her house. 1.

#### 2. There is the Question of Orthodoxy:

For 2 John deals with the same problem as 1 John. False teachers began to arise infecting the church with false doctrine. This teaching eventually became known as Gnosticism. Dr. Andrew Telford ( 1895- 1997 ) says,

**False teachers were going from place to place trying to gain an audience. They Denied that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh. They Deviated from the teachings of Christ. They Deceived new converts to their own advantage. They came preaching another so called gospel. They presented a different Christ from the One John's converts knew.**

These Gnostics claimed to have superior knowledge but they denied the basic teaching about the incarnation and the humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ. They attacked the person of Christ, and He is the touchstone of truth. My ..... the person and work of Jesus Christ are of crucial importance. And John's purpose was to strengthen Christians to resist the tide of heresy that was rising against the church. 1. 2.

### **3. There is the Question of Hospitality:**

You see, when this letter was written there was no complete Bible. This necessitated a special ministry of prophets and teachers who imparted and interpreted New Testament truth to the church. These travelling preachers were highly esteemed and quickly attained a leading role in the community. Such men would travel from place to place in a much needed teaching ministry. They were travelling preachers who would spend a few days here and then move on to somewhere else. The problem was, where

would they stay ? In those days the likes of Holiday Inn and Premier Inn were not around. Moreover the Inns of the first century were immoral, dirty and flea infested. So what were the circuit riding preachers supposed to do ?

*What else could they do, but stay with the believers who would provide them with a good square meal and a clean bed ?* But what was happening here was this. Among these preachers were false teachers who as John McArthur says “ *seemed to be conducting an itinerant ministry among John's congregations, seeking to make converts, and taking advantage of Christian hospitality to advance their cause.*” Lucian writes about the itinerant charlatan who lived on the generosity of Christians, as soon as he was found out, he moved to another company of equally benevolent guileless believers. The Didache an early Christian document lays down regulations about hospitality to travelling preachers. It states,

*If he that comes is a passer-by, succour him as far as you can, but he shall not stay with you longer than two or three days, unless there be a necessity. But if he is minded to settle among you and be a craftsman, let him work and eat. But if he has no trade according to your understanding provide that he shall not live idle among you, being a Christian. But if he will not do this, he is a Christmonger a trafficker in Christ, of such men beware.*  
( The Bible Book by Book by Raymond Brown p,247 )

I wonder was it the case that the front door of “ *the elect lady,*” was always open ? Did she not have the heart to say “ *no,*” to anyone ? Could it have been that she had shown hospitality to these false prophets ? Or was it that

John feared that these false teachers would take advantage of her kindness ? Whatever John writes this letter to warn his readers against showing hospitality to such deceivers. ( v 10 ) His message is “ *Make sure your love is discerning. Hospitality and kindness must be given only to those who are adhering to the fundamentals of the faith.*” Now is John’s letter relevant ? Well, we live in a day of ecumenical evangelism when folk demand that we accept and support the union of believers and apostates. Surely in such a day we need to remember John’s teaching for the Bible says “ *be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.*” ( 2 Cor 6:14 ) Doctrine matters. What we believe concerning the person and work of Christ matters. It is truth that determines the bounds of love and as a consequence the bounds of unity. Now in order to open up this letter to you, I want to underscore three words in the opening verse. “ *The elect lady,*” Notice “ *the elect lady,*”

### **(1) IS CONSIDERED BY THE APOSTLE v 1-3**

For he writes this letter to her. Now this is,

#### **(a) A PERSONAL LETTER:**

##### **1. Look at Him:**

“ *the elder,*” that is a term which comes from the Greek word *presbuteros* and it has the general meaning of “ *an old man.*” So it could refer here to Maturity: not necessarily indicating old age, but rather indicating someone who was the last survivor of those who had seen the Lord. I mean John’s knowledge of the gospel went

back a lot further than his present contemporaries. Of course the word could refer to Ministry: for this was a word given to a particular class who had the care of the churches. Peter went down a similar line when he described himself as a fellow elder. ( 1 Pet 5:1 ) So here we see John the apostle referring to himself as an elder. Reliable sources tell us that in the latter days of his life before he went home to be with the Lord John was ministering to the flock at Ephesus. Of course in the local church today there are elders appointed by the Holy Spirit ( Acts 20:28 ) to act as shepherds who feed and lead the flock. ( Heb 13:7,17 ) The elders have a responsibility to the church, and the church has a responsibility to the elders.

##### **2. Look at Her:**

“ *The elect lady,*” it can be translated “ *the elect kyria,*” or “ *the elect Electa.*” One scholar has tried to identify this lady and suggests that as the Greek “ *Kyria,*” lady is in the Hebrew “ *Martha,*” that she could have been “ *Martha of Bethany.*” But this is hardly likely as this letter was addressed to the “ *elect lady and her children,*” and as far as we know neither Martha, Mary nor Lazarus ever married. I believe that John is writing to a godly mother, someone who is a devoted follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, someone who has had the joy of seeing some of her children come to saving faith in Christ. Here was a lady who was following in the footsteps of Philemon and many others when she made her home available for the various church meetings. ( Phil 2 ) Now if this is true then 2 John is the only book in the Bible that is addressed to a

woman and it is a commendation of a Christian mother. So this is a personal letter from John to a godly mother whom John was deeply concerned about. Can you see in the opening remarks John's restraint ? As John Phillips says " *he uses the term ' beloved,' when writing to a church or to a man but he uses no such familiarity in addressing a woman not even when writing to a sister in Christ.*" (a)

### **(b) A DOCTRINAL LETTER:**

Do you notice that in the first 4 verses of this letter John uses the word " *truth*," five times ? He also uses the word " *love*," four times in these opening verses. When you put those two words together you can see the emphasis that John intended in this short letter. He was saying, " *I want you to understand what Christian love is, its walking in truth.*" Now how important it is not to separate those two things. To practice truth without love leads to legalism, to employ love without truth leads to liberalism. Truth and love. These two qualities ought to mark our lives as Christians. Someone once said that a well-balanced Christian life contains salt and sugar. Salt is truth and sugar is love. Some Christians want only the salt, they are all truth without love. They can be cold and judgmental having no concern for the feelings, needs or hurts of others. Others are only sugar bowls.

They are all love and no truth. They don't want to be held accountable. They don't want to be confronted with sin. All they want is for you to be nice to them. All they want is sugar. Our goal as believers is to keep truth and love,

salt and sugar in balance. Is this not how our Lord lived ? Did He not walk in truth and love ? ( Jn 8:7-11 ) Paul combines the two when he says, " *but speaking the truth in love.*" ( Eph 4:15 ) Here heresy was making inroads into the church so John writes this doctrinal letter where,

### **1. Truth is EMPHASISED:**

David Jackman says, " *the truth of God revealed supremely in the living Word and recorded unerringly in the written Word provides the route by which the Christian is travelling from earth to heaven.*" The " *truth*," is the whole body of Christian teaching later called by John the " *doctrine of Christ.*" ( v 9 ) The Bible, the Word of God is the truth of God. ( Jn 17:17 ) Now John opened this letter on this note of " *truth*," because there were false teachers abroad who were spreading error. ( v 7 ) John was not one to say that all teaching is true in one way or another and that we should not be critical as long as folk are sincere. No, to John there was a great difference, in fact a deadly difference between truth and error and he would not tolerate error.

All we hear about today in an ecumenical climate is love. We have been told to set aside doctrinal differences and the things we hold tenaciously to, and just love one another. Now we ought " *to love one another,*" ( v 5 ) Is there not far too much bickering, strife, and discord among believers ? But it is never correct to lay aside doctrine for love, for Christian love operates in the sphere of truth. 1.

## **2. Truth is EXPERIENCED:**

For the “*truth*,” is not only an objective revelation but a subjective experience in our lives. We can know the truth. How did this elect lady and her children come to know the truth and become children of God ? Through the “*grace and mercy of God.*” ( v 3 ) You see, when you receive grace and mercy from God you experience his peace. 1. 2.

## **3. Truth is EMBODIED:**

For Jesus Christ is the truth. ( Jn 14:6 ) Here John declares His Deity for He is “*the Son of the Father.*” ( v 3 ) It has been well said that it is possible to discover where a person stands, by where he is prepared to place Jesus Christ. ***You see, the Christian faith stands or falls on the doctrine of the Deity of Jesus Christ.*** If he is only man then he cannot save us. If he is not God come in flesh then the Christian faith is lies not truth and John opened his letter with the wrong emphasis. Some years ago the great American statesman Daniel Webster was dining in Boston with a group pf distinguished men some of whom had Unitarian leanings. The Unitarians deny the Trinity and the Deity of both the Son and the Spirit. When the subject of religion came up Webster affirmed his belief in the deity of Jesus Christ and his confidence in the work of atonement. “*But Mr. Webster,*” said one man “*can you comprehend how Christ can be both God and man ?*”

“*No, sir,*” I cannot comprehend it,” Webster replied. “*If I could comprehend Him, He would be no greater than myself, and I feel that I need a superhuman Saviour.*”

My .... do you realise that the person of Christ is the fundamental test of Christian doctrine ? The question that should be continually upon our lips is this, “*what think ye of Christ ?*” for truth is embodied in a person and that person is Jesus Christ.

## **4. Truth is EXPRESSED:**

How can you express truth ? By walking in it. By regulating your life according to the truth. By living in the light of the truth. J. B. Hewitt sums it up beautifully when he says, “***Truth is in the Christian Intellectually, in his mind, he holds the truth. Truth is in the Christian Sympathetically: in his heart he loves the truth. Truth is in the Christian Authoritatively, in his soul he lives the truth.***” So the elect lady is (1)

### **(2) IS COMMENDED BY THE APOSTLE v 4**

Look if you will at ( v 4 ) Now keep in mind that John is addressing this lady and her family, and possibly the church that met in her home who were living in a society that was absolutely pagan and godless. Think of,

### **(a) THE TRUTH THAT WAS TAUGHT IN THIS HOME:**

Here was a woman who had taught her children the truth and they were maturing in the things of God. Now the literal translation of ( v 4 ) is “*some of thy children.*” Did that indicate that there were others who had gone their own way and done their own thing ? Was this family just

like many more ? They had not yet experienced household salvation yet the truth had been taught. What does God expect in a Christian home ? What does God expect from a Christian home ? Did you notice that this family were ***well Balanced*** ? They had truth and love. They were ***well Behaved***: they were walking in the truth of God. They were ***well Blessed***: they were loved by all the believers who entered their home. Is my home different from my neighbour's home next door, who may be unbelievers ? Is my home a place where God is honoured ? Is it a home where His Word is respected ? Is it a home where His people are welcomed ? What about our kids ? Do we seek to “ *bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*” ( Eph 6:4 ) *Do you pray with them and for them ? Do you teach them the Word of God ? Do you bring them out to hear the Word of God ?* Here is a Christian mother who had the unsurpassed joy of seeing at least some of her kids walk in her footsteps. Susannah Wesley had seventeen children, yet she made time to be alone with God for one hour every day, to plead for their salvation.

### ***(b) THE JOY THAT WAS BROUGHT TO THIS HEART:***

For as John sees this family living for the Lord he is refreshed and encouraged. To “ *walk in the truth,*” means to obey it, to permit it to control every area of our lives.

John's joy was that the elect lady's children were walking in truth. It certainly brings joy to the Father when He sees His children obeying His Word. And we who are in spiritual leadership know what it means when a church family is submissive to the Word of God. When the great

Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon was a lad, he lived with his grandfather who pastored a church in Stambourne, England. A church member named Roads used to sit in the local pub and drink beer and smoke and this practice grieved the pastor very much. One day Charles said to his grandfather, “ ***I'll kill old Roads, I will.***” Do you know what did young Spurgeon did ? He went to the pub and he confronted Roads in the pub with these words, “ ***What doest thou here Elijah ? Sitting with the ungodly, and you a member of a church and breaking your pastor's heart. I'm ashamed of you. I wouldn't break my pastor's heart, I'm sure.***” Do you know what happened ? It was not long before Roads showed up at the pastor's home, confessing his sins and apologising for his behaviour. Young Spurgeon had “ *killed him,*” indeed. Would John if he knew you, rejoice over you and commend you ? Do you bring joy to the hearts of your spiritual leaders ? Are they refreshed and encouraged when they look at you ? Why ? Because they see you walking in truth. 1, 2

### **(3) IS COMMANDED BY THE APOSTLE v 5-6**

For John wanted the elect lady, and her family, and the church meeting in her home to “ *love one another.*” Now notice,

#### ***(a) THE WHERE OF THIS COMMAND ?***

Where did this command initiate ? In the Upper Room. If you read the Upper Room ministry in John ( Ch 13-17 ) this word “ *love,*” occurs some 26 times. Whatever else

the Lord Jesus intended to impress upon the disciples, He wanted this to live with them, and live in them. And so He says “ *a new commandment I gave unto you that ye love one another, as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye have love one to another.*” ( Jn 13:34 ) Here is the badge, the identifying mark of the true believer, if you have love one to another. You see, the Lord Jesus could see down through the ages. He knew that His people would be living in a hostile environment, that they would experience trial and hardship and so He says, “ *don't hate one another, don't be unkind, don't be discourteous, love one another.*” Tell me, what have you done with the Lord's command ? Has brotherly love gone out through the window ? Are you marked by love or have you allowed jealousy and bitterness to well up within your heart ?

#### **(b) *THE WHO OF THIS COMMAND:***

Who did this command include ? John says, “ *one another.*” I heard about a prestigious Baptist church in the U.S.A. who were appointing a new assistant pastor and there was a great disagreement over who it should be. The members meetings were lively, eventually one man was chosen and he was appointed. The day came for the induction service and for the first time ever a church service in the U.S.A. was televised and it was this one. There was great excitement, this had never happened before. In the proceedings after the hymns the pastor elect stood to his feet, and one of his greatest opponents could not take it anymore. He strode up to the front to the

podium, planted an upper cut on his chin in front of the congregation and the whole audience that was watching on television. *What do you think that communicated to the outside world ?* What did it say about the Lord's word's “ *by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye have love one to another .... ,*” ? It turned out that the young pastor's attitude made all the difference, because that young pastor was a man called Charles Stanley, who has become one of the greatest Bible teachers in America. You see, it was his attitude that made the difference. I wonder what this community really thinks of this church ? Do they say, “ *See how these Christians love one another ?*” (a) (b)

#### **(c) *THE WHAT OF THIS COMMAND:***

What did this command involve ? Well, the world tells us that “ *love is a many splendoured thing,*” “ *love is all we need,*” but John defines love like this in ( v 6 ) Notice that in ( v 5 ) obedience finds expression in love, in ( v 6 ) love finds expression in obedience. Love is obeying the Lord. Children love their parents by obeying them. Christ says “ *If ye love me keep my commandments.*” ( Jn 14:15 ) Walking in love means we walk in obedience to the Word of God. Christian love is an act of the will. It simply means treating each other the way God treats us. God forgives us, so we forgive one another, God receives us, so we receive one another, God is kind to us, so we are kind to one another. How tragic it is when Christians claim to love the Bible and hate the brethren. My .... where there is a sincere love for the Word of God there will be a sincere love for the people of God.

*Love never faileth  
Love is pure gold  
Love is what Jesus  
Came to unfold*

#### **(4) IS CAUTIONED BY THE APOSTLE v 7-13**

You see, the canon of Scripture was not complete. Itinerant ministry was the order of the day. Hospitality was being shown to the servants of God, but there were those who took advantage of it. Wandering, vagabond preachers were popping up everywhere, expounding all sorts of doctrine that was striking at the very roots of Christianity. And though this “this elect lady,” was a stalwart for the truth, John still felt the need to warn her, and all like her, especially women to be on their guard. So He warns here about,

##### **(a) *THOSE THAT DECEIVE:***

He’s talking about those false teachers mentioned in his first letter who did not believe in the incarnation, the literal coming into human existence of the Lord Jesus. Where did these false teachers come from originally ? John says, “*for many deceivers have gone out into the world.*” It seems likely that they had gone out from the church. At one time they professed to believe “*the faith which was once delivered to the saints,*” ( Jude v 3 ) But they turned from that faith and abandoned the truth and the church. John says, “*they went out from us but they were not of us.*” ( 1 Jn 2:19 ) Do you recall Paul’s warning to the Ephesian elders ? “*For I know that after my*

*departure shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them.*” ( Acts 20:29-30 ) Mark, those words “*of your own selves,*” did you know that the founders of many cults came of out orthodox evangelical Christianity ? Does the name William Irvine ring a bell ? He professed faith in Christ in 1895, joined the Faith Mission in 1896 becoming a strong leader and dynamic preacher. Then all of a sudden William Irvine changed tact and began denouncing the churches. He set himself as up as a special leader and teacher and gathered a group of people around him to be known later as the Cooneyites. They preach “*the Jesus way,*” salvation is through imitating the life of Christ.

Eventually in 1920 Irvine went to live in Jerusalem, for he believed that he was one of the two witnesses mentioned in ( Rev Ch 11 ) But the story goes that in 1947 he died and three and a half days did not rise again like the two witnesses will, but he still lies in the grave testimony to the fact that he was a false prophet who spawned a false cult. Do you see what John is saying ? ***If you err concerning the person of Christ its proof that you are not a child of God.*** John describes these teachers as antichrist because they deny that He is indeed God come in the flesh, and gave their converts a substitute Christ who is not the Christ of the New Testament. You see, the first question you want to ask any teacher, preacher, author is, “***What do you think of Christ ? Is He God come in the flesh ?***” If he hesitates or if he denies that Jesus is God come in the flesh then you can be sure you have a false teacher.



**(b) *THOSE THAT DESTROY:***

John says, “ *look to yourselves,*” beware, take heed.

“ *that we lose not ....,*” ( v 8 ) A believer cannot lose his salvation but he can certainly lose his reward, and it's a serious thing to be led astray by someone's false doctrine. What a tragedy it is when God's servants labour faithfully to build up a work and then the work is destroyed by false teaching. ( Gal 4:11 2 Pet 1:11 ) My .... do we not need to discriminate fellowship on the basis of adherence to the truth ? ( Col 2:18-19 3:24-25 )

**(c) *THOSE THAT DEPART:***

The word “ *transgresseth,*” means “ *to run ahead too far, to pass beyond the assigned limits,*” “ *to go onward,*” it's a dig at those who claimed to have advanced knowledge. The reference is to people who go beyond the doctrine of Christ which is characteristic of every false cult. They have some new information, some new book, some new revelation by some new prophet. But do you see how cut and dried John is ? “ *Either you hold to the historic doctrines of the Christian faith or you don't. If you do you are a genuine believer, united to the Father and the Son. If you don't you are deceived and have not God.*” ***Truth, then boils down to doctrine.*** ( 2 Tim 4:3 ) My .... truth always comes down to doctrine. It was so in John's day, it was so in Martin Luther's day, when he stood before all the massed might of Rome. It is so in our day, as we are inundated with cults that attack all the great fundamentals of the faith and who decry doctrine claiming it to be divisive and an obstacle to their vision of a global,

ecumenical church. No wonder John says, “ *Watch, take heed, beware.*” They may be gifted and charming, may drop the names of believers into the conversation, may say many true things. But out it will come, some subtle serious error, concerning the person of Christ, the ministry of the Holy Spirit or the inerrancy and inspiration of Scripture. (a) (b) (c)

**(d) *THOSE THAT DISCIPLE:***

Look if you will at ( v 10 ) You may think, “ *Oh, that is so harsh. That is so unloving. Brother John you don't love people.*” Well, although John was called the apostle of love an old story describes how strong he was. While he was living in Ephesus one day he went to the public baths. While he was there a false teacher named Cerinthus arrived. John jumped out of the water, got his clothes and towel, and took off running. He said, “ *let us hurry from this house, lest it fall on us. Cerinthus the enemy of truth is here.*” Cerinthus taught that the Lord Jesus was the natural son of Joseph and Mary, not God come in the flesh. My .... we must not allow the ***poison of false doctrine to get into our home.*** We don't have to be rude or impolite about it, but John says, “ *don't welcome the cultist when he comes, don't greet him when he goes for if you do you may be an accomplice in a wicked work which may send souls to their eternal ruin.*” ( v 11 )

My .... we must not allow ***the poison of false doctrine to get into our church.*** In an age when experience takes precedence over truth may we “ *prove all things, hold fast that which is good.*” ( 1 Thes 5:21 )

