

# Sermon: How to Love One Another

Text: [II John 1:1-13 ESV](#)

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**Introduction:** Many times epistles that are so short in the NT are overlooked and not studied or preached. [II John](#) is so small as to be contained on a standard sheet of papyrus that measured 8x10 inches. These last two letters [II John](#) and [III John](#) cover some of the same topics and themes. These topics cover “truth,” “loving one another,” and behavior matching what’s inside the person (spiritually). All the Johannine writing was done in the 90’s and here the backdrop is probably Ephesus with the recipients being in the churches of what was called Asia (modern-day Turkey). Letters were circular, intended to be shared with other churches much like the book of [Revelation](#) that was addressed to 7 churches in Asia originally.

In these ancient letters there were many times a “greeting” followed by commandments, encouragement, and sometimes warnings to avoid walking away from the truth of the Gospel, and then a final greeting of encouragement or a benediction (blessing).

## I. The Letter Starts with a Greeting (vv.1-3).

[II John 1:1-2 ESV](#) <sup>1</sup> 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, <sup>2</sup> because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever:

### A. Identifies the writer (many times)

The “elder” is probably simply a term for the Apostle John’s age rather than it being an official office designation.

There are two words used for elder that we might mention here. Certainly the word for shepherd is used for elders in some cases, but the word here is *πρεσβυτερος* that is more about age. The other word used in [I Timothy 3](#) where it is referring to the office and qualifications for elders and their ministry is *επισκοπος*.

As a congregation, can you imagine having the Apostle Paul being the person who started your church, then followed by Timothy, Paul’s protege, to where we are here in [2 John](#) with John being available to the church and probably other elders.

The phrase “the” elder must be a clue to this being about age because in the early Church there were always a plurality of elders for a congregation.

**Acts 14:23 ESV** <sup>23</sup> And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

### B. Identifies the recipient

**II John** was addressed to “the elect (chosen) lady.” There have been many guesses as to whom this refers such as Mary (Jesus’ mother), Mary of Bethany, but more than likely it is addressed to a particular church. And the children would be the Christians there.

And then what we see in **verse 3** is not so much a prayer as the confident assurance of the Lord’s blessing (Plummer, p. 177).

**II John 1:3 ESV** <sup>3</sup> Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son, in truth and love.

“In secular letters of the time we have simply ‘greeting’ (χαρειν) instead of these Christian blessings. ‘Grace’ (χαρις) is the favour of God towards sinners...mercy is the compassion of God for the misery of sinners; *and* ‘peace’ is the result when the guilt and misery of sin (and disobedience) are removed. ‘Grace is rare in the writings of S. John; elsewhere only John i. 14, 16, 17; Rev. i 4, xxii. 21.’” - Plummer

If a person were to reject God’s truth and love, one should not expect grace, mercy and peace. All of God’s gifts to us must be accepted with the qualification attached of knowing the truth and then out of love obeying it. John, the author of this epistle, uses the word “truth” 5 times in these 13 verses, and “love” 4 times. And here in **verse 3** he pairs God and Jesus Christ as the source of this grace, mercy and peace.

## II. John Both Commends and Warns the Church (**vv. 4-11**).

### A. The Church Needs to Walk in Love (**vv. 4-6**).

**II John 1:4-6 ESV** <sup>4</sup> I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> 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.

In **verse 4**, it seems John is pointing out there are those (maybe the majority) who are walking in the truth, i.e., behaving as they should, but there are some who are not, and this must be addressed because it reflects badly on God and Jesus, His Son. Godly behavior, holy living is required and is informed by correct (orthodox) teaching.

The word “joy” (NIV) and “rejoiced” in our translation (ESV) come from the same root as the word used for “grace.” This was indeed a wonderful gift for John as it is when we see our own children accepting Jesus as their Lord and understanding what is needed to live the life of a Christ follower.

Loving God and loving neighbor are ancient commands. **Deuteronomy 6:4-5 ESV** 4 “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

**Leviticus 19:18 ESV** 18 You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.

Jesus had distilled the ten commandments into just two and referenced these OT passages during his earthly ministry. Jesus was asked:

**Matthew 22:36-40 ESV** 36 “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” 37 And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

In the context of sacrifice and witnessing we hear Jesus say: **John 13:34-38 ESV** 34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” 36 Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, where are you going?” Jesus answered him, “Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward.” 37 Peter said to him, “Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.” 38 Jesus answered, “Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times.

Plummer, p. 179 has it right here when he says: “In v.5 obedience prompts love; here (in v.6) love prompts obedience.”

God is not interested in your obedience without love. He wants us to act and react to Him and others out of love understanding the sacrifice that demonstrated that love to us.

#### B. Beware of False Teachers (vv. 7-8).

**II John 1:7 ESV** 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.

So there seems to have been a group who left the church chasing heretical teaching. The primary problem was they did not believe Jesus was God while others taught Jesus was God or a god, but not fully human like you and I. And now these false teachers were back within the church trying to take more disciples for their false teaching.

If Jesus is not like us although without sin, he cannot be the perfect sacrifice for our sins. If Jesus is not God he has no power to grant to us salvation and eternal life. Bishop Moule once said, “A Savior not quite God is a bridge broken at the farther end.” And as I see it then the Christian life would give us nothing in the end except disappointment and despair. The incarnation: Jesus being God in the flesh and Emmanuel (God with us) must be true. And those who would teach differently will be doomed to Hell if they do not repent. These false teachers show by their leaving the church they are following Satan rather than Jesus, the Head of the Church.

Going out into the world is to the forces who are opposed to God and Jesus and His church. It is comparable to the “going out” of Judas when Satan entered into him.

**John 13:27, 30 ESV** <sup>27</sup> Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, “What you are going to do, do quickly.” <sup>30</sup> So, after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

Jesus’ coming in the flesh is a doctrine that separates orthodox Christianity from many heresies and cults (Mormons, JWs).

“Martin Luther said of Jesus: He ate, drank, slept, waked; was weary, sorrowful, rejoicing; He wept and He laughed; He knew hunger and thirst and sweat; He talked, He toiled, He prayed... so that there was no difference between Him and other men, save only this, that He was God, and had no sin.”

Emil Brunner cites this passage, and then goes on to say, “The Son of God in whom we are able to believe must be such a One that it is possible to mistake Him for an ordinary man.”

**I John 1:8 ESV** <sup>8</sup> Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we[you] have worked for, but may win a full reward.

**Q.** For what have the members of John’s church worked?

**A.** Their faith/salvation/ even possibly maturity in Christ.

**John 6:29 ESV** <sup>29</sup> Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”

Paul had similar problems in Ephesus: **Ephesians 4:14 ESV** <sup>14</sup> so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

Not everyone believes it is possible to lose your reward, but the N.T. is written to and for the Church. Some people believe in eternal security, but anyone can break a relationship with God by walking away from the church and following a false teacher who is tied to Satan, the deceiver or an antichrist as is warned against here. John writes a similar comment to the church at Philadelphia: **Revelation 3:11 ESV** <sup>11</sup> I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.

Perseverance is necessary in any relationship. Timothy Keller's reflections on marriage apply equally to all our relationships: "Love without truth is sentimentality; it supports and affirms us but keeps us in denial about our flaws. Truth without love is harshness; it gives us information but in such a way that we cannot really hear it. God's saving love in Christ, however, is marked by both radical truthfulness about who we are and yet also radical, unconditional commitment to us" (*The Meaning of Marriage*).

### C. Correct Doctrine (Orthodoxy) Is Important (vv. 9)

**II John 1:9 ESV** <sup>9</sup> 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.

The phrase "goes on ahead" (**προοιγω**) "perhaps this is a sarcastic reference to the way in which the false teachers themselves proudly claim to be offering "advanced" teaching. *John*, "the elder claims that they have "advanced" beyond the boundaries of true Christian belief." - Rienecker, p. 798

To be clear you cannot have God, the Father without Jesus, the Son. I love the way John can be so either/or when he needs to be. Probably sarcastically referring to gnostics, this verse speaks clearly on the importance of orthodoxy (correct teaching) which will lead to orthopraxy (correct practice). In fact, John insists that correct teaching leads to an abiding relationship with God, where incorrect teaching will break the relationship. Confession and repentance are needed!

### D. Do Not Fellowship with the False Teacher (vv. 10-11)

**II John 1:10-11 ESV** <sup>10</sup> If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, <sup>11</sup> for whoever greets him takes part (**κοινωνια**) in his wicked works.

There are other similar prohibitions in the NT as to associating with those who call themselves “Christians” yet do not live/act as such.

**I Corinthians 5:11 ESV** <sup>11</sup> But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.

And here we have a parallel thought in our text to Paul’s in the Corinthian letter: **“do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting,”**

This seems to be in the context of never providing any kind of support whether by personal recommendation or material support. John must be talking about both personal and corporate support of a false teacher.

The word “house” (οἶκος) could very well refer to house-churches.

**Q.** What do you think about having cult members come into your home?

**A.** I do not think this applies exactly to that situation, but there certainly is a risk/reward depending on your level of understanding of the Bible.

Paul also understood the danger of heresy creeping into the Church.

**II Corinthians 11:4-6 ESV** <sup>4</sup> For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough. <sup>5</sup> Indeed, I consider that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles. <sup>6</sup> Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not so in knowledge; indeed, in every way we have made this plain to you in all things.

### **III. Communication Is Very Important (vv.12-13).**

**A.** Some Encounters Need to Be Face to Face (v. 12).

**II John 1:12 ESV** <sup>12</sup> 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.

**Q.** Why did John not want to write a long letter?

**A.** A visit is much better and can bring much joy. There is nothing like Christian fellowship that breaks down all barriers and unites us together under Jesus’ leadership. Letters (text messages) have a higher probability of being misunderstood.

John wants to talk “face to face” which in the text is an idiom that literally means “mouth to mouth.” In this short letter, John is almost giving them an agenda that can be fully taken up when he arrives.

There is a textual variant in **verse 12**. “so that our (your) joy may be complete.” I believe that John means “our” joy because he is one with them in Christ. The church is a functional body and a happy/blessed family when we follow our Lord Jesus Christ.

John wants the church to know:

B. We Are in This Together (v.13).

**II John 1:13 ESV** <sup>13</sup> The children of your elect sister greet you.

Isn't it great to understand that we are working in the Kingdom of God with other like-minded brothers and sisters? What is it that binds us together, but the love we have for God, the Father; Jesus, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Because of God's love for us, we love our brothers and sisters. We love His Word because

**Psalm 119:105 ESV** <sup>Nun 105</sup> Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

**Conclusion:** Church should never be a casual relationship. We dare not allow heresy and false teachers access to our assemblies. John Stott observes, “If John's instruction still seems harsh, it is perhaps because his concern for the glory of the Son and the good of men's souls is greater than ours, and because ‘the tolerance on which we pride ourselves’ is in reality an ‘indifference to truth’” (*The Epistles of John* [Eerdmans], p. 214; the quote within the quote comes from Neil Alexander, *The Epistles of John*, Torch bible commentaries [S.C.M. Press]). He adds (pp. 214-215), “False teaching ... is not just an unfortunate error; it is a ‘wicked work’ .... It may send souls to eternal ruin.”

We must love like Jesus did and do the things that he asked us to do. Some of his very last words found in Matthew's gospel:

**Matthew 28:16-20 ESV** <sup>16</sup> Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. <sup>17</sup> And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. <sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Maybe if the church at Ephesus could have listened and obeyed John, they might still be meeting today. Sadly, though they are not. We must learn from them, and do better!