



2 John

Author and Title

Ancient manuscripts uniformly identify this as a second letter by John. Due to the writing style, position in the Canon, and theological outlook, it is best viewed as written by the apostle John. The document itself identifies its author as: <<**the elder**>> (v.1). Theories that this was some elder John different from the apostle are interesting but lack compelling support.

Elder was a common term for pastoral leaders of local congregations in the early church. In calling himself the elder, John is simply affirming his pastoral role, as Peter also does: <<**To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed**>> (1 Peter 5:1), not somehow disqualifying himself from being identified as Jesus' disciple and ultimately an apostle.

Date

Like First John, 2 John was probably written in the vicinity of Ephesus near the end of the 1st Century AD. Ancient sources suggest John spent the closing decades of his life in this area, ministering to churches like those listed in Revelation Chapters 2-3. See the comparative section in the Introduction to 1 John for more information on John being in Ephesus.

Theme

The focus of 2 John is living in the love of God in accordance with the truth of Jesus Christ. This love extends not only to God but to other people. The letter gives a stark warning against false teachers and calls for discernment by the church, who should then oppose such people. It instructs the readers not to: <<**run ahead**>> of biblical revelation (v.9), but to hold on to the truth they have been taught. It does not lend aid to enemies of the Gospel message (vv.10-11). Instead, Christ's followers: <<**walk in obedience to his commands**>> (v.6) and through faith are: <<**rewarded fully**>> for doing so (v.8).

Purpose of 2 John

Out of the four NT books that comprise just a single chapter: Philemon, 2 John, 3 John and Jude, this letter is the shortest, with 3 John a close second. As John will explain, it was his hope to visit the recipients of his letter at some point in the not too distant future and therefore he did not write all that he had to say to them. However, this letter gives a warning against the false teachers operating in their area and John considered that it was too urgent a matter to let it wait until he could come and visit them.

Anyone familiar with 1 John will recognise that 2 John encapsulates the situation and problems that underlie 1 John. But 2 John adds no substantially new content. Why, then, was it written? There are commentators who believe that 2 John served as a covering letter for 1 John, and was delivered by the same couriers, to include personal greetings from the Elder to a specific congregation under his pastoral care, with 1 John given for wider distribution, perhaps being sent on to other churches in Asia.

John writes to urge readers to love each other (v.5) and beware of deceivers (vv.7-8). He offers practical counsel on showing hospitality to travelling missionaries especially with regard to those who were false teachers (v.10-11), and seeks to prepare the chosen lady, i.e. the church he is writing to, for his anticipated visit in the near future (v.12).

Summary of Salvation History

Christians are to live in love and truth, just as Christ loves them. They are to endure suffering for the sake of Christ, looking back on Christ's sufferings and forward to the consummation of salvation at his Second Coming.

Writing Style

In format, this brief letter is a conventional NT epistle, consisting of a salutation, a body, and a conclusion. As in most epistles, the body of the letter consists of mingled instruction and commands, and although readers do not find the concentrated list of commands that comprise the familiar parænesis, i.e. set of ethical commands of NT letters, vv.8-11 have affinities with that conventional motif.

Key Themes

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Verses</u>
1. The truth of Jesus Christ is eternal.	2.
2. Christian love and compliance with God's commandments are inseparable.	6.
3. False teaching about Christ abounds.	7.
4. Purveyors of false teaching have to be identified and left to their own devices, not welcomed and supported by upholders of authentic Christian teaching.	9-11.

The Setting of 2 John

John, writing from the region of Ephesus, a major sea port and idolatrous city in the Roman Province of Asia, writes to: <<**the chosen lady**>> (v.1). This refers to a congregation rather than an individual, because much of 2 John is written in the second-person plural. It is also questionable whether John would write to a female Christian that he and she should: <<**love one another**>> (v.5); the phrase makes better sense if addressed to a church.

There are four additional reasons why chosen or elect lady may refer to a whole congregation:

1. The word church in Greek is feminine in gender, and lady would go along with that.
2. The church is depicted as bride elsewhere in John's writings: <<**Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready**>> (Revelation 19:7), <<**I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband**>> (Revelation 21:2), <<**One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb"**>> (Revelation 21:9), and: <<**The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life**>> (Revelation 22:17).
3. The Greek word *kyria* or lady often refers to a social subunit in the Greek city-state. John may use this word for a local congregation instead of the more common feminine word *ekklēsia*.
4. 2 John 13 suggests that John writes to one congregation from another, where he uses the term: <<**your chosen sister**>>.

Outline

- I Greeting: The Elder's Love (1-3)
- II The Elder's Joy and Request (4-6)
- III The Elder's Concern (7-8)
- IV The Elder's Warning (9-11)
- V Closing: The Elder's Farewell (12-13)

Summary of 2 John

John is writing to a church that he is well acquainted with and calls himself 'The Elder', showing he has a position of respect and authority among them, although he is clearly also an elder in another church, the one from which he is writing.

John commences the letter with an exhortation to the church, noting that they are conducting themselves according to the truth of the Gospel message and reminds them that it is appropriate for them to do so in love for one another.

As with many other churches at that time, and indeed in the modern era, they need to be aware of the dangers of the false teachers, who are bringing heresies into the church. If they were to fall into that trap they could lose what they have worked so hard to achieve; their eternal salvation. John gives a particular warning to anyone who offers hospitality to a false teacher as that would indicate sharing in their work.

John concludes the letter by stating he hopes to visit them, at which time he will have more to say. He then offers the greetings from his own church.

I 2 John 1-3 - Greeting: The Elder's Love

Unlike his previous letter, 2 John has the formal characteristics of a true letter: the sender and recipients are identified and a greeting is passed on to them. All of these features are typical of ancient letters.

Yet the identification of the author is unusual, for where one would expect a personal name, the author refers to himself only as the Elder, Greek *ho presbyteros*. Literally the word means someone who is old, but because those who were elderly were deemed to have wisdom and experience that qualified them to be leaders, an elder was someone who was also held in a position of authority.

Love frames the opening section, appearing in v.1 and v.3, with the truth, i.e. the Gospel message concerning Jesus as the Christ, being mentioned in each of the opening three verses.

¹ The elder,

To the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in the truth – and not I only, but also all who know the truth –

2 John 1

The elder. Elders had been the leaders of communities throughout history, this is illustrated when God was sending Moses to speak to the leaders of the Hebrews who were slaves in Egypt: <<Go, *assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers – the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt*>> (Exodus 3:16), and when Boaz called witnesses to a business transaction that was to offer the estate of Naomi's late husband Elimelech to a kinsman redeemer, which would include taking Naomi's daughter in law Ruth as a wife, it was the elders that he summoned: <<*Boaz took ten of the elders of the town and said, "Sit here," and they did so*>> (Ruth 4:2).

From the earliest days the churches operated under a plurality leadership model, with **elders** overseeing the day to day work of the church, including the pastoral care and teaching. It is interesting that John does not call himself an **elder** but **the elder**, indicating that he was well known to his readers, and was held in particularly high esteem by them; he was emphatically and eminently a beloved leader in many regional churches. Given his unique position in the church and almost certainly by this time he was one of the last surviving apostles, although

church tradition has it that Philip was martyred under the emperor Domitian (AD81-96).

Chosen, translated as elect in some bible versions, is again an indication that the apostles considered and taught that those who were true disciples had been predestined and selected by God from eternity past to come into his kingdom. Jesus acknowledges that he has chosen who will follow him: <<*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name*>> (John 15:16).

It is clear that the church is not a voluntary organisation or meant to be a social club, but the fellowship of those called together by Christ. For such a fellowship, family imagery is all the more appropriate, for it suggests the bonds of intimacy and love that bind the family together. Family imagery also underscores that it was not by the children's initiative that this family came into existence.

The chosen lady and her children almost certainly refers to the members of a local church congregation. This was probably located within the Roman Province of Asia. Some commentators including Matthew Henry have taken this to be a literal woman and her family. However, it was quite common for the church in Israel to be referred to as a woman: <<*Sing, O barren woman, you who never bore a child; burst into song, shout for joy, you who were never in labour; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband,*>> (Isaiah 54:1), and the congregation as her children: <<*All your sons will be taught by the Lord, and great will be your children's peace*>> (Isaiah 54:13).

The word truth is prominent in John's greeting, perhaps because early Christians saw themselves as being in close communion with Jesus, who referred to himself as such: <<*Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"*>> (John 14:6), and whom they acknowledged as such, and perhaps because John knows he will shortly write about the untruth of spiritual deceivers in vv.7-11.

John would also have thought of the Gospel message that he and the other apostles had so freely proclaimed to be the truth, especially with relation to the false testimony of others. Truth is the reality to which Christians are committed, and they are known by their commitment to it.

Because truth comes from God, it exists forever and remains with the faithful, just as God exists eternally and remains in relationship with the faithful. Truth was the primary purpose of Jesus earthly ministry, for it needed to be proclaimed in order for people to understand how far they had fallen away from God and that there was only one way that mankind could be reconciled with a holy and pure God: <<*"You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me"*>> (John 18:37).

If John's view of truth could be captured as a force that, because it is the work of God's own Spirit, it shapes and empowers believers, they might be less prone to think of the truth as something that depends upon them to preserve it. In reality, they depend upon the truth to guard them, and not vice versa, because they depend upon God. It is only because the Spirit of Truth abides in them that they abide in the truth. But people are somewhat prone to reverse that relationship, and put human beings in the place where God's activity and power rightly belong.

² because of the truth, which lives in us and will be with us forever:

2 John 2

Because of the truth. God wants all of mankind to know the only truth: <<*I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth*>> (1 Timothy 2:1-4).

Lives in us. The Gospel that unites John and his readers is personally present.

In us could be translated 'among us'. Christian faith is shared across the whole community and beyond; it is not just a personal conviction. Christ came to dwell among his people: <<*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth*>> (John 1:14), but later he sent his Holy Spirit to dwell in them: <<*If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you*>> (John 14:15-17).

³ Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, will be with us in truth and love.

2 John 3

Grace, mercy and peace. As their pastoral leader John offers a benediction over his readership. This is a standard feature of the NT epistle and was part of John's heritage as a Jew.

Grace is divine favour and goodwill, the spring of all good things; it is grace indeed that any spiritual blessing should be conferred on sinful humans for it is totally unmerited.

Grace is used extensively in the NT. It is a key attribute and gift of Jesus as the Christ, although surprisingly John only uses it four times: here in v.3, in the introduction to his Gospel: <<*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'*" From the fullness of his grace we

have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ>> (John 1:14-17), and twice in Revelation 1:4 and 22:21.

Mercy is shown to humans by God when he does not punish them as their deeds deserve. Instead, he bestows forgiveness; those who are already rich in grace have need of continual forgiveness. God's mercy is a key feature in both the OT and the NT but this is the only time that John refers to it in any of his writings!

For John, peace from God, would be based on the Hebrew word *shalom*, which has a much richer connotation than the English word does, since it conveys not merely the absence of conflict and turmoil but also the notion of positive blessing, especially in terms of a right relationship with God and, as a result, the idea that 'all is well' in one's life. This may be manifested most clearly amid persecution and tribulation. Again, this is a word that John makes surprisingly few references to, with one here, one in his third epistle: *<<I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. Peace to you. The friends here send their greetings. Greet the friends there by name>>* (3 John 14), twice in the final book, see Revelation 1:4 and 6:4, and six times in his Gospel (John 14:27 [twice], 16:33, 20:19, 20:21 and 20:26); three of which refer to Jesus bestowing peace upon his apostles, and the other three as a way of greeting his apostles following his resurrection.

The Father's Son. The emphasis here alerts the reader to the uniquely close bond that exists between the Father and his Son. John had already acknowledged that Jesus had come from the Father in his first epistle: *<<The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us>>* (1 John 1:2).

Will be with us in truth and love. The phrasing here suggests this is a promise from the Father that is there for all who believe in the Son.

II 2 John 4-6 - The Elder's Joy and Request

The way of life for a disciple of Jesus, described by John as walking, is prominent in this section and refers to everyday ethical conduct. John's concern is with his readers' practical lives as Christians.

⁴ It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us.

2 John 4

It has given me great joy indicates the genuine delight that John felt when he saw that other disciples were progressing well in their lives as Christians. Joy should be the hallmark of all followers of Jesus.

Some of your children. This statement could be read in one of two ways. It could imply that some in the church are not walking in the truth, i.e. are not living the way Christians should be living, or alternatively it could be that John knows of some personally and that he sees that they are living the way they ought, without making comment on the rest of the church he is writing to.

Apparently John had encountered members of the congregation who were walking in the truth, i.e. living in a manner pleasing to God, or perhaps he had heard of them from a trusted brother. This could then have been one of the reasons why he determined that he needed to write this letter to their church as encouragement.

As the Father commanded us. John had received his teaching from Jesus but knew that what Jesus taught was from the Father: <<*Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does"*>> (John 5:10). He was with the others in the upper room when Jesus had rebuked Philip to show that Jesus and God are one: <<*Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work"*>> (John 14:8-10). Therefore, John accepts that anything he has heard from Jesus is from the Father.

⁵ And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another.

2 John 5

Dear lady is a fond greeting to the congregation that was addressed as the chosen or elect lady in the opening address.

I am not writing you a new command. As will be noted in v.6, Jesus had given the apostles a new command to love one another. This was well known to the church by now and so John was not issuing a new command but re-enforcing the one they already knew and should be living by.

I ask shows the humility of John in that he does not instruct or order them as he could, given his position of authority, but he chose instead to encourage them through the love that he holds for them. It is an example of practising what you preach. Paul had showed a similar attitude in his appeal to Philemon, whose slave Onesimus had absconded and who Paul was sending back, not as a slave but as a brother: <<*Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I appeal to you on the basis of love. I then, as Paul – an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus – I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains*>> (Philemon 8-10).

Love one another may suggest there was dissent and discord among the readers or it could just be an exhortation for them to continue to do what they have been doing all along. John had written on this before: <<*And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us*>> (1 John 3:23), which shows that those that do love one another also love God, for one requires the other and is a demonstration of a disciple's authenticity.

On the central role of love in Scripture, it is known that love must be the distinguishing mark of Jesus' disciples. Jesus gave a new command, which

takes its point of departure from the Mosaic commands concerning love: <<Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord>> (Leviticus 19:18), <<Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength>> (Deuteronomy 6:5), and: <<One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” “Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices”>> (Mark 12:28-33), but Jesus’ own love and teaching deepen and transform these commands. Jesus also raised the bar with his teaching: <<You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect>> (Matthew 5:43-48).

The command to love one’s neighbour was not new; the newness was found in loving one another as Jesus had loved his disciples: <<It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love>> (John 13:1), and: <<Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends>> (John 15:13).

Brotherly love was something that was being taught in all the churches and should still be a prominent part of the Christian message today. As it is based on a divine command then it should be seen as an obligation for those in the church. Paul had certainly taught it while he was in Thessalonica: <<Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more>> (1 Thessalonians 4:9-10).

⁶ And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.

2 John 6

And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands shows the fruit of the true disciple. To obey God is a key component in a disciple’s life and it should be something that is done with a genuine desire to accomplish it rather than merely as an obligation. God has always required his people to be obedient: <<The

Lord warned Israel and Judah through all his prophets and seers: “Turn from your evil ways. Observe my commands and decrees, in accordance with the entire Law that I commanded your fathers to obey and that I delivered to you through my servants the prophets”>> (2 Kings 17:13).

Love has a strong ethical dimension. The commands that the readers have heard from the beginning must constantly steer their lives.

Command singular probably refers to what has been termed by some commentators to be the love command introduced by Jesus: <<“*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another*”>> (John 13:34-35).

III 2 John 7-8 - The Elder’s Concern

Doctrinal integrity and confusion were a threat to the congregation’s righteousness, and were clearly a concern to John, who would have had apostolic oversight for the churches he maintained contact with.

⁷ Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist.

2 John 7

Many deceivers refers to the false teachers that were and still are a serious threat to churches and the faith in general. This was something John had already noted: <<*Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us*>> (1 John 2:18-19). Disciples are called to create a balance of not judging yet not being naively accepting. Jesus had taught his disciples that they must be wisely discerning when professed prophets and teachers come into their midst. The life of the prophet and the results of his influence on others are the fruits that will indicate whether or not his message is consistent with the kingdom life of righteousness: <<*Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit*>> (Matthew 7:17).

Other NT writers professed similar concerns to those of John: <<*As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God’s work – which is by faith*>> (1 Timothy 1:3-4), <<*But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them – bringing swift destruction on themselves*>> (2 Peter 2:1), and: <<*Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for*

the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord>> (Jude 3-4).

Those who deny Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh cannot claim to be of God. In his first epistle John wrote: <<*This is how you can recognise the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world*>> (1 John 4:2-3), which shows that many false teachers were saying that Jesus only appeared to be human. This was probably based on a false idea that the material creation was inherently evil and therefore physical bodies were evil. Others may have claimed that Jesus was an inspired rabbi from Nazareth, thereby dismissing his deity.

That Jesus Christ came in the flesh is a key aspect of God's work of salvation. God had to deal with the sinful nature of mankind if they were ever to be reconciled back to him without him compromising his pure and holy nature, which he could never do and remain truly God. Therefore, God became fully human in the person of his Son Jesus Christ, so that he could put sin to death, once for all: <<*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit*>> (Romans 8:1-4).

Anyone can talk about Jesus, believe that he lived on earth and even agree that he was the most excellent teacher known in history, as other religions, cults and philosophies often affirm. But unless such people accept both the full deity and the full humanity of Jesus, and what his atoning death has achieved, they are not truly confessing Jesus as Lord and Saviour of all but, as John states in unequivocal terms, they are under the influence of the spirit of the antichrist.

Broadly, an antichrist: <<*is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ*>> (1 John 2:22b). More specifically, John understands such a person to be a human representative of the evil one of whom Jesus spoke: <<*My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one*>> (John 17:15). They can also be people who are only interested in themselves.

⁸ Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully.

2 John 8

Watch out. Jesus used similar language in warning about end-time perils: <<*Jesus said to them: "Watch out that no one deceives you. Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many. When you hear of wars and*

rumours of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains. "You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them">> (Mark 13:5-9), <<So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time>> (Mark 13:23), and: <<Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come>> (Mark 13:33).

Do not lose what you have worked for. The verb translated lose is used elsewhere in terms of being lost for all eternity: <<*While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled*>> (John 17:12), and those who do accept Jesus as God's provision for salvation will not be lost or perish: <<*I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand*>> (John 10:28). It is clear from Scripture that there is no halfway house with eternal life issues. It is portrayed in black and white terms. A person either has life or they do not. The latter option does not mean eternal death, as most might understand it, but is eternal separation from God with the true realities of suffering that will go with such an existence.

These false prophets that were going out to the churches were clearly very persuasive people and they were able to fool even the most committed of disciples with their half-truths and promises. Although Jesus offers to take the burden from those who follow him: <<*Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light*>> (Matthew 11:29-30), becoming a disciple of Jesus is no easy option and sacrificial suffering is expected. These are not nice people that are trying to split the church, even if they appear outwardly to be so. Jesus had warned of them: <<*Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves*>> (Matthew 7:15), as did Paul: <<*I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them*>> (Acts 20:29-30).

Worked for used here in no way denotes that John implies that salvation is earned. It is a free gift that is given by the grace of God to those who have faith in Christ: <<*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast*>> (Ephesians 2:8-9). The work a believer does is an outworking of that faith: <<*Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead*>> (James 2:15-17).

Rewarded fully refers to the hope of transformation and greater eternal reward in Christ's very presence: <<*Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope*

in him purifies himself, just as he is pure>> (1 John 3:2-3). The reward is promised to all who will keep going until the end comes, either in death or Christ's return. Jesus confirmed this a few years later when he instructed John to write to the churches: *<<I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown>>* (Revelation 3:11). God has promised such a reward to all who persevere: *<<And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward>>* (Matthew 10:42), and: *<<So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised>>* (Hebrews 10:35-36). Even men like Moses, who had turned his back on the wealth and privilege of living in Pharaoh's palace to serve God, knew it would one day come to them who were faithful in their walk with God: *<<He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward>>* (Hebrews 11:26).

IV 2 John 9-11 - The Elder's Warning

The church must withstand pressure from people or forces that do not fit well within the teaching of Christ (v.9). This requires spiritual discernment to identify who the false teachers are and strength of character to resist them.

⁹ Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.

2 John 9

Runs ahead probably refers to the acceptance of new teaching or attractive promises that amounted to rejection of the apostolic faith. The false teachers were not holding to the truth but were going beyond the actual truth, or running ahead, as John chooses to phrase it.

Does not continue in the teaching of Christ. There are some faiths that reject Jesus as the Christ, others that acknowledge he was a true prophet of God but no more. These false teachings are easy to detect as the people making such claims do not try to hide their feelings or intentions. It seems that the ones that John was really worried about were those who speak half-truths with subtle changes to some aspects of the Gospel that may appear innocent enough to start with. Such people are cunning and deceitful. After a while, disciples may start to believe these falsehoods and are then in a position to be fed further lies, which will probably sound authentic to them. This is quite commonly seen in the modern church where some have decided to accept new moral values because society has changed, e.g. living with a partner, gay clergymen, promoting excessive and unhealthy eating habits, etc.

Does not have God, i.e. does not have eternal life in fellowship with God. Threats to church purity come not only from the outside but often from within. Paul warned those at Corinth: *<<Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God – I say this to your shame>>* (1 Corinthians 15:34).

¹⁰ If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him.

2 John 10

The context of if anyone comes makes it clear that this refers to travelling teachers or preachers working against true Christian teaching. This had always been a common feature of the NT era both within various religions and philosophies, where people would earn their living by speaking about their own ideas and ideals. Such people are not to be allowed to speak openly in church and others warned that what they are proclaiming is false.

Do not take him into your house. Such a welcome would give the appearance of endorsing the false teaching, especially since early churches were house churches. This is not a prohibition against showing the hospitality to sinners for which Jesus himself was well known and criticised: <<*While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners"*>> (Matthew 9:10-13), and: <<*The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners."*>> *But wisdom is proved right by her actions*>> (Matthew 11:19). Paul also warned against overzealous separation from non-Christians: <<*I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people – not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world*>> (1 Corinthians 5:9-10). It is rather false Christians that require caution and perhaps rejection: <<*But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you"*>> (1 Corinthians 5:11-13).

CH Dodds was unhappy with John's assertions and believes it is not in keeping with the Christian spirit of being welcoming to all. He said: "Does truth prevail the more if we are not on speaking terms with those whose view of the truth differs from ours – however disastrous their error may be?" One commentator has responded: *'Dodd's query raises an important point, but is it the right question? It is difficult, if not impossible, to know exactly what the personal and social relationships were between the Christians of the Elder's congregation and those who had withdrawn from it. Were the Christians of John's community actually 'not on speaking terms' with those who had left the church? Had they tried to win back those under the sway of the false teachers? Were their attitudes and actions cold and judgmental? We have no way of answering these kinds of questions'.*

John appears to be dogmatic on this issue. Given his unique experiences and the personal teaching he received from the Lord, it seems more likely that he

had a better understanding of the truth than most others in the churches then or now! On this passage Robert Kysar comments: *'Tolerance must finally have its limits, if the church is to have integrity'*.

Ultimately, it is the church's responsibility to teach people and to nurture them in faith, righteousness and love. As a church, it must draw the lines that exclude teaching and practice it deems out of harmony with the revelation of the Scripture. It has this right and responsibility.

Welcome him. John is also intimating that those who welcome the false teachers are indicating that they accept what they hear as being true and therefore they are equally guilty as those who are teaching such falsehoods.

The significance of John's call to reject the false teacher was heightened in a society that considered hospitality a great virtue. Hospitality, much admired in both Greco-Roman and Jewish sources, was especially a requirement of anyone that would be part of church leadership: *<<Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money>> (1 Timothy 3:2-3), and: <<Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined>> (Titus 1:8)*. Hospitality was much needed in an era when inns could be dangerous and unpleasant. It was expected that travelling disciples would be able to find appropriate accommodation in another disciple's house: *<<Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town>> (Mark 6:10)*.

¹¹ Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work.

2 John 11

Here, welcomes means to extend approval, giving assistance and sharing in full fellowship with someone. It would therefore indicate acceptance of him as a brother.

Shares in his wicked work. The word translated shares is more indicative of one who shares fellowship with someone else. In this context it means more than just being hospitable or having a casual acquaintance with someone, it is more in line with that which John has written elsewhere: *<<We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ>> (1 John 1:3)*. To support someone who is working against the true Christian message is to incur that person's guilt, for it would be seen as assisting in their work to oppose the Gospel.

V 2 John 12-13 - Closing: The Elder's Farewell

John makes it clear that his letter is only a prelude to an intended pastoral visit that he hopes to accomplish soon.

¹² I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete.

2 John 12

I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Apostolic letters would have been a key source of great encouragement for the early churches, where communication was slow and personal visits rare. John indicated that he had a lot to share with them but wanted to do so more intimately in person, for he knew the added joy that would bring. However, the urgency of the message he has conveyed to them could not wait until he could visit.

I hope to visit you. John was now in his latter years but clearly still able to undertake such a journey. Even if it were not too far away, all travel in those days was arduous and could also be dangerous. John, like Paul, was clearly not a man to be put off by such inconveniences and would do what he thought was right in his service to Christ and the church.

Talk with you face to face. This is by far the best way to communicate and would bring mutual benefit and encouragement to all concerned, a sentiment with which Paul agrees: <<*I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong – that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith*>> (Romans 1:11-12).

Our joy. John typically writes in the first person plural as he is sending these warm greetings and desires on behalf of the entire congregation of his home church.

So that our joy may be complete. Doctrinal deviation threatens the joy of the church because it destroys unity and imperils the approving presence of Christ in personal lives, as well as in the corporate assembly. John had spoken of how his joy was complete when he shared his knowledge of Christ, as he wrote in his first epistle: <<*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete*>> (1 John 1:1-4). Christian joy may be complete when believers share appropriate fellowship with each other and with God. That is their aim.

¹³ The children of your chosen sister send their greetings.

2 John 13

Children of your chosen sister are the believers in the congregation from which John writes, which is presumed to be either a single house church or a collective of churches in or near the city of Ephesus.