

God's Amazing Book

Journey Through the New Testament

TRUTH DEFENDED, LOVE DEMANDED

A Quick Look at the Second General Epistle of John

"Truth or tact? You have to choose. Most times they are not compatible." The old radio comedian Eddie Cantor said that. Here is a psychologist on the same topic: "The truth is often a terrible weapon of aggression. It is possible to lie, and even to murder, for the truth." Such comments raise the question, ***is truth a loving thing?*** From comedians to counselors, many of us feel that it is not. There is a tension between truth and love, we think. You get something of this in John Gray's best-selling book *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*. Gray suggests men are more concerned about problem solving and truth telling, while women are more concerned with empathy and relationships. Again, there is a divide. Truth and love seem to exclude one another. If you want to show love, perhaps you will want to ease up on the truth. Love is amendable and soft. Truth, on the other hand, can be harsh, even aggressive. So, if you don't really love someone, well, you can tell them what you really think! This division is even found among churches. **There are love-oriented churches and truth-oriented churches. Truth-oriented churches major in apologetics, doctrine, evangelism, and preaching, while love-oriented churches stress counseling, fellowship, recovery groups, and soup kitchens.** If this division sounds right to you, John's second letter should be of interest.¹

What happens today when someone is disfellowshipped from a local church? Most often they simply go down the street to another church, usually without accountability on the part of the leadership of either community - the one they left or the one that receives them. **In the elder's situation there are no other churches down the street for them to go to.** But since those who have been disfellowshipped are "prophets," they can be expected to go from town to town, bent on convincing others of their "insights." These churches need to be warned. Thus 2 John, a sort of miniature 1 John, presses the latter's primary themes - love and the Incarnation. But while 1 John was written to assure the elder's own community that they, not the false prophets, walk in the truth, **this letter warns a house church in another town that these deceivers are on the loose.** Notice also that 2 John 10-11 anticipate the concern over hospitality that will be raised in 3 John. Indeed, 2 and 3 John should probably be read together in order to see the two sides to hospitality that will be discussed in 3 John.²

Fast Facts on 2 John

Written by? John

Written to whom? "The elect lady and her children" (v. 1). Probably a local church in Asia Minor

Written when? A.D. 85-100

Written why? Challenge believers to:

1. Walk in truth
2. Obey the commandments
3. Love one another
4. Guard the teachings of Christ

Some Who Showed Hospitality in the Bible

Abraham to three angelic beings	Genesis 18:1-8
Lot to two angels	Genesis 19:1-11
Laban to Abraham's servant	Genesis 24:11-61
The Shunammite woman to Elijah	2 Kings 4:8-10
Mary and Martha to Jesus and His disciples	Luke 10:38-42
Priscilla and Aquila to Paul	Acts 18:2
The New Testament widows	1 Timothy 5:9-10

¹ Mark Dever, *The Message of the New Testament*, 489.

² Gordon Fee, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*, 417.

Christians Must Be Inhospitable Toward Untruth!

Many verses in the Bible exhort us to be hospitable. Paul commanded the Romans to “Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality” (Rom. 12:13). He told Timothy that widows should be known for showing hospitality (1 Tim. 5:10). The author of Hebrews said, “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it” (Heb. 13:2). And Peter wrote, “Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling” (1 Pet. 4:9). So what could John possibly mean when he writes, “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work” (2 John 10:11). Does this mean we should refuse housing to someone who teaches something we disagree with about the Christian life? Should we refuse to house a “holiness teacher” or a cousin who is Jewish? Should we refuse to share a meal with a nonreligious friend or a Jehovah’s Witness? A few observations will help us clarify what John means here.

First, when John says, “If anyone comes to you,” he does not mean people who do not profess to be Christian. He means people who profess to be Christians, yet who teach this false doctrine.

Second, when John refers to someone who “comes and brings this teaching,” he does not mean “comes and brings” in a casual sense, as in, “anyone who happens to show up for a service on Sunday morning and tells a couple of people afterward the pastor was wrong.” He is referring to someone who comes in an official teaching capacity.

Third, when John refers to his readers’ “house,” remember, he means the church’s meeting place. After all, in those days churches met in houses.

Fourth, when John forbids them to “welcome” or “share” in this wicked work, he means he does not want them to give their recognition and consent to such a false teacher. Do not let him teach the congregation with his false doctrine, much less install him in a formal teaching position. Allowing him to teach is “sharing” in his wicked work. It is having “koinonia,” or fellowship, with it. We must not have any fellowship with false teaching about the person or work of Christ. We can have open homes, as we understand the word “home” or “house” today. **But our pulpits must be closed to false teaching about Christ.** Real Christianity involves love, and real Christianity involves truth.

LIFE LESSONS FROM 2 John³

1. Walking in obedience to the truth is to be a continual habit in your life.
2. Be careful! False teachers are very deceptive. Look at their lives and their message to see if they match with Scripture.
3. **Avoiding hospitality is reserved only for those who would destroy the truth of Christ.**
4. **Disagreement over minor issues is not a reason for avoiding hospitality.**

THINGS TO REMEMBER ABOUT 2 John⁴

1. 2 John is the second shortest book in the Bible (see also: 3 John).
2. 2 John is one of only three personal letters in the New Testament (see also: 3 John, Philemon).
3. 2 John is the only book in the Bible addressed to a woman - if the “Elect Lady” is not a reference to a church (1:1).
4. 2 John is one of only two books in the Bible to use the term “antichrist” (1 John).
5. In 2 John, the word “truth” is a key word and is found five times and some twenty times in John’s three epistles combined.
6. 2 John was one of the last books to be accepted into the New Testament canon of Scripture.
7. In 2 John, the author does not identify either himself or his recipients outright (1:1).
8. Of the thirteen verses in 2 John, at least eight of them are found directly or indirectly in 1 John.
9. 2 and 3 John are the only two New Testament books addressed from “The Elder.”
10. In 2 John, we have John’s stern warning that false teachers are not to be invited into our homes, or even to be bid Godspeak (vv. 10-11).

³ Jim George, The Bare Bones Bible Handbook

⁴ Jeff Lasseigne, Highway 66 (Santa Ana, CA: Calvary Chapel Publishing, 2004)