

2 John

I. Setting

2 John is the 24rd book of the New Testament and 18th among the Epistles. They are the primary doctrinal portions of the New Testament.

It is not that the Gospels and Acts do not contain doctrine, but that the purpose of the Epistles is to explain to churches and individuals how to apply the teachings of Jesus.

Jesus' earthly life models ministry. In every area of ministry, we must apply the example of Christ. He was filled with the Spirit, sought to honor God, put a high value on people, and lowered Himself as the servant of all. Once He ascended to heaven, He poured His Spirit out on believers and the New Testament church was formed. Acts focuses on the birth, establishment, and furtherance of the work of God in the world, through the church.

The Epistles are written to the church, further explaining doctrine.

A. 2 John is the 3rd New Testament book attributed to the apostle John.

1. Five New Testament books are attributed to the Apostle John including the Gospel of John, 1John, 2 John, 3John and Revelation.

2. This makes John one of the largest contributors of the New Testament.

a. Statistics can be made to say a lot of different things. Since the New Testament was not originally written with chapters and verses, the best way to determine percentage of writing is through word count.

i. John –

- By book count wrote 18% of the NT
- By chapter count wrote 19% of the NT
- By verse count wrote 17% of the NT
- By word count wrote 20% of the NT

ii. Luke – wrote 27% of the NT

- By book count wrote 7% of the NT
- By chapter count wrote 20% of the NT
- By verse count wrote 27% of the NT
- By word count wrote 27% of the NT

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iii. Paul – wrote 25% of the NT

- By book count wrote 48% of the NT
- By chapter count wrote 33% of the NT
- By verse count wrote 25% of the NT
- By word count wrote 23% of the NT

b. These stats do not include the book of Hebrews although many attribute its authorship to Paul

B. 2 John is the second shortest book in the New Testament. It has only 245 words in the Greek text and would have easily fit on a single piece of papyrus. Some have referred to it as a “postcard epistle.”

II. Date

A. John was written towards the end of John’s life and the end of the 1st century.

III. Author

A. 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John and the 4th Gospel are not signed, the writer simply calls himself ‘The Elder’ (2 John 1; 3 John 1).

1. This is somewhat unique among the New Testament epistles. The thirteen epistles of Paul all begin with the writer’s name, as do the epistle of James, the two epistles of Peter and the epistle of Jude. That leaves only Hebrews and the three epistles attributed to John as “unsigned” epistles.

2. Because of the similarity in writing it is clear that the same person wrote the three epistles and the 4th gospel.

3. John never named himself, choosing instead to call himself:

a. ‘The disciple whom Jesus loved’ (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20)

b. ‘The other disciple’ (John 18:15–16; 20:3–4, 8)

c. ‘The Son of Zebedee’ (John 21:2)

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4. The bulk of scholars, and the weight of church history, agree that the author these three letters was John the Apostle.
- B. John refers to himself as an elder, which speaks of both his age and his position in the church.
1. He was a leader who served in a Pastoral role in ministry.
 - a. The term Elder is used interchangeably with the terms bishop/overseer and pastor/shepherd.
 - b. The conditions required for a person to serve as an elder are listed in 1 Timothy 3.
 - c. There is a distinction made in 1 Timothy 5:17 between elders and elders who were also teachers.
 2. John would also serve the role of the elder statesmen who had walked with the Lord for many years and was now passing on his knowledge to the next generation.

IV. Recipients

- A. 2 John was written to *'the elect lady and her children. . .'*
1. There have been a number of suggestions as to who this woman was. The most common are that she is simply an unnamed believer to whom John is writing, or that John is using the term "Lady" as a reference to the church.
 2. I heard one pastor suggest that since this was a time of persecution the church went by "code name – lady." I am not sure how accurate that may be, but I enjoyed hearing his rationale behind his statement
- B. Whenever attempting to unlock the meaning of a text, it is valuable to keep "The Principle of Normal Usage" in mind. This principle of interpretation suggests we are to take the Bible at face value, because it means what it says. As a result, we should allow the text to speak for itself rather than hunting for hidden meanings that require secret codes in order to identify.
1. Taking 2 John at face value we would come to two conclusions regarding the recipients.

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- a. First, John is speaking to an actual woman and her children regarding how to walk with Christ.
 - i. There is no evidence the lady and her children were among the greats of the earth; they do not seem to be of the ruling class or among the wealthy, they may have made no name in the world.
 - ii. Although they may never win a place in the history of a world that is passing away; they have a place in the world that is to come. They seem to have had a great impact upon their world for the kingdom.
 - 2 John 1:1 – *“To the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all those who have known the truth, “It is clear her faith was well spoken of in her world.*
 - She is called “the elect lady”. Elect speaks of being chosen by God out of the world for salvation.
 - We do not know her past, but some of the other “elect ladies” in scripture include:
 - Mary Magdalene – out of whom were cast 7 demons.
 - Woman at the well – married 5 times and living in sin.
 - Woman caught in the very act of adultery.
 - What a glorious picture of the marvelous grace of God that can set us free and give us life!
- b. Second, because the subjects he addresses are not family issues like marriage, child rearing, dealing with a difficult uncle etc. We can conclude that this woman probably had a church that met in her home.
- c. 2 John was also written to ‘her children’

It is clear John knew this family and the church that met in their home personally. He had made investments in their lives and sought further installments.

- i. 2 John 1:12, “Having many things to write to you, I did not wish to do so with paper and ink; but hope to come to you and speak to you face to face, that our joy may be full.”

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- C. 2 John is a letter of encouragement to the church. In it John writes they are to continue in love, and warns them to be on guard against false teachers, who lead many astray.

V. Opening

- A. John begins the letter with a promised blessing upon this woman, her family and the church. This was more than a common greeting, and is filled with theological importance.

1. GRACE—the gift of blessings, which we do not deserve.
2. MERCY—the removal of the punishment for sin, which we do deserve.
3. PEACE—the relationship with God, which we can enjoy

- B. The promise is associated with great joy.

1. 2 John 1:4 – “I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, . . .”
 - a. Joy is God’s desire for his children.
 - i. It is a fruit of the Spirit born in the life of those who are in a relationship with Christ.
 - ii. In John 15:11, Jesus relates joy to abiding in Him.
 - iii. In John 16, Jesus relates joy to our prayer life.
 - iv. In 1John, joy is directly related to fellowship with God

VI. Purpose and Content

- A. 2 John is written as an exhortation calling the readers to action.

1. Those who read are exhorted to walk in the truth, love one another, and be on guard against false teachers.
2. Unlike 1 John, this letter follows the normal pattern of the New Testament epistles with an opening salutation, body, and a closing.

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B. The letter begins with commendation, moves to encouragement and exhortation and ends with a personal promise.

1. John begins the letter with a promised blessing, as stated above.
2. This is followed by a description of those to whom it was written.

C. The body of the epistle (vv. 4–11).

1. John builds this epistle around key words. In these thirteen verses John uses:

a. “Truth” (five times)

b. “Love” (four times)

c. “Commandment” (four times)

d. “Walk” (three times)

e. “Teaching” (three times)

f. “Children” (three times)

g. He also utilizes a rare word, “antichrist,” which appears in Scripture only in 1 and 2 John (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7).

2. The key word of the letter is truth. John stresses the need for “walking in the truth” because “many deceivers are entered into the world.”

VII. Doctrine

A. The Key Word of the Letter is Truth and is directly associated to the commendation found in 2 John 1:1-4.

1. John wrote because he “heard your children are walking in the truth”

B. The question we are left with is: What is truth?

1. This was the question asked by Pilate in John 18:38, “What us truth?”

2. This is the question asked by every generation.

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- a. During my first year in college I took an intro to philosophy class. On the first day, the professor asked us the meaning of relativism. After a few very obscure and off base answers, he went on to explain that relativism is the philosophical viewpoint that there are no absolutes and truth is determined by the individual.
 - i. This viewpoint has impacted every area of our modern culture.
- b. The Word of God answers this question.
- c. In his other writings, John himself gives us three basic definitions of truth.
 - i. Jesus is the truth
 - John 14:6 *“I am the Way, the Truth and the Life...”*
 - ii. The Word of God is the truth
 - John 17:17 *“Sanctify them by your truth, your word is truth”*
 - Psalm 119:160 *“The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endure forever.”*
 - Ephesians 1:13 – The truth is designed to bring us to faith and salvation. *“In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. . .”*
 - iii. The Holy Spirit is the truth.
 - John 14:17 *“The Spirit of truth...”*
 - One of the primary roles of the Holy Spirit is to guide us in the truth of God’s word.
 - John 16:13 *“ However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.”*

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- As a result, ALL of us can become students of the Word. We do not need to be left in the dark regarding who God is and how to live for Him.

- d. John explains that the truth of God is not something that changes with culture.
- i. 2 John 1:2 “...because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever . . .”
 - ii. Psalm 119:89 (the Psalmist expressed the same sentiment) “Forever, O LORD; your word is firmly fixed in the heavens.”
 - iii. There are many things that we once considered true that are no longer believed.
 - The earth is flat
 - heavier things fall faster than lighter things,
 - aspartame as a sweetener
- e. John uses a number of verbs to describe our relationship with the Truth.
- i. 1:1 “...All those who have known the truth...”
 - ii. 1:4 “... I have found some of your children walking in the truth”
 - iii. 1:1 “...I love in the truth”
 - According to 2 John we must know the truth, walk in the truth, and love in the truth.
 - Walk in truth is used twice in 3 John.
- f. Know the Truth
- i. 1 Timothy 2:4 God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”
 - Jesus defined eternal life as being in a relationship with Him; He called it “knowing Him”.
 - Once we have met Christ, we should make the master passion of our lives to get to know him better.

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- ii. Philippians 3:10 - Paul tells us his greatest desire was to know God better. “. . .*that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, . . .*”
- iii. 2 Peter 3:18 - Peter explains this should be our desire as well. “. . .*but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*”
- iv. We meet God in the pages of His word, and as we walk out the truths of His word in our daily lives.
- v. We learn the word of truth in order to know the God of truth.
- vi. What we learn with our heads will transform our hearts.

g. Walk in the Truth

- i. Remember, Jesus, His Word and the Spirit, are all referred to as the truth. To walk in the truth we need to make applications to all three.
- ii. ‘Walk’ is a New Testament idiom for how we live. We are to live out the truth in our daily lives. We do this by walking with Jesus, in His Word and in the Spirit.
 - In Colossians 2:6-7, Paul wrote, “*As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, . . .*”
 - In John 8:31-32, Jesus said, ‘*If you abide in my word, you are my disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*’.
- iii. Walking in the truth is also referred to as ‘*walking in the Spirit*’. This has a lot to do with not following your emotions or our body’s desires, but following the written word of God that is prompted in our mind by the Spirit.
 - In other words, we face a situation and our emotions tell us to do one thing while the Holy Spirit reminds us of what the Word of God says. Walking in the Spirit is choosing to follow the lead of the Spirit, rather than the push of emotions.

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- Paul put it like this in Galatians 5:16, 25 *“Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh”*. . . *“If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit”*.
- iv. There is a desperate battle going on in the Christian life between the sinful desires of the flesh and the desires of the Spirit, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can walk in the truth and resist sin.
- h. Love in the Truth.
- i. This leads to the first exhortation of the book.
- 2 John 1:5 *“And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another.”*
- ii. 2 John 5-6 Love one another *“Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, who have borne witness of your love before the church.”*
- His message to LOVE each other is presented in the form of a plea. He actually pleads with the church to love each other.
 - ‘Love one another’ is one of the most repeated commandments in the New Testament.
 - Including this reference, John says ‘love one another’ six times
 - 1 John 3:11 – This is the message you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another
 - 1 John 3:23 – This is the commandment that we should believer on Jesus and love each other
 - 1 John 4:7 – Beloved let us love one another
 - 1 John 4:11–12 – Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought to love one another
 - 2 John 5 – Love one another

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- Paul says 'love one another three times
 - Romans 13:8 – *“Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.”*
 - 1 Thessalonians 3:12 - *“May the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another . . .”*
 - 1 Thessalonians 4:9 – You are *“taught by God to love one another . . .”*
- Peter says 'love one another' twice
 - 1 Peter 1:22 – Love one another fervently
 - 1 Peter 4:8 – *“Above all things have fervent love for one another, for ‘love covers a multitude of sins.’”*
- iii. It is not difficult to interpret what God expects out of His children. WE ARE REQUIRED TO LOVE EACH OTHER AND TO DO SO FERVENTLY
- i. Why? Why does God put such a high price tag upon loving each other? Let me suggest 2 simple reasons.
 - First – Love is the nature of God. When we love one another we are acting like our father.
 - Second – The world expects Christians to love each other and they are often turned away from God when we don't. Jesus said the world would know we are His by our love for each other
- j. What Does Love Look Like?
The Bible is abundantly clear that we are to love each other, but the Bible equally as clear on what our love for each other should look like.
 - i. 2 John 1:6 “This is love that we walk according to His commandments.”
 - It is clear that John considered love not as an emotional feeling but as an action that could be experienced by others

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- The best way I can show love to my wife, kids, coworkers, community or the lost, is to put into practice the teaching of the Word of God.

k. What Does Biblical Love Look Like

- i. 1 John 3:18 *“Little children, let us not love in word or talk but indeed and in truth.”*
 - ii. 1 Thessalonians. 5:11 *“Therefore comfort each other and edify one another’ . . .”*
 - iii. 1 Corinthians 12:25 *“. . .that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.”*
- Philippians 2:3 *“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than Himself.”*
 - Ephesians 4:32 *“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”*
 - Hebrews 10:24 *“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works . . .”*
 - Galatians 6:2 *“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”*
 - James 5:16 *“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another. . .”*
 - Galatians 5:13 *“For you were called to freedom brothers, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”*
 - Paul also writes to the Romans that we are not to judge others or cause each other to stumble.

C. This leads to the final section of the meat of the letter as Paul gives a warning regarding FALSE TEACHERS.

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1. The apostle Paul described them as *'false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ'*. (2 Corinthians 11:13)
2. John called them deceivers, a word meaning an impostor or a fake
3. Doctrine matters!!!
 - a. Christians are supposed to test the doctrines of teachers and preachers.
 - i. In his first letter John wrote, 'Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; 1 John 4:1
 - ii. We are to test what is said from pulpits, papers, internet, Facebook, blogs... with the doctrine of Christ found written in the pages of His Word.
 - iii. Christians are supposed to separate themselves from false teachers.
 - iv. Paul said the same in Romans 16:16-18
"Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you. Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple."
4. As we have opportunity, we should seek to win ALL for Christ
 - a. However, we must be careful as it relates to false teachers that we do not:
 - i. Associate with them in their evil deeds.
 - ii. We are not to greet these people as Christians as we *'greet one another'*;
 - iii. We are not to receive them into the 'house' of God to stand in our pulpits or to take part in leading our church services;
 - iv. 'Division is better than agreement in evil', said the Puritan George Hutcheson.

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5. The main message of the letter is found in 5-11, where John gives exhortations.