

# *Mount Pisgah A.M.E. Church*

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**Bible Study, Wednesday, June 8, 2016**

**Survey of the Bible**

**Lesson 65: 2 John**

## **The Book of 2 John**

The book of 2 John is the second in a series of three epistles (along with 1 John and 3 John) written with similar concerns. While 1 John is a General Epistle, 2 John is more of a Pastoral Epistle (although it is not categorized with “The Pastoral Epistles” written by Paul. It is written to a specific congregation and its leader. 2 John, like Hebrews, emphasizes the important interaction between belief and behavior.

## **Author**

Like 1 John, the author of this book (as well as 3rd book in the series) is broadly accepted as John, the son of Zebedee. He is the apostle John who also wrote the gospel of John and the book of Revelation. The similarity and style and theme argue for it having been penned by the same author as 1 John. Some have suggested that there was one named “John the Elder” or “John the Presbyter” who is to be distinct from John the apostle and could have written it, however there is limited evidence to support this position.

## **The Times and context of 1 John**

As in 1<sup>st</sup> John, John writes this letter to those who are facing the incursion of false teachers who seek to undermine the commonly accepted basic teachings of Christ, and about Christ. Unlike 1<sup>st</sup> John, the recipients of this letter seem to be from a particular congregation. There are differing opinions about whether the “congregation” is actually one family, literally a mother and her children, or whether the “lady” mentioned is actually a figurative description of a church (as in the passages where Jerusalem and Israel are personified as women – see Isaiah 54:1-8, Galatians 4:21-31). There is insufficient evidence to tell. However in either case, the readers well known to John and probably lived in the province of Asia, not far from Ephesus. If the figurative view is taken, the “children of your chosen sister” would be a sister congregation. If the literal view is taken, it lends credence to the idea that house churches existed in apostolic churches that were led by women.

In his first epistle, John wrote that a number of false teachers had split away from the church. Some of these became traveling teachers who depended on the hospitality of individuals while they sought to infiltrate churches with their teachings.

Judging by the content, it seems that 2<sup>nd</sup> John is from the same period as 1<sup>st</sup> John, but perhaps a bit later. Some estimates place its writing at about 90 AD. All three of John’s epistles were probably written from Ephesus.

## **Overview**

This brief letter has much in common with First John, including a warning about the danger of false teachers who deny that Jesus Christ came in the flesh (the incarnation of Christ). John encourages the readers to continue walking in love, but exhorts them to be discerning in their expression of love. 2<sup>nd</sup> John breaks into four parts: Saluting the “Elect Lady and her children”, (b) Walking In God’s Truth, (c) Avoiding Falsehood, and (d) a benediction expressing sources of support and strength.

## **Outline**

- I. Salutation (1:1-1:3)**
- II. Exhortation to Walk in Love and Truth (1:4-1:6)**
  - A. Walk in Truth (1:4)**

**B. Walk in Love (1:5-1:6)**

**III. Avoid False Teachers (1:7-1:11)**

**A. Doctrine of False Teachers (1:7-1:9)**

**B. Avoid the False Teachers (1:10-1:11)**

**IV. You Have Support (1:12-1:13)**

**Keys to Understanding 2 John**

- The basic theme of this brief letter is faithfulness in the practice and purity of the apostolic teaching that readers have “heard from the beginning.” Messiah, the Word of the Father, came into the world born of a woman – fully human. God’s Word came encased in “earthly stuff.” This idea was inconceivable to the false teachers, who were trying to say that “The Christ” could not be contained in human flesh.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> John, like 1<sup>st</sup> John, was written as an argument against the Gnostic teachers who were infiltrating the churches in Asia Minor. The Gnostic heresy taught that:
  - Matter is inherently evil, spirit is inherently good
  - There was a distinction between the man Jesus and the spiritual Christ
  - The two came together at baptism, but separated before the crucifixion
  - Gnostics were those who possessed “the secret teachings of Jesus.” They were above normal distinctions of right and wrong. What they did “in the flesh” had nothing to do with who they were spiritually. Some used this license to indulge in all kinds of behavior. Others tried to separate themselves from all kinds of contamination.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> John teaches that being Christian requires that a person not just “know truth,” as the Gnostic teachers assert, but that a person WALK in the TRUTH. This was asserted to refute the idea that a person can confess one thing while living a lifestyle that is inconsistent with what they say they believe.
- For John, there is a basic interaction between love and truth/obedience. A person shows their love by obedience to God’s Word, and a person shows their obedience to God’s Word by their love.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> John emphasizes “loving one another” as the true expression of obedience for this congregation. However, the love must be a *discerning* type of love. Welcoming someone in who was teaching something among them that would be destructive to their understanding of the gospel was to be avoided.

**Some Lessons from 2 John**

- Those who love Jesus MUST love all who seek truth and walk in truth. (Truth in this case means Biblical truth.) We don’t get to be choosy, regardless of our personal histories, tastes and preferences.
- Christians ought to support anyone who is striving make changes in their lives so that they can walk in obedience to God’s Word. Sometimes we tell people “it doesn’t take all of that” more because of the light that their changed behaviors sheds on *our* behaviors. However, if the Holy Spirit is convicting someone about certain behaviors or attitudes, we ought to praise God that God is moving in their lives, not try to keep them “the same as we have always known them to be.”
- One of the greatest joys of believers should be that The Truth is being imparted to, and obeyed by, the following generation. We ought to want our children to walk in holiness and do everything we can to make that possible.
- Error and heresy can creep into our understanding very easily and in ways that are difficult to detect. Some teachers have started with right understanding, but then gone off on a tangent because they failed to stay grounded and rooted in the basics. Do not take in instruction unless you carefully examine it in light of the “rightly divided” teaching of scripture. It will cause confusion and weaken your faith.
- One of the blessings of “the connection,” which involves churches having oversight and the benefit of “sister churches” is that there is mutual accountability and stability – it keeps us from losing our footing. This is part of what we celebrate as a denomination. Heresies can be shown for what they are when there is mutual accountability and loyalty to true doctrine. Only what we do for Christ will last!