

A LETTER FOR GODLY MOTHERS

2 John

Intro: This is a letter written to a lady, a godly lady and mother, who had godly children. It forever honors the place that women have in the work of the Lord. The Apostle John wrote to her, not as an apostle, but as an elder. This seems to be not only an evidence of his great love for her and for her family, but also of his great concern for her. There has been much discussion about whether or not the Apostle John was actually writing to a lady, or was he writing to a church? Personally I believe he was writing to a lady and her family. The expression "lady" in verse 5 seems to support this view, as well as the reference to her "elect sister" in verse 13.

Although these two epistles, 2 and 3 John, are the two shortest books in the NT, they are very important. They show how important individuals were to the Apostle John. The letters which Paul wrote show the same. Every child of God was important to them, and they earnestly sought the blessing of the Lord upon each individual.

The emphasis in 2 John is clearly upon the Word of God. The "truth" is mentioned five times in the first four verses. In addition, we have "commandment" mentioned once in verse 4, again in verse 5, and again in verse 6, plus the plural, "commandments," also in verse 6. Then the word "doctrine" appears twice in verse 9, and once again in verse 10. Add all of these together and you can see that there is a special emphasis upon the Word of God. And right in the middle of the epistle is verse 7 with its doctrinal emphasis. (Read verse 7.) *This undoubtedly explains why the Apostle John wrote this epistle. The danger of accepting the false teachers was the special problem which this lady faced. She had been faithful to the truth in the past, and the Apostle John wanted her to continue to be faithful.*

But let me give you the divisions of the epistle, and then we will consider what the Apostle John had to say to this lady.

The outline:

- I. JOHN'S GREETING AND COMMENDATION (vv. 1-4).
- II. JOHN'S EXHORTATION AND WARNING (vv. 5-11).
- III. JOHN'S CONCLUSION (vv. 12-13).

I. JOHN'S GREETING AND COMMENDATION (vv. 1-4).

Some of you might ask, "Why do you call this epistle, 'A Letter for Godly Mothers'?" Well, since it has been a part of the Word of God, I believe that we can assume that, although it was written to a godly lady whom the Apostle John knew in the first century, it is intended to be a help to all women in every generation who are interested in pleasing God--whether married or unmarried. And then if you were to ask me, "What makes you think that this woman was a godly woman?", I would say that it is because the Apostle John addressed her as "the elect lady." He obviously believed that she was saved, and the only way he could tell that was because she was living like a person should live who is one of God's elect.

When the Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Colosse, he said this:

12 Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;

13 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

14 And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness (Col. 3:12-14).

The Apostle Paul was clearly indicating what we have been learning from 1 John--that if anyone really knows the Lord, you will be able to tell it by the life he or she lives. All who know the Lord are "the elect of God," chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. And so if a person's life shows that he is "elect," it must be because that person is behaving in a manner that is pleasing to God.

Notice how "the truth" figured in their lives and in their fellowship in verses 1, 2, and 4. Sometimes the article "the" is used, and sometimes not, but when it is not used the word "truth" alone indicates that they were *faithfully* walking, or living, in obedience to the truth of God, which is the Word of God. Concerning all of God's elect, we can say, as John said in verse 2, that the truth "dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever." We may not have as much in us as we should, and we may not be living as obediently as we should, but we do have the word abiding in us, and it will be with us forever.

Now because the Apostle John knew that he was not only writing to a lady who knew the Lord, but who was living a holy life, he could tell her how he had been praying for her. (Read verse 3.) Every one of us needs God's grace, His mercy, and His peace every day that we live.

In preparing this message I read a message which Alexander Maclaren preached on just this one verse, and I wish I had the time to read it to all of you. But since I can't do that, let me summarize part of it for you.

He described God's grace as the source of all of our blessings. And he described it as "free, undeserved, unsolicited, self-prompted (from God), and altogether gratuitous bestowment" (Vol. 11, p. 49). And he said, as the Apostle John indicated at the end of verse 4, that it all issued forth from the faithfulness and love of God for us, His people. He likened God's love gushing forth like it was coming from an artesian well. This is the source of our blessings, which Maclaren said,

comes spontaneously, driven by its own fulness, and welling up unasked, unprompted, undeserved, and therefore never turned away by our evil, never to be wearied by our indifference, never to be brushed aside by our negligence, never to be provoked by our transgression, the fixed, eternal, unalterable centre of the Divine nature (Vol. 11, p. 50).

God's grace flows from His love.

His grace is the source of our blessings, and it flows toward us like a mighty stream, or river. These mercies are "new every morning." It is His mercies which keep us from being consumed. God deals with us not only as sinful, but as "weak and wretched" (*Op. cit.*, p. 51). Just as God's grace comes from His love, so His mercy flows out of God's grace.

And what is it when it reaches us? It brings peace like a mighty lake, calm and beautiful, always full and always sufficient. And the reason we will never lack for grace or mercy or peace is because they come to us "from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father." In Paul's epistles he speaks of "grace" and "peace," but in writing to Timothy and Titus he tied these two great words together with "mercy," just as the Apostle John did here in writing to this elect lady.

But look at verse 4. Not only was this dear lady walking in the truth, but her children were doing the same. And that caused great joy for the Apostle John. What particularly was the "commandment"? This takes us to the next part of the epistle.

II. JOHN'S EXHORTATION AND WARNING (vv. 5-11).

A. The exhortation (vv. 5-6).

I don't think that the Apostle John was telling this elect lady that she or her children needed to start doing what they had *not* been doing, but that they were to continue on doing *what they had been doing*. If there was anything that needed to be added to what they were doing, it was that they should do it with greater fervor and intensity.

What was the commandment? Was it something new? No, it was what they had known "from the beginning" (mentioned twice--once in verse 5, and once in verse 6). It was "that we love one another" (v. 5). And how do we show our love for each other? By living according to our Lord's commandments. See v. 6a. And we all know that this is also the way we show our love for God Himself.

Remember the man who asked the Lord what was the greatest commandment in the Law. This is what the Lord said:

- 34 But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together.
- 35 Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying,
- 36 Master, which is the great commandment in the law?
- 37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.
- 38 This is the first and great commandment.
- 39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.
- 40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Matt. 22:34-40).

The Apostle John tells us that the way we show our love for each other is by obeying the Word of God, and that is exactly the way that we show our love for God. We may have to think about that for a while until we see how that is true, but the most important thing for us to do is to be faithful in obeying the Lord, and we will see that we begin to love each other more, and at the same time we will be experiencing greater love for God the Father, and for His Son, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

But there is something else that this will do for us. And this brings us to:

B. The Apostle John's warning (vv. 7-11).

Up to this point in the epistle we have seen the importance of doing what God in His Word has told us to do. Now, related to that, we see that this

"elect lady" was told to believe the doctrine, the teaching, that we find in the Word of God--with special emphasis upon what the Scriptures teach us about *Christ!*

Even at that relatively early period in the history of the church, the Apostle John had to say that "many deceivers are entered into the world."

What is a deceiver? He is someone who wants to corrupt what you have been taught is the truth of God, and he wants to lead you astray by getting you to believe something else.

Do you remember what we learned in the first three verses of 1 John 4? Let us go back and read those verses again, and we will see that we have the same thing here in 2 John 7-11. (Read 1 John 4:1-3.)

In 1 John 4 Paul called them "false prophets"; here in 2 John 7 he called them "deceivers." *And in both passages he said that there were "many" of them.* And in both passages he called them "antichrists." This means that they were *against* Christ, *opposed to* Christ.

What were they teaching? They were teaching that Jesus Christ had not come in the flesh. The Apostle John was referring to the teaching of a group known as Gnostics. They were known as Doketic Gnostics, and they denied that our Lord was truly a Man. They denied His humanity. They claimed that what people thought was a man, was only the appearance of a man, but not a true man at all. This strikes not only at the Person of Christ, but, if true, would have done away with all hope of salvation. How important it is for all of us to know what the Old and New Testaments teach about Christ. There is nothing more important, nothing more basic, in all of Scripture than "the doctrine of Christ." And we cannot allow even the slightest deviation, or departure, from the teachings of Scripture.

The Apostle John's exhortation is given in verse 8. (Read.)

Note: The first and last "we" of verse 8 are "ye" in some MSS, but what our Authorized Version gives may very well be the true reading.

"Look to yourselves" means that they were to consider very carefully what the false teachers were saying, and to compare it with what the Apostle John had taught them, and what they could see was the plain teaching of Scripture. The problem with false teaching is not that it is so profound,

but that often people are ignorant of, sometimes totally ignorant of, what the Scriptures teach, especially about Christ. If professing Christians had known the Word, liberal theologians would not have been able to do so much damage in denying the Deity of Christ while praising Him for His humanity, and for His ability as a Teacher. If He were not the Son of God, we can only come to one conclusion: He has to be the greatest impostor who ever lived. But He was not an impostor. He was, and is, God in human flesh--true God and true Man.

So we need to be convinced of the truth of Scripture ourselves. Having done that, then we judge the rightness or wrongness of any teaching by the Word of God.

Now look at verse 9. *To transgress is to step over a boundary.* The moment anyone steps beyond or in a different direction from the teaching of Scripture, not only does he show that he doesn't have God, but neither does he have Christ. *So such a teacher cannot possibly be a Christian. He cannot possibly be a child of God. He may claim to be, but his claim is empty and false--just like his teaching!*

And what was this lady to do if such a teacher came along? Two things, and both are negative:

- 1) Don't entertain him in your home.
- 2) Don't bid him God speed.

It was customary in those days for Christians to house visiting teachers. This was not to be done when a teacher had shown himself to be false. And to bid him "God speed," that is, *to wish him well*, is to become one who has entered into fellowship with such a false teacher.

So, going back to what the Apostle told this lady in the early part of this letter about love, are there limits concerning the extent of our love? Are we as the people of God to love everyone? No, absolutely not! *We are to love each other, but our love is to be within the limits of the truth!*

This does not mean that we have to agree on every point of doctrine, but it does mean that there can be no variation in what the Scriptures teach us about Christ.

And now we come to the conclusion of the epistle.

III. JOHN'S CONCLUSION (vv. 12-13).

The Apostle John evidently had written this letter in haste because of the urgency of this godly mother's need, and the need of their children. He had other things he wanted to say to her, but those could wait until he visited them. And his visit was not to be something that they would dread, but something that would bring fulness of joy to them and to him.

The epistle closes with the Apostle sending greetings from the children of the elect lady's elect sister.

Concl: I pointed out to begin with, that this was a letter written to a lady, a Christian lady, a godly lady. Why would it be that a book of the Bible would be addressed to a lady and intended to be of help also to every girl or lady who knows and loves the Lord? Would I be overstepping the truth and being unkind if I were to say that with all of the wonderful qualities that ladies have, it is a tendency to think the best of everyone, and not to judge things on the basis of the truth? Men can do that too, but it seems to be more characteristic of women. There are exceptions, but remember how deceived Eve was in the beginning.

The tendency on the part of men is, as 3 John will show, to be lacking in love, to be too severe, and sometimes to be so hard that no one can possibly measure up to their requirements.

The ideal is to be found in the Word, and here the focus again has to be on our Lord. He was always gracious and loving and merciful. But, at the same time, He never compromised with the truth. He was very severe with the scribes and Pharisees, who were false teachers, but publicans and sinners heard Him gladly. May the Lord give us the grace to do as the Apostle Paul has exhorted us to do in Eph. 4:14-16:

14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

15 **But speaking the truth in love,** may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:

16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

May the Lord always keep us true to His Word, but let us always manifest His grace and mercy that we might lead others away from error and into the glorious truths of the Word of God..