

2 John

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Summary: *Second John is the shortest book in the New Testament by word count. Written by 'the elder' to 'the elect lady and her children,' the letter commends the community for walking in truth and love, reaffirms the commandment of mutual love, and issues a sharp warning against deceivers who deny that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. The elder instructs the community not to receive such false teachers into their homes or extend them hospitality, lest they share in their wicked work. The letter closes with the hope of a personal visit.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The letter demonstrates that Johannine theology is not abstract but has immediate practical implications — the community must make concrete decisions about whom to welcome. The identification of the author as 'the elder' (ho presbyteros) rather than 'the apostle' suggests either a deliberate choice of a relational title or a different figure within the Johannine circle. The 'elect lady' (eklektē kyria) is almost certainly a personification of a house church rather than an individual woman, as indicated by the plural 'you' in the body of the letter and the greeting from the 'children of your elect sister' in v. 13.*

Translation Friction: *The instruction not to welcome false teachers (vv. 10-11) raises questions about the limits of hospitality and tolerance. In the ancient world, extending hospitality to traveling teachers was effectively sponsoring their mission. The elder's prohibition is not about personal rudeness but about material and social support for a message that undermines the gospel. The identity of the 'elect lady' — whether a specific woman, a personified church, or a title — cannot be resolved with certainty from the text alone.*

Connections: *The christological test (v. 7) parallels 1 John 4:2-3. The love commandment 'from the beginning' echoes 1 John 2:7-8 and John 13:34. The 'teaching of Christ' (v. 9) connects to the Johannine emphasis on remaining in the received tradition. The elder's hope for a face-to-face visit (v. 12) parallels 3 John 13-14 and reflects the limitations of written communication in the ancient world.*

¹The elder, to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth — and not I alone, but also all who have known the truth — ²Because the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and will be with us for ever. ³Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and in love. ⁴I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we received a commandment from the Father. ⁵And now I ask you, dear lady — not as though I am writing a new commandment to you, but one that we have had from the beginning — that we love one another. ⁶

And this is love: that we walk according to his commandments. This is the commandment, just as you heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it. ⁷For many deceivers have gone out into the world — those who do not confess that Jesus Christ is coming in the flesh. Such a person is the deceiver and the antichrist. ⁸Watch yourselves, so that you do not lose what we have worked for, but may receive a full reward. ⁹Everyone who goes too far and does not remain in the teaching of Christ does not have God. Whoever remains in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, ¹¹Indeed, since he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds. ¹²Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to come to you and speak face to face, so that our joy may be made complete. ¹³The children of your elect sister greet you.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The self-designation *ho presbyteros* ('the elder') is a title of both age and authority within the early church. The phrase *eklektē kyria* ('elect lady') most likely refers to a local church community personified as a woman (cf. the 'elect sister' in v. 13 and the personification of the church as female in Revelation 12 and 2 Corinthians 11:2). 'In truth' (*en alētheia*) could mean 'truly' (adverbially) or 'in the sphere of truth' — both senses may be intended.
2. Truth is personified as an abiding presence — it dwells in believers and accompanies them eternally. The language parallels Jesus's promise of the Spirit of truth who 'remains with you and will be in you' (John 14:17). The future *estai* ('will be') extends the assurance beyond the present into eternity.
3. The greeting is unusual in its confidence — *estai* ('will be') is declarative rather than optative, stating a certainty rather than expressing a wish. The triad 'grace, mercy, and peace' appears elsewhere only in 1 Timothy 1:2 and 2 Timothy 1:2. The title 'the Son of the Father' (*toū huiou tou patros*) is found only here in the New Testament and emphasizes the unique filial relationship. The closing phrase 'in truth and in love' previews the letter's twin themes.
4. The phrase *ek tōn teknōn sou* ('some of your children') may imply that not all members of the community are walking in truth — a gentle pastoral concern. The verb *peripatountas* ('walking') uses the standard metaphor for daily conduct. The commandment 'from the Father' connects truthful living to divine authority, not human preference.
5. The request (*erōtō*, a polite verb for asking) echoes 1 John 2:7-8: the commandment is both old and foundational. The singular 'you' (*se*) addresses the community as a whole through its personified identity. 'From the beginning' (*ap' archēs*) refers to the original reception of the gospel message.
6. Love is defined as obedient walking (*peripatōmen kata tas entolas autou*). The circular structure — love is keeping commandments, and the commandment is to love — is intentional, not confused. Love and obedience are mutually defining in Johannine theology. The final pronoun 'in it' (*en autē*) could refer to the commandment or to love — the ambiguity reinforces their inseparability.
7. The participle *erchomenon* ('coming') is present tense, which could refer to Christ's past coming (historical present), his ongoing incarnate state, or his future return. The confession affirms the full, continuing reality of the incarnation — Jesus Christ did not merely appear in flesh temporarily but remains the incarnate one. The singular *houtos* ('this one') individualizes the type: every such deceiver embodies the spirit of the antichrist. This closely parallels 1 John 4:2-3.
8. The imperative *blepete* ('watch, look out, beware') is urgent. The SBLGNT mixes persons — 'you' do not lose what 'we' worked for — suggesting that the elder's apostolic labor is at stake in the community's faithfulness. The 'full reward' (*misthon plērē*) implies that partial loss is possible through compromise with false teaching, even if ultimate salvation is not in view.
9. The verb *proagōn* ('going ahead, going beyond, advancing') is used here negatively — the false teachers see themselves as progressive, going beyond basic Christianity, but the elder judges their innovation as departure. 'The teaching of Christ' (*tē didachē tou Christou*) could mean the teaching about Christ or the teaching that comes from Christ; both are likely intended. The consequence of departing is devastating: one 'does not have God' — the loss of relationship, not merely of correct doctrine.
10. In the ancient world, traveling teachers depended on private hospitality. Receiving someone into one's home (*eis oikian*) was effectively sponsoring their ministry. The prohibition against greeting (*chairein*, literally 'rejoice,' the standard greeting) is not about rudeness but about withholding the social endorsement that would legitimize the false teacher's mission. The 'house' may refer to a private home or to the house church that met there.
11. The verb *koinōnei* ('shares in, participates in, has fellowship with') is strong — extending hospitality to a false teacher makes one a partner in the deception. The principle is that material and social support for false teaching constitutes complicity. This verse has sometimes been misapplied to justify general inhospitality; its original scope is specific to those who deny the incarnation and actively propagate a counter-gospel.
12. The Greek *stoma pros stoma* ('mouth to mouth') is the literal expression behind 'face to face.' The preference for personal presence over written communication reflects both the limitations of ancient letter-writing and the Johannine conviction that personal encounter is superior to mediated communication (cf. John 1:14 — the Word became flesh, not text). The phrase 'our joy may be made complete' (*hē chara hēmōn peplērōmenē ē*) echoes John 15:11 and 16:24.

13. The 'elect sister' (tēs adelphēs sou tēs eklektēs) is most likely another church community — the one from which the elder writes. The parallel language of 'elect lady' (v. 1) and 'elect sister' (v. 13) suggests two sister congregations within the Johannine network. The 'children' are the members of that community. The SBLGNT does not include the 'Amen' found in some manuscripts.