

## The Epistles Of II And III John (Part One)

Avoid Friendship with False Teachers

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The letters of II and III John are the shortest books of the New Testament, but this obviously does not mean that II or III John are insignificant. Granted, in some ways, each merely repeats the general message of I John, which is longer, but the repetitions are made in two distinct contexts, which in turn gives a unique direction to the letters and bring out new emphasis.

The immediate problem in II and III John is that of traveling teachers or preachers. According to Christian ethics, all who travel about for this reason were to be shown hospitality by Christians in the town to which they came. In this, Christians were merely doing what the best of non-Christians would also do, but in Christian circles this extension of hospitality was open to obvious abuse and raised moral questions as well.

For example, suppose a visiting teacher claimed to be a Christian elder or even a prophet, but taught clearly false doctrine. Common hospitality would demand that he be provided for, but to do so would seem to be participation in the spread of his false teachings. So that raises the question, should he be received or not? John answers that question.

Or, as another example here, suppose the teacher overstayed his welcome and asked for money therefore giving evidence of being more motivated by greed than by a desire for Christian service. How long should such a person be tolerated? Should money be given?

The extent of this problem in the early church age is seen in the fact that the Didache, another early document, deals with the problem at length and even invents the term "Christmonger" from the Greek *Christemporos*, to describe those who attempted to profit by Christianity.

Now behind these questions lay the even greater problems of discerning truth from error, and of distinguishing false teachers from true servants of God. The letters of II and III John deal with these problems and also share other Christian teachings incidentally.

In II John, the author seems to be writing to a local church, so here the issues are discussed in the broadest terms. First, John reminds his readers of the test of true

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Christianity that had already been developed in the earlier and longer letter of I John. Secondly, he warns them to be on guard against false teachers. In this case the test of truth and error is the test of Christian doctrine, particularly as it relates to Jesus as the Christ come in the flesh.

In III John, the negative approach, “do not take him [the false teacher] into your house” gives way to a positive encouragement to receive those who really are God's servants. In III John, several distinct personalities are presented as examples.

III John is written to a Christian named Gaius. He is commended for having shown hospitality to teachers who had visited his area and is encouraged to continue showing it. Diotrephes is the second person mentioned in III John. He is rebuked indirectly for his refusal to welcome the same teachers and for trying to keep other Christians, such as Gaius, from doing so. The third person mentioned is Demetrius, whose example in such matters is said to be a good one.

These two letters (II and III John), the one warning against receiving and encouraging false teachers, and the other encouraging a genuine hospitality toward true teachers, belong together. A similarity between the two letters is that each begins with the author's introduction of himself as the elder. In the one case, he writes:

**II John 1** The Elder, 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.

**III John 1** The Elder, To the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth:

“The Elder” was a title used to designate the responsibility of certain leaders within the local church. In Greek, it is the word *presbyteros*, from which we get the words presbyter and presbytery.

Apparently it was normal for each local congregation to have several elders. The apostle Paul appointed elders in each place where he had conducted a ministry and entrusted them with the work of teaching and preaching in that place before he moved on.

In the case of the first verse of II and III John, the word probably means more than this, however because John calls himself “*the* Elder” as opposed to be just “an elder,” and assumes a special authority over the affairs of these two churches. An elder, in the traditional sense, would have had an authoritative voice only in the affairs of his local

congregation, but today it is not limited to one congregation, as we know.

Traditionally the identification of the elder, plus the unnamed author of I John and of the fourth gospel, has been fixed as John, the son of Zebedee, who became an apostle. The captions of the books themselves indicate this. John's identity was so well known and his authority so well recognized that he could use the title "the elder" without needing to qualify or amplify it.

Since John outlasted all the other apostles, he could have properly designated himself as "the elder" in a unique sense, thereby indicating that he was the last of these apostles who had seen the Christ and had been commissioned by Him to bear an authoritative testimony.

Now the messages of II and III John are not just for an earlier age. Like all Scripture, they have a message for our own time. The books of John—the gospel of John, the letters of I, II, and III John, as well as Revelation—are all tied together. In the gospel of John the apostle shows Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Savior of mankind and encourages fellowship with Him in order to build faith in God. In I John, he discusses fellowship with God; in II John he forbids fellowship with false teachers; in III John he encourages fellowship with Christian brethren.

The first message of II and III John is that we will always, in this life, have problems in God's church. If we did not know better, we might think that certain earlier ages of church history were unlike our own in that they were relatively free of the trouble that plagues us today.

Some might suppose that the first century of the church would have been free of problems, and if ever there were churches that would have been free of such things it would have been those churches, over which the apostles, specifically the apostle John, presided. But in point of fact, there were problems there too and therefore we should not be surprised when we have problems in this age as well.

John had great problems, there were problems of schisms and heresy in the churches to which he first writes. In addition to these, it was compounded by a deep bewilderment on the part of those who really were converted. Even today we are bewildered at times about how people act or how so many people are led astray.

In III John we also detect an entire range of personality conflicts reciprocated by the arrogance and desire of power by a man named Diotrephes. We can be encouraged by these facts, not that we rejoice in other people having problems, but because this helps

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us to put our own problems into perspective. We can refuse to be overwhelmed by our problems. Knowing that they are already known to God, we can begin to deal with them on the basis of the appropriate biblical principles and with the power of the Holy Spirit, which is of course absolutely necessary. Now turn to I Corinthians 10 where Paul writes:

**I Corinthians 10:13** No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

So if we remain close to God, obey His commandments and statutes, then we will be provided with an escape from those who try to deceive us. We will be able to bear up under these deceptions and come out with the wisdom of God's truth. This assurance by the apostle Paul is certainly needed as much now as ever as the church today begins to face increasing trials and tribulations.

The second message of these two letters is of our own responsibility as Christians to deal with such problems. It is true that the churches of John's day had problems, as we do today, but this was not to be an excuse for them to do nothing. On the contrary, the fact that the letters were written to the churches by John and contain specific instructions, indicate that there were actions that they were to take in order to cope with problems and willful sins, and so should we. We are to assume responsibility for our sins.

In I Corinthians 5, the apostle Paul admonishes and instructs the Corinthian brethren because they had neglected to do the right thing about a bad situation in their congregation. Now Paul tells the Corinthians that God has set certain boundaries to mark out His people as His own. The Corinthians needed to maintain these boundaries by disfellowshipping a man in the church who was involved in incest. Paul scolds the congregation for being puffed up, that is, self-righteous, proud, and arrogant about their tolerance of sin. He said they should have been deeply saddened by such willful and overt sin in their midst. Paul could see from afar what should be done about it because it was so blatantly clear.

Now the Sabbath service is a formal and sanctified gathering to worship God in spirit and in truth, and such acceptance of such blatant immorality was an insult to God and tainted their worship of Him. Therefore he was to be cast out of God's church and into Satan's realm, the world.

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In their self-righteous attitudes they were so vain about their false mercy and their extreme tolerance that they shammed God's church and this is what upset Paul so strongly. The influence of the tolerance of that one explicit sin would spread like leavening in bread throughout the rest of the congregation, if it was not rooted out immediately.

Paul emphasizes that proper worship must be done in sincerity and truth, and finally he commands them not to keep company with, not to fellowship with, and not even to eat with, a professing member of the church who is sexually immoral; covetous; an adulterer; reviler; drunkard; or blackmailer. Paul goes on to say, "Put away from yourselves the evil person."

This arrogance resulting from their self-righteousness may have developed from their wrong understanding that they were somehow free of normal moral constraints because they were under grace. If so, they may have thought of this freedom as an implication of grace. Their characteristic arrogance was doubly inappropriate in light of the shocking sin in their midst. So we must avoid giving the appearance of approving sinful conduct, lest criticism be brought on the church because of our complicit attitude manifested by our condoning comments and actions regarding the flagrantly sinful person. Sin must *never* be rewarded.

The third message of II and III John is the application of the tests of life to the whole life. The tests of life determine whether or not one is a true child of God, which obviously applies to one's whole of life. It is conceivable that a person could use them to determine whether or not he is a true Christian and then forget about them, believing that they no longer have any important bearing on his conduct.

We find this to be a common problem in the church where someone believes that he has already developed a humble attitude and so no longer works to develop or maintain it into a permanent part of his character. You might hear some people say, "I've been humbled," when they really mean humiliated, which in itself shows that they still have pride that needs to be overcome. Sometimes people might say, "I've overcome that sin or problem," and he gives no further thought of it. This brings to mind the principle and theme that we will see in more detail: "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."

The letters of II and III John make clear that forgetting about a problem after we think it has been overcome or solved is very dangerous spiritually. The tests of life are areas in which Christians are encouraged to remain strong and to grow.

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In II John, the tests are found in the first six verses: verses 1-4 talk about truth; verses 1, 3, 5, 6 talk about love; verses 4-6 talk about commandment. Now in III John: verses 3-4 talk about truth; verse 6 talks about love; verse 11 talks about goodness or righteousness. The three words also occur in an incidental way several more times throughout the letter.

The fourth message of II and III John is the need to be faithful in our responsibility, particularly in little things. We must be faithful in what we have already learned and we have to be careful to express those convictions consistently in our speech and in our conduct. In this light, we should use wisdom in choosing our friends. Is this not what good parents try to convey to their children? Our friends do have an influence on us, good or bad.

**Proverbs 12:26** The righteous should choose his friends carefully, for the way of the wicked leads them astray.

**Proverbs 13:20** He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed.

**Proverbs 22:24-25** Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go, lest you learn his ways and set a snare for your soul.

So we see here, in God's inspired written Word, that we are to be very careful with the people we choose to be friends with or to socialize with. Most people think of watching what you say or choosing your friends wisely as relatively little things, however the Bible is very clear on this. In one sense these are little things, but on the other hand, this is very important because it is here that most of the battles are won because they are preemptive. They consider the end result and prepare ahead to bring about a positive outcome.

Nowhere is this principle seen more clearly as in comparing the letter of the law, which is its literal statement, to the spirit of the law which is its spiritual principle. The Pharisees were infamous for deceiving the people into thinking that their self-righteousness was true righteousness. Though they followed the letter of the law with great pride, they had no wisdom to apply the law properly because they did not have God's Holy Spirit to guide them. True wisdom is the right use of spiritual knowledge and without it you cannot understand the spirit of the law.

Even obeying the letter of the law for reasons of pride and personal gain cannot prevent

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self-righteousness. Conversely our good deeds should be a light, and a light makes no noise unless something is wrong with it. Keep that in mind, if a light makes noise, it usually means that it is on the verge of going out.

Now it is not enough to have a law that we are required to follow by the letter. The Pharisees elaborated so extensively on God's laws that they created a monstrous slavery, thousands of volumes elaborating on what God supposedly intended the law to mean and how people should keep it.

The true effectiveness of the law is found in its purpose and in its intent, not in its letter necessarily. In a general way, the purpose and intent of a biblical instruction is what we call a spiritual principle. Also we can say that the purpose and intent of God's written law is the spirit of the law.

We learn a great deal about God's way of life by keeping His commandments. If we do not keep them, we do not experience them and we do not learn from them. Ancient Israel half-hardheartedly tried to keep them, but without the help of the Holy Spirit, they were unable to keep even the letter of the law for very long. Thus we see Israel going the way of the Gentiles, even though they had God's law initially.

When we keep God's commandments and statutes we learn to think like God thinks and we begin to develop the character of God. And as we learn more of God's plan for humanity, we discover that our own future responsibilities in the future government of God on earth depends, to a large extent, on us using God's law wisely with regard to preparation of being worthy of taking the Passover.

Most of the areas we have troubles with are attitudes that deal with the spirit of the law. For members of God's church, the blind spots are mostly in the areas of spiritual principles, since adherence to the letter of the law should be obvious in its application to all members of God's church.

We should already be following God's laws as far as obedience to the commandments go. We do not kill, steal, commit adultery, and so on. That should be a given for members of God's church. The key to keeping God's law properly is to learn to keep the law as Jesus did. We see an example of that here:

**Matthew 12:10-13** And behold, there was a man who had a withered hand. And they asked Him, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"—that they might accuse Him. [That was their intent.] Then He said to them, "What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the

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Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” Then He said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And he stretched it out, and it was restored as whole as the other.

What an encouraging statement this is regarding God's awesome power of healing. Remember what Jesus said right before this miraculous healing? “It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” He was expounding on a principle that there is more to keeping the Sabbath than just physically resting on it.

This was a moment of revelation because here Jesus Christ pointed to the spirit of the law. Now despite His emphasis on the spirit of the law, Christ continued to uphold the letter of the law as well because there is no conflict between the two.

**Matthew 5:18-20** For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. [What did they have at that time? They did not have New Testament, but they had the Old Testament scriptures.] Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

So if the scribes and Pharisees could only keep the letter of the law, because they did not have God's Holy Spirit, then by us having God's Holy Spirit we must keep, in addition, the spiritual principles of the law. The letter of the law that the Pharisees tried to keep is not enough, especially for God's church. We have to exceed the letter of the law.

Jesus is so specific here of the continuance of the law from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant, that He referred to the smallest punctuation and pronunciation marks, contained in the written law: “the jot and the tittle.”

Most modern theology discards the letter in favor of their interpretation of the spirit. One extreme is just as bad as the other, because the true Christian needs both the letter of the law as well as the spirit of the law in order to keep it properly, because you cannot have the spirit of the law without the letter to define and establish it.



In order to properly keep God's law we have to learn to recognize the spiritual principles that come out of the written law. The spirit of the law means God's original intent and purpose behind each law. Often people think of the spiritual principles of the law as the little things or as gray areas only, when in reality and truth, they are significant and important. Jesus was very clear on this point and He gave examples of this to clarify it.

**Matthew 5:21-22** "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. [We see Him stating the letter of the law of the Old Testament and elaborating on it, showing the spiritual principle or the spirit of the law.] And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.

**Matthew 5:27-28** You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

So we must be faithful in our responsibility, especially in the little things, which are not so little. Our faithfulness is centered on what we have already learned and manifested in our careful expression of our convictions, consistently in our thoughts, speech, and conduct.

We notice in John's writings that he himself is faithful, even to the point of writing letters to encourage and direct those whom he loves. He wants to visit them shortly since he says that he hopes to see them, but he still writes trusting that even so small a thing as a letter will do good.

Are we equally that faithful? Do we take care of the little things? Are we careful in keeping the spiritual principles and being careful on how we keep God's law? It is in these things that we are truly and clearly revealed for what we are and whose we are.

Now as we look specifically at II John we find that the words of the apostle Paul in I Corinthians 10:12, "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" which could well stand as a subtitle of John's little epistle of II John.

Let me give you a brief synopsis of II John. The recipients were obviously walking in truth and remaining faithful to the commandments they had received from the Father. John is deeply pleased to be able to commend them but he takes nothing for granted

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here. Realizing that standing is just one step away from falling, he does not hesitate to issue a reminder to love one another.

We almost become numb to that phrase because we hear it so often, but it is foundationally important to our faith. To love one another, he stresses, is equivalent to walking according to God's commandments. John indicates however that this love must be discerning. It is not naïve, unthinking, open to anything or any one kind of love. Biblical love is a matter of choice. It is dangerous and foolish to float through life with undiscerning love. In other words, do not be naïve when carrying out loving acts for others.

False teachers, which these books are about, abound who do not acknowledge Christ as having come in the flesh. It is false charity to open the door to false teaching. We must have fellowship with Christians but we must not have fellowship with false teachers. John explains this in his second epistle. We will begin in verses 1-3.

**II John 1-3** The Elder, to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth [keep this phrase in mind, because it is crucial to II John and III John], and not only I, but also all those who have known the truth, because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever: Grace, mercy, and peace will be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

It is strange that a letter, apparently so straightforward, would present deep problems regarding both its author and its recipients, but it is the case. There is a disagreement as to the identity of “the elder” and also as to the identity of the recipient: “the chosen lady and her children.”

The Bible does not identify the chosen lady directly. The most natural meaning of this salutation is that John sent this letter to a particular person, however, he more likely was referring to the church symbolically.

It is unlikely that John addressed his letter to Mary the mother of Jesus, because she would have been well over one hundred years old, if she was still alive at the time when John wrote this letter which was early to mid 90s A.D. Now since Mary had been chosen to be the human mother of Jesus, along with her close association with John, who cared for her as per Jesus' request, it is unlikely that John addressed his letter to another, “The chosen lady.”

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On the other hand it would not have been strange for John to have addressed the church as the very special lady. We see the church referred to as a woman in Ephesians 5:32, Galatians 4:26, and also in Revelation 12.

When John wrote his letter, agnostic Christianity had entered the church and false teachers were increasing, therefore God's children needed their spiritual mother more than ever. Paul told the members of the church in Galatia that the Jerusalem above is free, that is the mother of us all. Jerusalem, in Galatians 4:26 is a code word for God's church.

John uses the church as a family as he writes, so he is inferring that since the church is a type of spiritual mother, then the various congregations that are spread out everywhere are like sisters, and that individual members are their children. This is his reference in verse 13.

**II John 13** The children of your elect sister greet you. Amen.

Under this symbolic interpretation, "the children of your elect sister" would then be members of the congregation from which John writes that is located elsewhere. Nevertheless, what is important is how the letter applies to us as members of God's church.

It is apparent that John is addressing an individual congregation which he portrays by the phrase, "The chosen lady." Why else does this appear to be the case? First, because there is a strange absence of clear personal references which is made all the more strange by the marked contrast with III John, which is quite personal. II John is more general and broad, where as III John is more personal.

The second thing is that there is an apparent unconscious and repeated transition from the second person singular pronoun, in verses 4, 5, and 12, to the second person plural pronoun, in verse 6, 8, 10, and 13. This indicates that John was thinking of a complete congregation rather than just one individual.

And third, there were expressions that were highly appropriate to the corporate or group view. These involve the expressions of love that John has for "The chosen lady and the children"; the revelation that some of her children abide in the truth while some apparently do not; and above all, the closing verse conveys greetings from the chosen lady's sister and the children who are with her.

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Now if this view is objected to because such a portrayal is unnatural and necessary, we must remember that while that may be true for our age, it was not necessarily true for John's age. In fact a similar greeting from "she who is in Babylon, elect" also a feminine singular ending occurs a few pages earlier in I Peter 5.

**I Peter. 5:13** She who is in Babylon, elect together with you, greets you; and so does Mark my son.

So the balance of probability within the limits of our present knowledge seems to be on the side of the interpretation that it was written to a congregation or the church as a whole. The more standard part of John's greeting to the elect lady and her children is found in verse 3, in the phrase:

**II John 3** Grace, mercy, and peace will be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

Similarly, in I and II Timothy, we have the same threefold greeting: "Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Jesus Christ our Lord." In most of the other of Paul's epistles, grace and peace is the norm. So these phrases indicate that all spiritual blessings come from above and come jointly from God the Father and Jesus Christ, His Son.

Now the unique feature of this opening salutation in John is his surprising emphasis on truth and his linking of truth with love. This direct link suggests that those who love the truth naturally have a love for others.

**II John 1** The Elder, 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.

The word "truth" occurs four times in these first three verses, and once in verse 4, so there is a great emphasis on truth there and we see it connected to love. In these verses, John claims to love the elect lady and her children in truth and these are also loved by all others who are know the truth.

This is true precisely because of the truth and in this they are all following the way of the Father and Son who truly dispense the great blessings of grace, mercy, and peace in truth and love. So it is saying that we are to emulate the God the Father and Jesus

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Christ, His Son, in truth and love, because that is the way that they impart their blessings to us: in truth and love.

These phrases are of importance because they are expressions of how Christians are bound to other Christians, primarily by the special bond of truth. This is the foundation of genuine Christian love.

Why do Christians love one another after all? It is not on the ground of some special or imagined compatibility. John says elsewhere that God's word is truth. What binds the Christian community together is a common commitment to true and sound doctrine, and to the truth, out of which love arises. This means that Christians will differ fundamentally and mentally from the false teachers in their midst or from heretics.

For a time, false teachers and Christians may share common goals; for a time, false teachers may even be indistinguishable from those who are truly converted. But the false teachers will leave and go out into the world, as John said earlier, while on the other hand Christians will demonstrate that they are true Christians by remaining with one another in truth and walking in love. The truth must endure and must be held high. It is of great importance.

Christian love is founded upon Christian truth. We will never increase the love that is between us by diminishing the truth we hold in unity. We must be careful that in our pursuit of unity we do not compromise the very truth on which true love and unity depend. Having true doctrine in the church is of vital importance.

One of the comments I heard from someone after Worldwide split up was, that "God would never want it to be so hard for us. He doesn't want us to struggle so much to obey Him." That is exactly the point this is making here. You cannot have true unity within the church without sound doctrine or without the truth of God. You cannot have true love in the church either without the truth.

**II John 4** I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father.

Verse 4 brings us to the body of the letter that John wrote from which also we learn the reason for it having been written. Apparently members of the church, to which John is writing, had crossed John's path and they had brought great joy to him because of their apparent and continual growth in the truth. He wanted to share this joy and see more if it.

Consequently he writes to the church from which these Christians came, first, to praise it and encourage it in its life and witness within, and secondly to warn it against a danger that John, out of his wider experience, perceived to be approaching from outside the church. It had not quite reached the people that he was writing to in II John yet, but it was about to. He could see it coming, just as we too can see the false teachers, false ministers, and the false doctrines that are constantly swirling around God's church.

There is much in the life of the local church to give John cause for rejoicing but this does not mean that there is no more room for growth. He writes to Christians and their lives must meet the three tests: 1) the moral test—righteousness or obedience to God's commands, 2) the social test—love, and 3) the doctrinal test—the test of truth and sound doctrine.

This does not mean that their lives are as marked by righteousness as they might be, that they love each other fully, or that they have totally conformed to the whole of Christian doctrine. John writes to encourage them in what they are already doing and to encourage them to live a life characterized by mutual love.

None of us are perfect and none of those in the first century church were either. But we have to work towards it, as God works in us to complete us to His satisfaction, to makes us so that we are able to take care of the responsibility that we will have in His Kingdom.

**II John 4-6** I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father. 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. This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.

In the first three verses of the letter, it was the word truth that tied the thoughts together. Here the word is commandment(s), which also like truth occurs four times. In verses 4, John indicates that we are commanded to follow the truth. In verse 5 and at the end of verse 6 the word “commandments” is the command to love. And in verse 6 the word commandments is plural, thereby indicating all the commandments, which if the Christian obeys them, will lead to righteousness.

Now what is to be the Christian's obligations in each of these areas? As John says, is that he is obligated to follow along in them and walk in them. That means not only to

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believe them or agree with them, but to also do them. In other words, by deliberate and disciplined choice he is to pursue that path upon which he has been set by the very God of grace who saved him. We have to make a deliberate and disciplined choice which takes work.

Furthermore, it is explicitly said that this is to be true in each area. We are to walk in the truth (verse 4), and in obedience to His commandments (verse 6), and in love (verse 6). It may be thought to be impossible by some that a person cannot be commanded to love; to follow truth; to pursue righteousness, but that is precisely what we are commanded to do.

If we do not understand this or like it, the fact only reveals how little we know of these great qualities. Therefore, belief in God's truth is *not* optional, it is commanded. Besides a failure to believe is not an intellectual ability, but rather a sin, as John has already indicated in chapter 3 of his gospel.

**John 3:18-21** "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God." [This is the important passage here.]

Doing and living the truth takes us to an enlightened understanding of how to love. Similarly, love is the expression of a self-sacrificing service to others that can be deliberately undertaken. Righteousness is that unto which, by the grace of God but nonetheless by conscience choice and deliberate action, we may spiritually grow.

The basic theme of this brief letter in II John, is steadfastness in the practice and purity of the doctrine of Christ and the apostles that members of the church heard from the beginning. John writes it as a reminder to continue walking in obedience to God's commandment to love one another. This is a practical encouragement, not an impossible one.

Its primary purpose is to deliver a warning not to associate with or assist teachers who do not acknowledge the truth about Jesus Christ and His work. This is a doctrinal encouragement. Now we will read II John 7-11. My Bible has a caption here that says, "

Beware of antichrist deceivers”

**II John 7-11** For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, [so it is possible to lose the knowledge that we have gained by studying God's Word if we do not continue to work for it] but that we may receive a full reward. Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house [that is a command] nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.

John stresses that those who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh (verse 7) are deceivers who must be avoided and one must abide in the doctrine of Christ to have a relationship with God.

John has laid some stress on the need for growth within the life of the local congregation, but now he lays even greater stress on the danger he perceives to be arising from a widespread movement of heretical “Christian” propaganda. As one reads these verses, the movement seems to be similar, if not identical, to the Gnostic threat alluded to in John's first letter. But unlike the situation in I John, in this case the danger has not yet reached the congregation to whom he writes. He is warning them ahead of time.

The first thing John says about this movement is that its adherents are numerous and that they are actively going out into the world for propaganda purposes. And when John says that the deceivers have gone out into the world, he indicates that they have left the Christian congregation in which they originated in order to establish their own religious movement.

This was apparently the case with the situation reflected in I John, because John wrote: “they went out from us, but they were not of us.” This may also indicate that they had gone out into the world, in the sense of embarking on a parallel program of evangelism.

From their own perspective and from their own eyes, these men probably thought of themselves as Christian proselytizers, yet from the viewpoint of John they were dangerous heretics and imposters because they did not hold to the essential doctrines as Jesus Christ and the apostles.



Now in particular, they did not hold the truth that Jesus is the Christ who came in the flesh, but it is not limited to that. Any distortion of Jesus Christ and His doctrine fits into this warning. John says that a teacher who is in error on this point is a deceiver and an antichrist. There were many antichrists by the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. and in the final days of the apostle John. Many pretended to be part of God's true church and even originated there. Notice what John says of these people:

**I John 2:18-19** Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.

This tells us where we find them and where they came from, but now how do we recognize them? Turn to II John 7 again where it is very obvious.

**II John 7** for many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

So we have the simple definition there of an antichrist. An antichrist is a deceiver. It includes any deceiver of God's Word; who Jesus Christ is; what He has done or what He is doing. So how does an antichrist deceive us?

The answer is given here in II John 7 as well. Antichrists deceive by teaching about a false non-biblical Jesus Christ. Their Christ is based on their own human reasoning which eventually becomes established in their churches as religious tradition. "According to the traditions of men" is what the apostle Paul wrote in Colossians 2.

**Colossians 2:8** Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

Deceivers and false teachers teach their own traditions contrived by their own perverse thinking, telling people what they want to hear rather than guarding the truth and upholding godly standards as found in the inspired written Word of God which we call the Holy Bible, made up of both the old and new testaments. Jesus reprimanded the

Pharisees for making the word of God of no effect.

**Mark 7:5-13** Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, “Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?” He answered and said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.” He said to them, “All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’ But you say, ‘If a man says to his father or mother, “Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban”—’(that is, a gift to God), then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do.”

By extension, there is the antichrist mentality as seen in the Catholic Church and her Protestant daughter churches which reject the holy Scriptures in favor of their own deceitful philosophy and tradition. The apostle Paul warns God's church over and over again not to be deceived by such methods.

**Ephesians 4:14** that we should no longer be children [spiritual children], tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.

The apostle Paul has nothing good to say about these people, and neither does John or Jesus Christ. I Timothy 6 concerns false teachers and centers on their greed and their apparent exploiting of their faith for material gain. False teachers are often referred to in the pastoral epistles as having faulty reasoning. Since the gospel is the truth, to deny it is to think in a faulty manner.

True apostolic teaching always fits with and leads to godliness as opposed to the negative effects of false teaching. True doctrine is often recognizable by the impact that it has on everyday living. You will know it by the positive fruit that is produced by those who live in and by the truth.

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**I Timothy 6:3-5** If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.

Another command: to avoid; to not be friends with people who teach and preach false doctrine. People who wrongly teach that God will give material health and wealth if only one has enough faith fall under the condemnation of this passage.

Antichrists change the nature of God to suit their own desires preaching it as truth, they also change the true gospel by obscuring the wonderful true gospel of the coming Kingdom of God. God is at work creating a family which is called the Kingdom of God, and He is doing this by calling and converting a small number of individuals to help Him in this glorious work. That is something we can be thankful for and really be in awe of that we actually have a part in this, but there is work to be done.

The focus of many antichrists often concentrates on doing away with God's law and His way of life. The apostle Paul calls this the mystery of lawlessness already at work. An antichrist is someone who is against Christ and His way of life and who has enmity against God. They can be from the church or not from the church.

We see today that even our own president is exceeding his own station as just such an antichrist. He is not *the* antichrist, but his is an antichrist, because he is doing everything he can to destroy Christianity. He is a puppet, he has other people behind him running him, but he is the visible source and we have to be careful not to hate him or disrespect his position of authority.

Now it is clear from I John 2:18 that there will be one specific antichrist who will appear on the world scene at the end of the age before the return of Christ.

**II Thessalonians 2:3-4** Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

I am reminded here of some older ladies that met with us a while back and one of them said to me that she admired Pope John Paul. She was just in awe of him and she had fallen for that deception, thinking that he was just another Christian. This example proves that even people in the church can be taken that far into deception if they are not careful. "Take heed lest you fall."

**II Thessalonians 2:8-11** And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie.

Do you love the truth? I do not mean just the truth of God, I mean *all* truth. Do you care what the truth is in education, sports, entertainment, and so on? Notice the sentence there: "they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved," and because they had no love of the truth, they believed the lie. Now what does it mean to receive the love of the truth? Notice what Paul told the Romans in Romans 12.

**Romans 12:2** And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

That is another description of truth: "Prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." We are to be truth seekers in everything, not just when it comes to religion. We must have a mind set that questions everything the world does and says, and we must prove all that we believe. That is what we are doing in the commentaries, we are questioning what the world tells us. We must test all things as the apostle Paul admonishes in I Thessalonians 5.

**I Thessalonians 5:21** Test all things; hold fast what is good. [Other translations might say, "Prove all things."]

We have a duty as members of God's church to subject everything submitted to us in life to the proper test. The Greek word from which "test" is translated applies to metals, referring to the art of the naysayer, by which the true nature and value of the metal is

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tested. This test or trial was usually made by fire. We use the phrase “trial by fire” to express our severe suffering during hard times.

In this light we are to carefully examine everything proposed to us to believe. We are not to receive it on trust or just believe it just because it was urged with passion or plausibility. In the various opinions and doctrines that are submitted to us to believe, and I should include the propaganda in the major news media, we are able to apply the appropriate tests based on the Word of God and what we find to be true we are to grip tightly, but what is false we must reject.

God does not require us to disregard our reason or to be gullible. He does not want us to believe just anything just because others say so. He wants us to prove all things, even what is stated by the ministers in the church. God's true ministers are human and we make mistakes no matter how hard we try not to. Even though we are held accountable for what we teach, you must still prove what we say to be true. Herbert Armstrong even said, “Blow the dust off your Bible and prove these things.” The Bereans were commended for this very thing in Acts 17.

**Acts 17:11-12** These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men.

I Thessalonians 5:21 again says: “Test all things; hold fast what is good.” Hold fast what is good is just as much a duty as it is to test and prove all things. When we apply the proper tests and have found out the truth, we are bound to hold it tight and guard it. We are to guard the truth and we are not at liberty to shrug it off or throw it away as if it were valueless, neither may we treat truth and falsehood alike. They are at opposite ends of the spectrum.

It is the responsibility of God's people to firmly commit to the truth and suffer the loss of all things rather than to abandon it. We owe this to God and to ourselves. This is a very important rule because it shows the true nature of God's way of life and it is a rule, whose practical value as a guide will be felt positively and consistently throughout our lives, if we apply it. The day will come when your belief in the truth and how deeply held it is, will be tested.

Other religions require the devotees to receive everything upon trust because it is not

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backed by the truth, but by human tradition and reasoning. In mainstream “Christianity” human doctrine trumps the truth of the holy Scriptures, which to false ministers just gets in the way of their false doctrines. In contrast, true Christianity asks us to examine everything.

Error, superstition, bigotry, and fanaticism attempt to repress free discussion of the truth. Mainstream “Christianity” says that there are certain “Christian” traditions which have been believed too long to change. Prime examples of this are: false doctrines of Sunday keeping; the trinity; the judgment of eternally going to heaven or hell upon one’s death. These are all sanctioned because so many respected false theologians have endorsed them as being true.

To permit such false doctrines to be subjected to the scrutiny of unordained eyes or to be handed by layman’s hands is frowned upon by mainstream Christianity and ruthlessly defended in the Catholic Church.

In opposition to all of this, true Christianity requires us to examine everything, no matter by whom it is held, by what councils ordained it, by what respected experts advocate it, or by what tradition may sustain it. We must not follow any popular trend or fad in favor of any false religion or teaching.

The calendar issue is one that plagues the church every few years and every time it becomes a small fad that gathers a following and draws them away from God’s church. Notice how the apostle Paul admonished the young pastor Timothy, and in principle each and every one of us.

**II Timothy 4:3-5** For the time will come when they [the members of God’s church] will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all [“all”—a universal word encompassing not just God’s Word, but everything we hear or do] things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

We are to examine religious teachings freely before we accept it, but when we are convinced that it is true, having prayed and if necessary having fasted about it, it is to be held tight to the chest as the precious thing that it is no matter if it is not current or popular; no matter if it is ridiculed by others; and no matter if you are persecuted because of it.

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As John the elder sends his love in the truth, so must we show our love to one another by living our lives in the truth.