

RAY C. STEDMAN

Adventuring Through the Bible

A Comprehensive Guide to the Entire Bible

New Enhanced Edition



Adventuring Through the Bible

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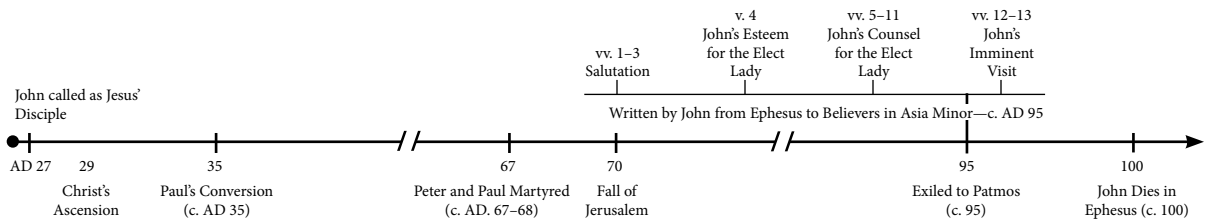
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The Vital Balance

Second John is the only letter in the New Testament that was written specifically to a woman. We gather from the letter itself that it was written to a mother with several children, perhaps a widow, to answer her questions regarding specific problems that had arisen. In those days the people were dependent on the apostles and church leaders for guidance regarding Christian truth and answers to problems.

Of course, a question then arises: How do we know if a certain leader who claims to speak for God actually speaks the truth? How do we distinguish between *God's* prophets and *false* prophets?

Evidently some who claimed to be prophets had come to this woman's home (probably in the city of Ephesus), and had raised certain doctrinal matters that disturbed her. Not knowing how to evaluate their opinions, she wrote to John and asked for his counsel.

The letter we now know as 2 John is the apostle's response to her question. As we go through this letter, we will see how it also answers many questions we have today, especially the question of how to

deal with people who teach spiritual concepts that are not in line with God's truth.

A Balance of Truth and Love

The first six verses of the letter present both the problem and John's approach in answering it:

The elder,

To the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in the truth—and not I only, but also all who know the truth—because of the truth, which lives in us and will be with us forever:

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, will be with us in truth and love.

It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us. And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. And this is love: that we

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

This chapter examines the second letter of John, a brief communication written to "the chosen lady and her children," to answer her troubled questions about certain false teachers.

LEFT: Nazareth



Ruins of the Library at Ephesus

walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love (vv. 1–6).

Here John sets the stage for the answer to this woman’s problem. He is highlighting two factors that must be taken into consideration when facing questions about true and false teachers: truth and love. Notice how he links these two in verse 3: “Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father’s Son, will be with us in truth and love.”

Truth and love: These two qualities ought to characterize our lives as Christians. These are the same qualities Paul commends to us in Ephesians 4:15—“speaking the truth in love.” The great challenge we face in the Christian life is the challenge of learning to keep truth and love in balance.

Someone once said that a well-balanced Christian life contains salt and sugar. Salt is truth. Sugar is love. Some Christians want only the salt, and so these salty Christians go around scattering their salt wherever they go. They are all truth, no love. They are full of doctrines, dogmas, and laws. They are cold and judgmental, having no concern for the feelings, needs, or hurts of others. They defend the truth at the expense of love. In fact, they have no problem speaking the truth in cruelty! The truth is all that matters. These people are nothing but religious saltshakers.

Others are sugar bowls. They are all love, no truth. They would never confront anyone caught in sin because that would involve telling that person a hard truth—even if it were for that person’s own good and for the good of the church. We all know people who

THE BOOK OF 2 JOHN

TRUTH AND LOVE (2 JOHN 1–6)

JOHN'S GREETING vv. 1–3

WALK IN THE TRUTH OF CHRIST v. 4

WALK IN THE LOVE OF CHRIST vv. 5–6

THE DANGER OF FALSE TEACHERS (2 JOHN 7–13)

HOW TO RECOGNIZE FALSE TEACHERS vv. 7–9

HOW TO DEAL WITH FALSE TEACHERS (AVOID THEM) vv. 10–11

CONCLUSION AND BENEDICTION vv. 12–13

only want sugar from their brothers and sisters; they run from the salt of truth. They say, “Give me grace, love, acceptance—but don’t hold me accountable, don’t confront me when I stray. If I sin, say, ‘That’s okay. Don’t feel bad. A little sin never hurt anybody.’ Don’t tell me I have to change; that’s too judgmental! Don’t be honest with me. Just be nice to me. Keep your salt. All I want is sugar.”

Our goal as Christians should be to keep truth and love—salt and sugar—in balance. The Lord Jesus provides us with a perfect example. He walked in truth and love. He dealt tenderly with sinners and outcasts, and he dealt truthfully with the arrogant Pharisees.

When He met the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4, Jesus truthfully told her all the sins she had committed, yet He dealt

lovingly with her and offered living water for her thirsty soul. In John 8, after He lovingly saved the adulteress from being stoned and assured her that He did not condemn her, Jesus truthfully confronted her with her need to change. “Go,” He said, “and sin no more.” Jesus spoke the truth in love. He kept truth and love in perfect balance, and so should we.

Deceivers and Antichrists

In the next section, John answers the woman’s question regarding the reliability of those who claim to be spiritual teachers and leaders:

Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch out that

you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son (vv. 7–9).

Two statements in this passage describe the two fundamental forms of false teaching. In fact, all Christian error and heresies arise from one of these two forms of falsehood:

1. *Deception regarding the person of the Lord Jesus.* He is the one who came from God into the world and became human; He is the only Messiah. The incarnation is an essential doctrine of the Christian faith. If you trace someone's origin from birth and discover the person entered the stream of humanity through the normal reproductive process, yet claims to be the Savior sent from God, you can disregard this person's claims. Many false christs are in the world today, and John clearly warns us not to believe them.

Many people distort the truth about Jesus. One of the most common distortions is the claim that Jesus was a good person, a good moral teacher, but not truly God. This sounds nice, because it's an affirmation that Jesus had many good things to say. This claim, however, ignores the central message of Jesus, because His message was Himself: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). If Jesus was not God, then his claim is a lie—and a liar cannot be a "good moral teacher."

Jesus claimed to be both God and man. Anyone who denies either His divinity or His humanity makes Him a liar. Anyone

who denies the incarnation of the Son of God is a deceiver and does not speak for God. In fact, John says that anyone who makes such a claim is an "antichrist," and is opposed to the truth about Jesus.

2. *Deception regarding the teaching of the Lord Jesus.* John says that anyone who does not continue in the doctrine or teaching of Christ does not know God (v. 9). This revealing statement addresses people who say the Bible is not an adequate revelation of God and that we need some additional revelation from another teacher, guru, or book. These people may be very persuasive, and might seem very sincere, but if they do not agree with the teaching of Jesus Christ then they do not know God.

Now notice the danger in these two forms of falsehood: "Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully" (v. 8). What do you lose, as a Christian, if your faith becomes polluted by cults, heresies, and the watered-down liberal theology so prevalent today? Will you lose your salvation? Not if you are truly born again, of course. Salvation rests upon the work of Christ. You are not going to lose your place in heaven, nor your redemption, nor your part in the body of Christ.

But you will lose a great deal, as John makes clear. You will lose the value of your life spent here. You will have wasted the time God gave you to serve Him effectively and obediently. Your religious activity will be revealed as nothing more than wood, hay, and stubble to be consumed in the fire of God's searching judgment. You will lose your reward.

The Response to False Teachers

How, then, should we respond to those who approach us with false doctrines and heresies regarding the Lord and His teaching? John replies:

If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work (vv. 10–11).

John is not suggesting that our hospitality be subject to some doctrinal litmus test. We would be very offensive people if that were the case, and we would certainly have little impact in our witnessing. After all, who would we witness to if we could talk only with those who are doctrinally pure?

What does John mean? He is telling us that truth should be spoken in love, and love should be balanced by truth. In other words, we are not to receive deceivers in such a way that we appear to endorse or accept their teaching. In John's day, itinerant preachers and teachers stayed in private homes. If you received a certain teacher, you were seen as endorsing and subsidizing their message. John is saying

that we should never allow ourselves to be placed in a position of appearing to support or subsidize the teaching of an antichrist.

John underscores the importance of his warning against receiving false teachers when he writes:

I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete (v. 12).

In those days, mail was slow and uncertain because it had to be hand carried by travelers who were going to certain cities. Like most of us, John found it difficult to sit down and write letters. So he said, in effect, "I have a lot to tell you later, when I see you in person—but this matter of false teachers is so urgent it couldn't wait. I just had to write now to warn you about these deceivers and antichrists." Then he concludes with greetings from the Christian family he is evidently staying with.

Truth and love together—that is the vital balance we must seek in the Christian life. That is John's goal in this brief but powerful letter.

2 JOHN

THE VITAL BALANCE

1. Read verses 5 and 6. What command does John give? How does John define love in this passage? Why does John connect love with obedience to God's commands?

2. Read verses 7–11. Why do you suppose false teachers and deceivers were such a problem in the early church? What does John mean when he identifies a false teacher as “the deceiver and the antichrist”? What does John warn against?

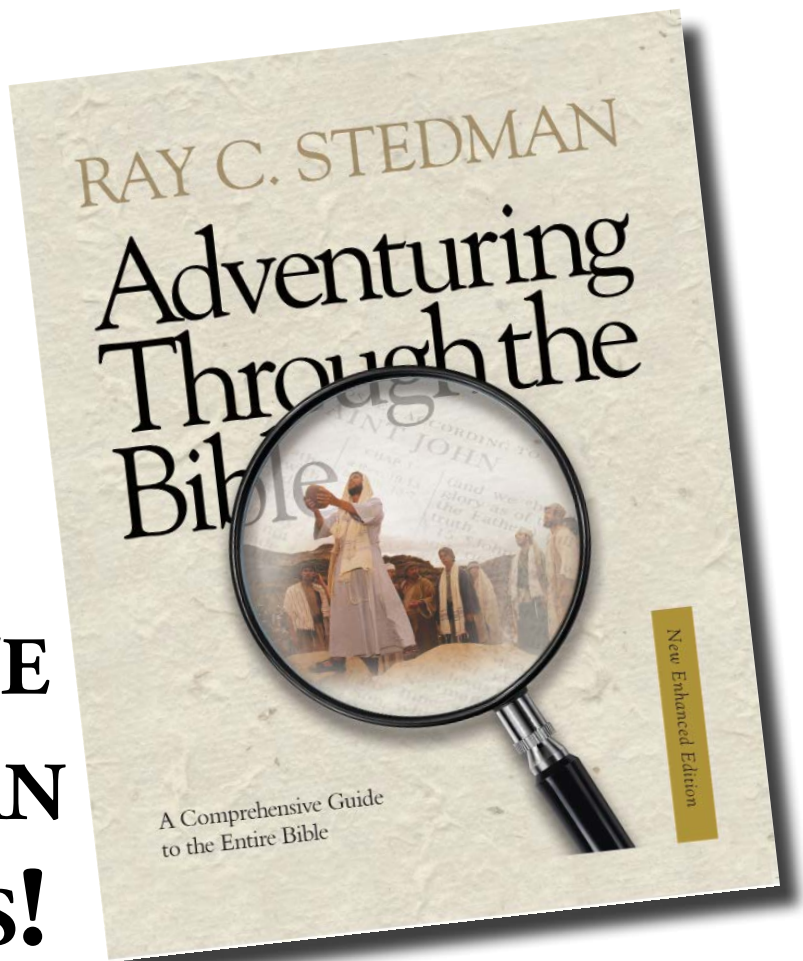
John even warns the lady not to take any of these deceptive teachers into her house or to welcome them in any way. “Anyone who welcomes him,” he says, “shares in his wicked work.” Why is this a serious issue?

Personal Application:

3. Are there deceivers and antichrists in the church today? What are some of the deceptive doctrines that you hear in the media and the culture today? Why do you think people are fooled by these false ideas? What steps should you take to protect yourself against being deceived?

4. In verse 6, John writes, “As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.” What are some specific things you can do toward family members, friends, church members, and neighbors to “walk in love”? Why is walking in love such a powerful means of witnessing to others? Are you “preaching the gospel” by walking in love? Why or why not?

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