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## COMMENTARIES

# EXPOSITION OF THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

## 2 JOHN

*by John Gill*

*Thou hast given a standard to them that fear thee;  
that it may be displayed because of the truth*  
— Psalm 60:4

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## 2 JOHN

### INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF 2 JOHN

Though this epistle was called in question and gainsaid by some as authentic, as Eusebius says <sup>f1</sup>, yet there is no room to doubt of the authority of it; it was very early received into the canon of the Scripture, and is cited as such, and also as the Apostle John's, by Irenaeus <sup>f2</sup>, who was a disciple of Polycarp, and an hearer of Papias, who were both disciples of the Apostle John; nor need there be any question as to his being the author of it. Eusebius indeed does say <sup>f3</sup>, it was a doubt whether it was the Apostle John's or another of the same name; and some have since asserted, that it was written not by John the Evangelist, but by John the Presbyter of Ephesus, after the apostle; and this is thought to have some confirmation from the author of it being called an elder, or presbyter, which is judged not so agreeable to the Apostle John; though it should be observed, that Peter an apostle styles himself an elder, as John here does, (~~1~~1 Peter 5:1), moreover, the above ancient writer, Irenaeus, expressly ascribes this epistle to John, the disciple of the Lord; and whoever compares some passages in this epistle with the former, particularly (~~2~~2 John 1:5-7,9), with (~~1~~1 John 2:7,8 ~~3~~3:23 ~~5~~5:3 ~~4~~4:1-3), will easily conclude, from the likeness of style and matter, that it is a genuine epistle of the Apostle John: the design of which is to exhort and encourage the lady he writes to, to continue in the truth and faith of the Gospel, and in love to God and his people, and to avoid false teachers and their doctrines.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION TO 2 JOHN 1

The writer of this epistle describes himself by his office, an “elder”, and inscribes it to a certain matron, whom he styles, on account of her honour and riches, a “lady”; and by reason of her grace, “elect”; and to her children, who, as well as herself, were the objects of the apostle's love, and of all that knew the truth, and that for the sake of it, which was common to them all, (<sup><G001></sup>2 John 1:1,2), the salutation follows, (<sup><G003></sup>2 John 1:3), and then a congratulation of the lady, that some of her children walked in the same path of truth with herself, (<sup><G004></sup>2 John 1:4), and next an exhortation to brotherly love, which is the commandment from the beginning; the evidence of which love is walking according to that, and every other command of God, (<sup><G005></sup>2 John 1:5,6), and the rather this should be closely attended to, since many deceivers, who were no other than antichrist, had got into the world, who did not own that Christ was come in the flesh; wherefore it became those that were concerned for his name and glory, as well as their own interest, to take heed lest what was wrought should be lost, and so a full reward be not received, (<sup><G007></sup>2 John 1:7,8), and then a description of these deceivers and false teachers is given; that they are transgressors of the rule of God's word, abide not in the doctrine of Christ, and so have not God, any interest in him; whereas he that abides in the doctrine of Christ has an interest both in the Father and in the Son, (<sup><G009></sup>2 John 1:9), wherefore the apostle gives advice to the lady how to behave towards such; not to receive them into her house, nor wish them success, since so to do would be to join with them in their evil deeds, (<sup><G010></sup>2 John 1:10,11), and then he excuses the shortness of his letter, though he had many things to write unto her, yet would not, because he hoped shortly to visit her, and then would personally relate what he had to communicate to their mutual joy, (<sup><G012></sup>2 John 1:12), and closes the epistle with the salutation of her sister's children to her, (<sup><G013></sup>2 John 1:13).

**Ver. 1.** *The elder unto the elect lady and her children*, etc.] By the “elder” is meant the writer of this epistle, the Apostle John, who so calls himself either on account of his age, he being now near an hundred years of age,

having outlived all the apostles: or on account of his office, being a bishop or overseer, not only of the church at Ephesus, but of all the Asiatic churches, which is the same with an elder; nor is this incompatible with his being an apostle; (see ~~1~~1 Peter 5:1), the elect lady is the person he writes unto; by whom is designed not the church of Christ, since such a way of speaking is unusual; and besides, he speaks of coming to see her face to face, and of the children of her elect sister: but some particular person, some rich, as well as gracious woman of John's acquaintance; and these words, "elect lady", are neither of them proper names of the person: some think that the word "Kyria", rendered "lady", was the name of the person, as "Domina" with the Romans, and answers to the Hebrew word "Martha"; for as ~~rm~~, "Mar", signifies lord, so ~~atrm~~, "Martha, lady"; and then the inscription runs, "to the choice" or "excellent Martha"; and the Syriac and Arabic versions read, "to the elect Kyria": and others think that the word rendered elect is a proper name, and that this person's name was "Electa", as "Electus"<sup>f4</sup> is a man's name; and then it must read thus, "to the lady Electa"; but her sister also is so called, and it can hardly be thought that two sisters should be both of a name; neither of them are proper names, but characters and titles of respect and honour: she is called a "lady", because she was a person of distinction and substance, which shows that God sometimes calls by his grace some that are rich and noble; and also that titles of respect and honour, where flattery is avoided, may be lawfully given to persons of dignity and wealth; so Nazianzen<sup>f5</sup> calls his own mother by the same title; and it was usual to call women by this name from fourteen years of age<sup>f6</sup>: and this person also is said to be "elect"; either because she was a choice, famous, and excellent person, not only for her birth, nobility, and riches, but for her virtue, grace, and good works; or because she was chosen unto eternal life and salvation; and which the apostle might know without a special and divine revelation, by the Gospel coming with power to her; by the grace that was wrought in her; by the faith of God's elect, which she appeared to have, seeing it worked by love; and which may be, and ought to be concluded in a judgment of charity, of everyone that professes faith in Christ, and walks according to it; and this also makes it appear that election is of particular persons, and not of nations, communities, and churches, as such; nor is it unusual to salute single persons under this character; (see ~~613~~Romans 16:13), this epistle is inscribed not only to this lady, but also to "her children"; who were not infants, but grown up, and had made a profession of the truth, and walked

in it, (~~GR04~~2 John 1:4), and both the mother and the children the apostle represents as the objects of his love:

*whom I love in the truth*; either as being in the truth and faith of the Gospel; for though all men are to be loved as men, and to be done well to, yet they that are of the household of faith, or are in the faith, are in and especial manner to be loved and respected; (see ~~GR00~~Galatians 6:10 ~~GR05~~Titus 3:15); or the sense is, that the apostle loved this lady and her children sincerely and heartily, without dissimulation; not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth, (~~GR05~~1 John 3:18):

*and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth*; either the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the truth; not with a notional knowledge, but with the knowledge of approbation and affection; with a fiducial and appropriating one: or the Gospel, the word of truth; not with a speculative, but with a spiritual and experimental knowledge of it: and this is not to be understood of every individual person then living, which had such a knowledge of the truth; for it cannot be reasonably thought that every individual person should know this lady and her children; but of all such persons who had any knowledge of them; for such who are born again by the word of truth, love not only him that begot them, but all those who are begotten of him: this shows in what sense the word “all” is sometimes taken.

**Ver. 2.** *For the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us*, etc.] Not for her high birth, nobility, or riches; but either for Christ's sake, who is the truth, and who dwells in the hearts of believers by faith, and who is the same that dwells in one as in another; and on his account it is that saints love one another, because they belong to him, he is formed in them, and his image is stamped upon them; and every like loves its like: or for the Gospel's sake, which has a place, and dwells in every saint, and is the same for matter and substance in one as in another; and unity of mind and judgment produces unity of affection: or for the sake of the truth of grace, the inward principle of grace, which dwells in every regenerate person; a communication of the experience of which knits the saints one to another:

*and shall be with us for ever*; where Christ enters and takes up his abode, from thence he never finally and totally departs, though he may sometimes hide his face with respect to communion, or withdraw his gracious presence; and where the Gospel has once took place in the heart, and is become the ingrafted word, it can never be rooted out, or be removed; and

where the truth of grace is, it will remain; it is an incorruptible seed, a well of living water, springing up into eternal life.

**Ver. 3.** *Grace be with you, mercy [and] peace*, etc.] This form of salutation, or wish and prayer for the blessings mentioned,

*from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ*, is the same used by other apostles; (see <sup><BOOK></sup>1 Timothy 1:2 <sup><BOOK></sup>Jude 1:2) and (see Gill on <sup><<BOOK></sup>Romans 1:7”). Only it is added here with respect to Christ, that he is

*the Son of the Father in truth and love*; which is mentioned by the apostle to confirm the deity of Christ, which is plainly implied in wishing for the above things equally from him, as from the Father; and to oppose and confront some heretics of those times, who denied the true and proper sonship of Christ; and therefore he calls him, “the Son of the Father”, the only begotten of the Father; and that “in truth”, or truly and properly, and not in a figurative and metaphorical sense, as magistrates are called the sons of God, and children of the most High, by reason of their office; but so is not Christ, he is God's own Son, in a true, proper, and natural sense: and he is so “in love”; he is his well beloved Son, his dear Son, the Son of his love; as he cannot otherwise be; since he is not only the image of him, but of the same nature, and has the same perfections with him.

**Ver. 4.** *I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children*, etc.] Not all, but some of them; for good parents have not always good children, or at least not all of them; Adam had a Cain, Abraham an Ishmael, and Isaac an Esau: God is pleased to show his discriminating grace in tribes and families, by taking some, and leaving others: it is a great mercy when any are called by grace, and instead of the fathers are the children: and this was the case of some of the children of this elect lady, they were

*walking in the truth*: in Christ, the truth, by faith, as they had received him; and in the truth of the Gospel, as they had embraced and professed it; they abode in it, and by it, and made a proficiency in the knowledge of it, which may be signified by walking, that being a progressive action: as also they walked according to it, and as became it; and likewise they walked in the truth of Gospel worship, discipline, and ordinances:

*as we have received a commandment from the Father*; and which has been made known by Jesus Christ, as his mind and will. Now as it is matter of joy and gladness to godly parents when their children walk in the paths of faith, truth, and holiness, so it is also to ministers of the Gospel, as well as

to the angels in heaven; it gives them an inward pleasure and joy, and which is not only expressed by them, to such children and their parents, but is also abundant by many thanksgivings unto God.

**Ver. 5.** *And now I beseech thee, lady*, etc.] Or “Kyria”, which word the Syriac and Arabic versions retain, as if it was a proper name: the apostle having finished the inscription, salutation, and congratulation in the preceding verses, passes to an exhortation and entreaty to observe the commandment of love to one another, which is not a new commandment, but what was from the beginning:

*not as though I wrote a new commandment*, etc. (see Gill on “<sup>1</sup> John 2:7”) and (see Gill on “<sup>1</sup> John 2:8”).

**Ver. 6.** *And this is love, that we walk after his commandments*, etc.] By observing them as a rule of conversation, in so doing love is shown to God; and such may expect the fresh discoveries of the love of God to, them; (see Gill on “<sup>1</sup> John 5:3”);

*this is the commandment, that as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it*; that is, this is the will of God, that his people should walk in the truth of the Gospel, and abide by it, as they heard and received it at their first conversion, from the mouths of the apostles, or other faithful ministers of the word; a reason for which, is given in (<sup>2</sup> John 1:7).

**Ver. 7.** *For many deceivers are entered into the world*, etc.] By whom are meant false teachers, who are described by their quality, “deceivers”, deceitful workers, pretending to be ministers of Christ, to have a: value for truth, a love for souls, and a view to the glory of God, but lie in wait to deceive, and handle the word of God deceitfully; and by their quantity or number, “many”, and so likely to do much mischief; and by the place where they were, they were “entered into the world”; or “gone out into the world”, as the Alexandrian copy and some others, and the Vulgate Latin and Syriac versions read; (see Gill on “<sup>1</sup> John 4:1”); and by their tenet,

*who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh*; these were not the Jews who denied that Jesus was the Christ, though they would not allow that Christ was come in the flesh; but these were some who bore the Christian name, and professed to believe in Jesus Christ, but would not own that he was really incarnate, or assumed a true human nature, only in appearance; and denied that he took true and real flesh of the virgin, but

only seemed to do so; and these are confuted by the apostle, (~~GOOD~~1 John 1:1); and upon everyone of these he justly fixes the following character.

*This is a deceiver and an antichrist*; one of the deceivers that were come into the world, and one of the antichrists that were already in it; and who were the forerunners of the man of sin, and in whom the mystery of iniquity already began to work; for antichrist does not design any one particular individual person, but a set of men, that are contrary to Christ, and opposers of him.

**Ver. 8.** *Look to yourselves*, etc.] This is an exhortation to the elect lady, and her children, to look about them, and take care of themselves, and beware of these deceivers, and their doctrines:

*that we lose not those things which we have wrought*; or as the Alexandrian copy, and many other copies, and the Vulgate Latin, Syriac, and Ethiopic versions read, “that ye lose not those things which ye have wrought”; in embracing the Gospel, making a profession of it, walking in it, showing a zeal, and contending for it, expressing a love both by words and actions to the ministers of it, and suffering much reproach on the account of it; all which would be lost, and in vain, should they at last drop the Gospel, and embrace the errors of the wicked; (see ~~KRIB~~Galatians 3:4). Moreover, such who do not go such lengths, as to let go the head, Christ, but retain him as the foundation, and the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel, yet, among many precious things, may lay much rubbish on this foundation; and therefore should take heed what they build upon it, since, though they themselves may be saved, their works may be destroyed, and so they suffer loss; (see ~~KRIB~~1 Corinthians 3:11-15); and if we read the words, “that we lose not — which we have wrought”; the sense is the same, it being only a figure which rhetoricians call communion, and it is frequently used when a common duty is exhorted to; (see ~~GRIS~~1 John 2:28 ~~GOOD~~2 John 1:5); unless it should be thought that this has a peculiar reference to the ministers of the Gospel, as it may: for though the Gospel preached by them can never be lost, being the everlasting Gospel, and the word which abides for ever; yet it may be received in vain, and persons may fall from it, and imbibe error, and so the labour of Christ's faithful ministers may be so far in vain, and lost; and likewise, many souls whom they have thought they have gained to Christ, and that they have been instruments of working upon them for good, and have hoped they would be their joy and crown of rejoicing another day; when such are carried away by deceivers, fall off from the



truth, ministers of the word lose what they thought they had wrought, which must give them great concern; and this is improved by the apostle into a reason and argument why the persons he wrote to should beware of seducers and their errors:

*but that we receive a full reward*; in heaven, and which itself is called the recompense of reward, and the reward of the inheritance; not that this is a reward of debt due to the works of men, which are not rewardable in themselves; for they are such as are due to God before they are performed; and when they are done, they are not profitable to him, nothing is given to him, or received by him; when all is done that can be done, men are unprofitable servants; but this is a reward of grace, God has of his own grace promised it to those who love and serve him; and because it will be given them of his grace, after their work is over, as wages are given to a servant when he has done his work, it goes by this name: and whereas it is said to be a “full” one, the meaning is not as if it was different to different persons, for there is but one recompense of reward, or reward of the inheritance common to all the saints; or, as if it might be incomplete in some; it only signifies a large and exceeding great reward; (see <sup><R15E></sup>Genesis 15:1 <sup><R12></sup>Ruth 2:12); in which last place the same phrase is used as here; and where the Septuagint interpreters use the same words as here; and which is thus paraphrased by the Targumist,

“the Lord give thee a good recompence in this world for thy good work, and let thy reward be **amyl ç**, “full”, or “perfect”, in the world to come.”

And the Jews <sup>f7</sup> often speak of a full reward, and an equal one, to be received hereafter. Perhaps regard is here had particularly to the ministers of the Gospel, who have their reward in part here, for the workman is worthy of his reward, and they will have it in full hereafter. Moreover, the apostle might here be concerned, that he, and every faithful minister, might have their full number, they expected, that none may be missing, and which he may call a full reward: though the above copies and versions read here, as before, “ye”, and “not we”.

**Ver. 9.** *Whosoever transgresseth*, etc.] Not the law of God, of which everyone is a transgressors and that daily, in thought, word, or deed; but who passes over the rule and standard of doctrine, the word of God, and

will not adhere to that, nor walk according to it, but rejects and despises that rule:

*and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ*; which he received from his Father, and delivered to his apostles, and of which he is the sum and substance; the doctrine which is concerning his person as the Son of God, and as truly God, and the union of the two natures, divine and human, in his one person; and concerning his office, as the Mediator, surety, and messenger of the covenant, and as the prophet, priest, and King of his church; and concerning his incarnation, obedience, sufferings, death, resurrection from the dead, ascension to heaven, session at God's right hand, intercession for his people, and second coming to judgment; concerning peace and pardon by his blood, atonement by his sacrifice, justification by his righteousness, and complete salvation by him: this is *j yçmh Æl m l ç wdwml t*, “the doctrine of the King Messiah”, or the Messiah's Talmud<sup>f8</sup>, to use the Jewish phrase, and which agrees with John's. Now, whoever has embraced and professed this doctrine, but errs concerning it, and rejects it, and abides not in it, as Satan abode not in the truth, appears to be of him:

*hath not God*; for his Father, but the devil, the father of lies; he has no true knowledge of God, for there is none but in Christ, whose doctrine such an one has denied; nor has he, nor can he, have communion with him, nor any interest in him.

*He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ*; as he hath received and professed it; neither can anything remove him from it, not the arguments of false teachers, nor the reproaches and persecutions of men, or the snares and allurements of the world:

*he hath both the Father and the Son*; he has an interest in them both, and has knowledge of each of them, and fellowship with them. The Alexandrian copy and the Vulgate Latin version leave out the phrase, “of Christ”, in the preceding clause, and only read, “in the doctrine”; and the Syriac version, “in his doctrine”; the sense is the same.

**Ver. 10.** *If there come any unto you*, etc.] Under the character of a preacher;

*and bring not this doctrine*; or does not preach the doctrine of Christ, as before explained, but despises it, and preaches a contrary one:

*receive him not into [your] house*; neither into the house of God, suffer him not to preach there; nor into your own house, give him no entertainment there: false teachers always tried to creep into houses, where they served their own turn every way, both by feeding their bellies, and spreading their pernicious doctrines; and therefore such should: be avoided, both publicly and privately; their ministry should not be attended on in the church, or house of God; and they should not be entertained in private houses, and much less caressed:

*neither bid him God speed*; or give him the usual civil form of salutation, as a good day to you, all hail, all health and prosperity attend you, the Lord be with you, and the like. The word used by the Jews was *rçya*, which signifies “happiness”; so it is said <sup>f9</sup>, what do they salute with? *rçya*, “God speed”; which was forbidden to say to one that was ploughing in the seventh year. The meaning is, that with such no familiar conversation should be had, lest any encouragement should be given them; or it should induce a suspicion in the minds of other saints, that they are in the same sentiments; or it should tend to make others think favourably of them, and be a snare and a stumblingblock to weak Christians.

**Ver. 11.** *For he that biddeth him God speed*, etc.] Wishes him well, and success in his ministry, or in a friendly and familiar way converses with him:

*is partaker of his evil deeds*; he has fellowship with him, instead of reproving or shunning him, as he ought; he is an abettor of him in his principles, and so far joins in the propagation of them, and helps to spread them, and gives too much reason to think he is one with him in them.

**Ver. 12.** *Having many things to write unto you*, etc.] Either on a civil, or on a religious account, concerning the state of the churches of Asia, and particularly Ephesus, and of private families and persons, and concerning the truths and doctrines of the Gospel; not that he had any new one, or any other than what they had heard from the beginning, to communicate to them, by word of mouth, for this he denies, (~~GENUS~~ 2 John 1:5,6); wherefore this makes nothing for the unwritten traditions of the Papists, and as if the Scriptures did not contain the whole of doctrine and of the will of God.

*I would not [write] with paper and ink*; any more than what was written:

*but I trust to come unto you*; where they were, but where that was is not known; very likely in some parts of Asia, and it may be not far from Ephesus, since any long journey would not have been fit for the apostle to have taken in this his old age:

*and speak face to face*; that is, freely and familiarly converse together about things omitted in this epistle:

*that our joy may be full*; in seeing one another's faces, and through hearing the things that may be talked of; and since the conversation would doubtless turn on divine and evangelic things, so fulness, or a large measure of spiritual joy, may be here intended. Instead of "our joy", the Alexandrian copy, and some others, and the Vulgate Latin and the Ethiopic versions, read, "your joy".

**Ver. 13.** *The children of thy elect sister greet thee. Amen.*] Not the members of a sister church, as some think; but the children of one who was the sister of this lady, according to the flesh; and who, as she was either a very famous and excellent person, or rather one chosen of God likewise unto eternal life and salvation; and whose children also were walking in the truth, and here send their Christian salutation to their aunt; very likely those sister's children lived at Ephesus, where John resided.

# FOOTNOTES

- Ft1** -- Eccl. Hist. 50:3. c. 24.
- Ft2** -- Adv. Haeres. 50:1. c. 13. & 50:3. c. 18.
- Ft3** -- Adv. Haeres. 50:3. c. 25.
- Ft4** -- Herodian. Hist. 50:1. c. 51, 52, 53, 54.
- Ft5** -- Epist. ad Basil. 4. p. 769. vol. 1.
- Ft6** -- Epictet. Enchirid. c. 62.
- Ft7** -- Targum on Eccl. 1:3. & 2:11. & Midrash Kohelet, fol. 72. 4.
- Ft8** -- Bereshit Rabba, sect. 98. fol. 85. 3.
- Ft9** -- T. Hieros. Sheviith, fol. 35. 2. Vid. Taanith. fol. 64. 2.