

Outline of 2 John Emphasizing Love for God in Speech and Behavior

The Second Epistle of John stands as the New Testament's shortest letter, containing only 13 verses but packing profound wisdom about the inseparable relationship between truth and love. Written by the apostle John around AD 85-95 to "the elect lady and her children" (likely referring to a local church and its members), this letter demonstrates how **love for God is expressed through maintaining both doctrinal truth and practical love together, while exercising wise discernment against false teaching**. John's central message is clear: **authentic love for God requires walking in truth and love simultaneously, never separating these essential Christian virtues**^{[1][2][3][4]}.

I. Greeting in Truth and Love (2 John 1-3)

The opening establishes the foundational principle that governs the entire letter: genuine Christian fellowship must be rooted in both truth and love working together. John demonstrates how love for God begins with understanding the proper relationship between truth and love^{[2][5][4][6]}.

The Elder's Love in Truth (2 John 1-2)

John opens with a greeting that immediately establishes the crucial connection between truth and love that permeates the entire letter^{[3][4][6]}.

Loving in Truth, Not Mere Emotion (v. 1):

"The elder, To the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth, and not only I, but also all who know the truth" (2 John 1)^{[2][3][4]}.

John identifies himself simply as **"the elder"** rather than using apostolic authority, suggesting a pastoral rather than authoritative approach^{[6][7]}. The phrase **"elect lady"** (eklekte kuria) most likely refers to a local church, as the early church often used feminine imagery to describe the bride of Christ^{[8][9][10]}.

Key Elements of Truth-Based Love^{[2][4]}:

- **"Whom I love in the truth"**: Love grounded in reality, not sentiment
- **"Not only I"**: This truth-based love is shared by all genuine believers
- **"All who know the truth"**: The community of truth creates bonds of authentic love
- **Personal and Universal**: Both individual and community-wide love in truth

The phrase **"love in the truth"** indicates that Christian love must be grounded in reality and doctrine, not just emotional feelings^{[4][11]}. This love is shared by **"all who know the truth"** - the entire community of genuine believers^[2].

Truth That Abides Forever (v. 2):

"Because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever" (2 John 2)^{[5][4][6]}.

The **truth abides** (menei) in believers - it **remains, dwells, continues** permanently^[7]. This truth is not temporary teaching but eternal reality that becomes a permanent resident in Christian hearts^{[5][4]}.

Characteristics of Abiding Truth^{[5][4]}:

- **Present Reality**: "That abides in us" - currently dwelling
- **Permanent Duration**: "Will be with us forever" - eternally present
- **Community Bond**: Creates lasting fellowship among believers
- **Divine Source**: Comes from God, not human philosophy
- **Love for God Expressed**: Loving fellow believers in truth rather than mere emotion; allowing truth to abide permanently in hearts; sharing truth-based love with entire believing community

- **Speech Impact:** Speaking love that is grounded in truth; sharing the truth that creates authentic community
- **Behavior Impact:** Living as those indwelt by eternal truth; demonstrating love that flows from doctrinal reality

Grace, Mercy, and Peace in Truth and Love (v. 3)

John provides a unique blessing that ties together God's gifts with the twin channels through which they flow[2][11][6].

Divine Gifts Through Twin Channels:

"Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, in truth and love" (2 John 3)[2][11][6].

This is the only place in the New Testament where a greeting specifically mentions both **truth and love** as the channels through which God's blessings flow[11][6].

Three Divine Gifts[6]:

- **Grace:** God's unmerited favor and empowerment
- **Mercy:** God's compassion that withholds deserved judgment
- **Peace:** God's wholeness and harmony in relationships

Two Essential Channels[2][11]:

- **Truth:** Doctrinal accuracy and reality about God
- **Love:** Practical care and genuine affection for others

John's unique addition of "**mercy**" to the typical "grace and peace" greeting emphasizes God's compassionate character in dealing with human failure[6][7]. The phrase "**in truth and love**" indicates these are not opposing forces but complementary channels for receiving God's blessings[2][11].

- **Love for God Expressed:** Receiving God's gifts through proper understanding of truth and love; recognizing Christ's divine sonship; living in the grace, mercy, and peace that flow from Father and Son
- **Speech Impact:** Proclaiming grace, mercy, and peace; affirming Christ as Father's Son; blessing others with truth and love together
- **Behavior Impact:** Living as recipients of divine grace and mercy; demonstrating peace that comes from truth and love; reflecting God's character in relationships

II. Walking in Truth and Love (2 John 4-6)

The central section demonstrates how the foundational principle of truth and love must be lived out practically through obedient walking. John shows that love for God is not just theoretical but expressed through daily conduct[12][13][14][15].

Joy in Truth-Walking (v. 4)

John expresses genuine delight in discovering that some believers are living according to God's truth, demonstrating how love for God produces joy when others obey[12][16][17].

Great Rejoicing in Obedience:

"It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us" (2 John 4)[12][16][17].

John "**rejoiced greatly**" (echarên mega) - this is strong, exuberant joy, not mild satisfaction[16]. The Greek word for "find" (heureka) is the same used by Archimedes ("Eureka!") - discovering something valuable[16].

Elements of Truth-Walking[12][16]:

- **Some of Your Children:** Not necessarily biological children but spiritual offspring
- **Walking in the Truth:** Lifestyle that consistently aligns with God's revealed truth

- **As the Father Commanded:** Obedience traces back to God's original command
- **Great Joy:** Leaders should celebrate when others live faithfully

The phrase "**walking in the truth**" means conducting one's entire life according to God's revealed truth[12][17]. John didn't say "all" but "some" of her children, suggesting that truth-walking is not automatic but requires intentional choice[16].

- **Love for God Expressed:** Finding great joy when others walk in truth; celebrating obedience to Father's commands; recognizing truth-walking as valuable discovery
- **Speech Impact:** Expressing joy over others' faithfulness; commending those who walk in truth; encouraging continued obedience
- **Behavior Impact:** Living in ways that bring joy to spiritual leaders; conducting life according to God's truth; following Father's commands consistently

The Command to Love One Another (v. 5)

John transitions from celebrating obedience to issuing a specific command, showing that love for fellow believers is not optional but commanded[12][14][15].

Not a New Command:

"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" (2 John 5)[12][14][15].

John addresses the "**elect lady**" with affection while emphasizing that the command to love is **ancient**, not innovative[15][6]. This refers back to Jesus' teaching in John 13:34-35 and the message "from the beginning" of the Christian faith[12][14].

Characteristics of the Love Command[12][14]:

- **Not New:** Ancient command given from Christianity's beginning
- **From the Beginning:** Traces back to Jesus' original teaching
- **Personal Request:** "I ask" - pastoral appeal rather than harsh demand
- **Mutual Love:** "We love one another" - reciprocal, community-wide
- **Fundamental:** Basic to Christian faith, not advanced teaching

This command forms the bridge between truth (v. 4) and the definition of love (v. 6), showing that authentic Christian community requires both doctrinal faithfulness and practical love[14][15].

- **Love for God Expressed:** Following the ancient command to love fellow believers; recognizing love as fundamental, not optional; requesting rather than demanding love
- **Speech Impact:** Teaching the ancient command to love; making pastoral appeals for community love; emphasizing love's foundational importance
- **Behavior Impact:** Actively loving fellow believers; treating love as command to obey; building community through mutual affection

Love Defined as Obedience (v. 6)

John provides a crucial definition that links love directly with obedience, showing how love for God must be expressed practically[12][13][15][11].

Love Equals Obedient Walking:

"And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love" (2 John 6)[12][13][15].

This verse contains one of the most important definitions of love in the New Testament, directly connecting love with obedience[13][15][11].

John's Definition of Love[13][15][11]:

- **"This is love"**: Clear, definitive statement about love's nature
- **"That we walk"**: Continuous lifestyle, not occasional acts
- **"In obedience to his commands"**: Following God's revealed will
- **"As you have heard"**: Consistent with previous apostolic teaching
- **"From the beginning"**: Foundational principle, not new idea

The Circular Nature: "His command is that you walk in love" creates a beautiful circle - love produces obedience, and the command is to love[15][11]. This means love and obedience are inseparably linked[13].

John radically challenges modern notions that love is primarily emotional by defining it as **obedience in action**[12][15]. This echoes Jesus' words in John 14:15: "If you love me, keep my commands"[13].

- **Love for God Expressed:** Walking in obedience as demonstration of love; following commands as expression of affection; living love as lifestyle rather than feeling
- **Speech Impact:** Defining love in terms of obedience; teaching that love produces action; proclaiming commands as expressions of love
- **Behavior Impact:** Demonstrating love through consistent obedience; walking in God's commands daily; expressing love through practical actions

III. Warning Against Deceivers (2 John 7-13)

The final section addresses the serious threat of false teachers while providing practical instruction for maintaining both truth and love in the face of deception. John demonstrates how love for God requires wise discernment and firm boundaries[1][11][8][9].

Many Deceivers Deny the Incarnation (v. 7)

John identifies the specific false teaching threatening the church and characterizes those who promote it[1][8][9][18].

The Christological Heresy:

"I say this because 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" (2 John 7)[1][8][9].

Characteristics of the Deceivers[1][9]:

- **"Many deceivers"**: Not isolated individuals but widespread movement
- **"Have gone out into the world"**: Left the church to spread false teaching
- **"Do not acknowledge"**: Refuse to confess essential Christian truth
- **"Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh"**: Deny the incarnation
- **"The deceiver and the antichrist"**: Represent ultimate opposition to Christ

The specific heresy involves denying that **"Jesus Christ has come in the flesh"** - the doctrine of the incarnation[8][9][18]. This likely refers to **Docetic** teaching that claimed Christ only appeared to have a physical body, or **Gnostic** dualism that separated the divine Christ from the human Jesus[9][18].

Why the Incarnation Matters[18]:

- **God Became Human:** The infinite took on finite human nature
- **Salvation Accomplished:** Only God-man could atone for sin
- **Perfect Mediation:** Christ bridges divine and human natures
- **Victory Over Death:** Physical resurrection required real physical body

John calls these teachers **"the antichrist"** because they oppose the fundamental truth about Christ's nature[9]. Their teaching undermines the gospel by denying the reality of Christ's humanity[8].

- **Love for God Expressed:** Recognizing and opposing those who deny Christ's incarnation; protecting the church from false teaching about Christ's nature

- **Speech Impact:** Warning against deceivers; proclaiming Christ's true incarnation; identifying antichrist teaching clearly
- **Behavior Impact:** Refusing to follow those who deny essential Christian doctrine; maintaining loyalty to biblical Christology

Watch Yourselfs - Don't Lose Your Reward (v. 8)

John issues an urgent warning about the danger of being deceived and losing spiritual progress[5][11][17].

Vigilance Required:

"Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully" (2 John 8)[5][11][17].

Elements of Spiritual Vigilance[5][17]:

- **"Watch out":** Be alert, pay attention, stay awake spiritually
- **"You do not lose":** Avoid forfeiting what has been gained
- **"What we have worked for":** Spiritual progress achieved through ministry
- **"Be rewarded fully":** Receive complete spiritual blessing from God

The phrase **"what we have worked for"** suggests that spiritual progress requires effort and can be lost through carelessness[5]. The **"full reward"** represents complete spiritual blessing that comes from faithful perseverance[17].

Two Possible Outcomes[11][17]:

- **Loss:** Losing spiritual progress through deception
- **Full Reward:** Receiving complete blessing through faithfulness

This warning demonstrates that Christians must take active responsibility for guarding their spiritual lives against deception[5][11].

- **Love for God Expressed:** Being vigilant to preserve spiritual progress; working to receive full reward from God; taking responsibility for spiritual growth
- **Speech Impact:** Warning others about potential spiritual loss; encouraging vigilance against deception
- **Behavior Impact:** Actively guarding against false teaching; persevering to receive full reward; maintaining spiritual alertness

Abide in Christ's Teaching (v. 9)

John establishes the crucial importance of staying within the bounds of apostolic teaching about Christ[11][8][9].

The Boundary of Orthodox Teaching:

"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" (2 John 9)[11][8][9].

Two Types of People[11][9]:

- **Those Who "Run Ahead":** Go beyond biblical teaching
- **Those Who "Continue":** Remain within apostolic bounds

The Teaching of Christ refers to both:

- **Christ's Own Teaching:** What Jesus taught during His ministry
- **Teaching About Christ:** Apostolic doctrine concerning His nature[9]

Consequences of Each Choice[9]:

- **Running Ahead:** "Does not have God" - loses relationship with God
- **Continuing:** "Has both the Father and the Son" - maintains divine relationship

The phrase "**runs ahead**" (proagôn) suggests prideful innovation that goes beyond revealed truth[9]. Such people may think they're advancing spiritually but actually lose connection with God[11].

Why Boundaries Matter[11][9]:

- **Revelation is Complete:** God has fully revealed truth about Christ
- **Innovation is Dangerous:** Going beyond Scripture leads to error
- **Relationship at Stake:** Connection with God depends on orthodox teaching
- **Authority Matters:** Apostolic teaching provides the standard
- **Love for God Expressed:** Staying within bounds of apostolic teaching; refusing to "run ahead" of revealed truth; maintaining relationship with Father and Son through orthodox doctrine
- **Speech Impact:** Teaching apostolic doctrine about Christ; warning against going beyond Scripture; affirming the complete revelation
- **Behavior Impact:** Living according to apostolic teaching; avoiding innovative theology; maintaining humble submission to revealed truth

Don't Welcome False Teachers (vv. 10-11)

John provides specific, practical instruction for dealing with false teachers, showing how love must be balanced with wisdom[11][8][10].

Refusing Hospitality to False Teachers:

"If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them. Anyone who welcomes them shares in their wicked work" (2 John 10-11)[11][8][10].

This instruction seems to contradict the command to love, but John shows that true love sometimes requires firm boundaries[11][8].

Practical Guidelines[11][8]:

- **"If anyone comes":** Referring to traveling teachers
- **"Does not bring this teaching":** Lacks orthodox doctrine about Christ
- **"Do not take them into your house":** Refuse hospitality
- **"Or welcome them":** Don't even greet them warmly
- **"Shares in their wicked work":** Supporting false teachers participates in their evil

Why Such Harsh Treatment?[11][8]:

- **Protection of Truth:** False teaching spreads like infection
- **Community Safety:** Protecting vulnerable believers from deception
- **Clear Boundaries:** Showing that doctrine matters for fellowship
- **No Support:** Refusing to provide platform or resources for error

In the first-century world, **hospitality** included providing food, lodging, and financial support for traveling teachers[8][10]. By welcoming false teachers, the church would effectively endorse and support their ministry[11].

Balance of Love and Truth: This is not hatred but protective love – like parents who forbid their children from playing with dangerous objects[11][8].

- **Love for God Expressed:** Protecting the church from false teaching; refusing to support those who oppose Christ; maintaining clear boundaries between truth and error
- **Speech Impact:** Not welcoming false teachers; warning others about deceptive teaching; refusing to endorse error through greetings
- **Behavior Impact:** Denying hospitality to false teachers; protecting community from deception; demonstrating that

doctrine has practical consequences

Personal Closing (vv. 12-13)

John concludes with a personal note that emphasizes the value of face-to-face fellowship while maintaining connection with the broader Christian community[3][6][10].

Preference for Personal Fellowship:

"I have much to write you, but I do not want to do so with pen and ink. I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete" (2 John 12)[3][6][10].

Benefits of Personal Fellowship[3][6]:

- **Complete Communication:** Some things are best said in person
- **Full Joy:** Face-to-face fellowship brings complete joy
- **Deeper Connection:** Personal presence enables fuller relationship
- **Immediate Response:** Real-time interaction for questions and clarification

Greetings from the Community:

"The children of your elect sister send their greetings" (2 John 13)[6][10].

This final greeting connects the recipient church with the broader community of believers, showing that love in truth extends across congregational boundaries[6][10].

- **Love for God Expressed:** Valuing personal fellowship for complete joy; maintaining connections across Christian communities; preferring face-to-face communication for important matters
- **Speech Impact:** Expressing hope for personal visits; sending greetings from other believers; valuing quality communication over quantity
- **Behavior Impact:** Prioritizing personal fellowship; building relationships across church communities; investing in face-to-face ministry

Key Points All Christians Should Know from 2 John

| Theme | Key Teaching | Impact on Speech and Behavior |
|--------------------------------|---|---|
| Truth and Love Inseparable | Grace, mercy, and peace come in truth and love (v.3) | Never separating doctrinal accuracy from practical love in relationships |
| Love as Obedience | This is love: that we walk according to his commandments (v.6) | Demonstrating love through obedient actions, not just emotions |
| Christ's Incarnation Essential | Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh (v.7) | Confessing and defending Christ's full humanity and divinity |
| Vigilance Against Deception | Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked for (v.8) | Being alert to false teaching and protecting spiritual progress |
| Staying Within Bounds | Whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son (v.9) | Remaining within apostolic teaching rather than innovating beyond Scripture |
| Wise Boundaries | Do not take them into your house or welcome them (v.10) | Refusing to support false teachers while maintaining love for truth |
| Joy in Truth-Walking | I rejoiced greatly to find some walking in the truth (v.4) | Celebrating when others live according to God's truth |

Summary

2 John demonstrates that **love for God is expressed through maintaining both doctrinal truth and practical love together, while exercising wise discernment against false teaching**. Written as a brief but urgent letter to a local church facing the threat of false teachers who denied Christ's incarnation, this epistle provides essential instruction for balancing love and truth in Christian living.

The letter teaches that love for God produces:

Speech that reflects truth and love together:

- Loving fellow believers "in truth" rather than mere sentiment
- Confessing Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh against false teachers
- Warning about deceivers while expressing love for the community
- Teaching that love equals obedience to God's commandments
- Preferring face-to-face communication for complete fellowship
- Sending greetings that connect communities in truth-based love

Behavior that demonstrates balanced wisdom:

- Walking in truth as a lifestyle that brings joy to spiritual leaders
- Demonstrating love through obedient actions rather than just emotions
- Being vigilant to preserve spiritual progress against deception
- Staying within apostolic teaching boundaries rather than innovating
- Refusing hospitality to false teachers while maintaining community love
- Protecting others from dangerous teaching through wise boundaries

Relationships marked by truth-grounded love:

- Loving the community of all who know the truth
- Finding great joy when others walk in God's truth
- Following the ancient command to love one another
- Maintaining fellowship based on orthodox teaching about Christ
- Supporting those who bring true doctrine while rejecting false teachers
- Building connections across Christian communities through shared truth

The letter's central contribution to Christian theology is its insistence that **truth and love are inseparable**[4][11]. John repeatedly uses these terms together, showing they are not opposing forces requiring balance but complementary channels through which God's grace flows[2]. This challenges both:

- **Truth without love:** Harsh orthodoxy that lacks compassion
- **Love without truth:** Sentimental acceptance that ignores doctrine

The specific warning about false teachers who denied Christ's incarnation remains relevant today as various groups continue to undermine essential Christian doctrines[9][18]. John's test - confessing "Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh" - provides a clear standard for evaluating spiritual teaching[8].

The letter's instruction to refuse hospitality to false teachers (vv. 10-11) demonstrates that biblical love includes protective boundaries[11][8]. This is not hatred but wisdom - protecting the vulnerable from spiritual harm while maintaining clear standards for Christian fellowship.

2 John's emphasis on **walking** (mentioned in verses 4 and 6) shows that Christian faith must be lived out practically[12][13]. Truth that doesn't affect behavior is not genuine truth, and love that doesn't obey God's commands is not authentic love[15].

The letter's brevity reflects its urgent purpose - addressing an immediate threat while establishing enduring principles. John's pastoral heart is evident throughout as he expresses joy over faithfulness, concern about deception, and hope for personal fellowship[16][6].

Ultimately, 2 John teaches that spiritual maturity involves developing discernment that can distinguish between authentic and counterfeit spirituality while maintaining both doctrinal fidelity and practical love. The letter challenges believers to examine whether their love is grounded in truth and whether their truth is expressed in love, ensuring that both essential Christian virtues remain intact and mutually reinforcing.

The letter's closing emphasis on preferring face-to-face fellowship reminds us that while written communication has value, personal relationship and direct contact remain essential for complete Christian fellowship and joy[3][6]. This principle applies to both human relationships and our relationship with God - both require personal, intimate connection grounded in truth and expressed in love.

Resources

Tool:

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