

Main Idea: In the letter we call 2 John, John wrote and gave three very practical messages to someone he identifies as "the elect lady." These three messages are fitting words for mothers today who are serious about pleasing God.

- I. A commendation (4)
 - A. Notice what he did not say to this mother.
 - 1. Your children are famous and wealthy.
 - 2. Your children can provide you with security.
 - B. Notice what brings joy.
 - 1. Your children are walking in the truth.
 - 2. Your children are living lives guided by the person and word of Christ.
- II. A command (5-6)
 - A. We must love one another (5).
 - B. We must walk in obedience to His commands (6).
 - 1. Love isn't simply a feeling.
 - 2. Love is choosing to obey Jesus in the way I treat you.
- III. A caution (7-11)
 - A. Make sure you finish the job well (7-9).
 - 1. Some abandon the person of Christ (7).
 - 2. Some abandon the teaching of Christ (9).
 - B. Make sure your love is guided by the truth (10-11).
 - 1. Sometimes love chooses NOT to help.
 - 2. At all times love chooses to please Christ.

Getting Intentional about Application: Some questions to consider...

- 1. How would the world answer the question, "What is a successful family?" How does the Bible answer the question?
- 2. What are some ways we can help each another please God in our families?

Scripture Reading: Deuteronomy 5:16

To the elect lady and her children. That's the title of today's Mother's Day sermon, and I've chosen it based on how the apostle John began a letter he wrote which we'll consider today.

What can you say, what *should* you say to a mother on this significant day? It's a tough job being a mother, rewarding yet often challenging, fulfilling yet at times draining. So what words can we share? What is it that a mother needs to hear on a day when the spotlight turns to moms?

We find a God-inspired answer in the letter we call 2 John. Turn there and notice the introduction: "*The elder, To the chosen lady and her children.*"

John, an apostle, says he wrote this letter, this *inspired* letter, to a very special mother and her offspring. It has much to say to moms and their children today. Indeed, in the letter we call 2 John, John wrote and gave three very practical messages to a recipient he identifies as "the elect lady."

There's some debate as to whether "the chosen lady and her children" refers to an actual woman or is some kind of code language for a letter written to a church. Some say "elect lady" is a figure of speech referring to an entire church and "your children" refers to the Christians in the church.² If you consider the setting, you can guess why John might use a "disguise" in writing to a church, for when he penned this, persecution was a

***Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous message from this passage, see the sermon preached on 5/8/05.

² Note the switch from second person singular "thy" in vv 4-5 to second person plural "ye" in vv 6, 8, 10. This could indicate that John has in mind a church rather than an individual mother.

very real threat to local churches. Christians were hated and in some cases hunted by hostile authorities.³

On the other hand, this could well be a letter to a godly first century Christian mother. It's warm and personal, and addresses a very practical matter that faced a God-fearing woman in that day. And regardless whether the recipient was a church or an actual woman, the three messages contained provide fitting encouragement for mothers today who are serious about pleasing God (not to mention fathers and anyone else...).

Let's look at the three messages John gave to *the elect lady and her children*. Afterward, we'll come to the Lord's table and remember the One who alone makes it possible to heed these messages.

I. A commendation (4)

If you're looking carefully at your Bible you may be thinking, "You keep referring to John. I don't see his name in the letter." Correct. He identifies himself as "The Elder," a term that describes not simply age, but an official position (Stott). The author was known to his readers. The vocabulary suggests that the author of 1, 2, 3 John was the same individual, namely, John the apostle.

What do we know about John? He...

⇒ was the son of Zebedee and the brother of James; both left a lucrative fishing business to follow Jesus and become fishers of men (Mt 4:21-22)

⇒ belonged to the inner circle of Jesus' disciples, and was referred to as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (Jn 21:20)

⇒ was the last of the twelve apostles to die

If you trace the key events in John's life you'll discover that he followed Jesus for three years, then labored in Jerusalem during the early years of the church's existence (Acts 8:1; 15:2, 4; 16:4). After this he went to Ephesus in Asia around 65-70 A.D. where he served among the churches until 95 A.D. He was then exiled to an island called Patmos due to persecution by emperor Domitian. He returned to Ephesus in 97 A.D., and died there around 100 A.D.

Scholars feel that John wrote the epistle of 2 John from Ephesus between A.D. 90-95. It had been over sixty years since John walked the shores of Galilee with Jesus. He's now an old man, but he's not on the shelf. He's an 80+ year old man who's still serving Christ with a passion, and that's why he wrote this letter.

That in itself is significant. John reminds us that followers of Christ don't retire from serving their Lord. Granted, for physical reasons the type of ministry may change (John was once an on-the-go evangelist and now he's ministering by letter writing) but the fact of ministry remains. We have been saved to serve Christ by serving His church. If you are not serving Christ by serving His people, you are missing His purpose for you.

According to John's introduction he had a very special relationship with the recipients of this letter (1-3): "The elder, To the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in the truth [John said he loved this woman and her children, indicating he knew them well; verse 13 indicates he also knew the children of the woman's sister, who sent their greetings]—and not I only, but also all who know the truth— because of the truth, which

³ 2 John was written by John from Ephesus during the last decade of the first century, probably between A.D. 90-95.

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."

Notice the very specific way John refers to Jesus, calling Him "the Father's Son." The real identity of Jesus was under attack by false teachers—that present danger was the reason John wrote this letter, as we'll soon see.

In verse 4 John shares his commendation—"It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us."

It has given me great joy, John says. When it comes to your children, what gives you joy? We would do well to ponder carefully John's source of joy.

A. Notice what he did not say to this mother. He did NOT commend her by saying...

1. *Your children are famous and wealthy.* If we're honest, parents, that's often what lures us when we think of our kids. It starts on the tee-ball field. It's not enough that our kids just play ball. They must be the next Joey Votto, and if the coach doesn't recognize their talent, we'll straighten him out! This lust for fame and wealth surfaces around the dinner table, and our kids pick up on it. Do our children hear us urging them to pursue careers that pay well OR those where they can serve God well?

Here's something else for which John did NOT commend this mother.

2. *Your children can provide you with security.* Do you hear John saying, "I'm so proud of you. Little Johnny has grown up to be a doctor and Sally is now the CEO of her own company. Good for you in your retirement years." No, that's not what John says, for that's not what brings joy.

B. Notice what brings joy. Here it is. "It has given me great joy to find that..."

1. *Your children are walking in the truth.* The fact that John says "some of your children" may indicate that not all of her children were walking in the truth, or it may simply mean that he'd only met some of her children and that the ones he met were indeed walking in the truth.

But what does it mean to say someone's children are "walking in the truth?" Let's break in apart:

To "walk" refers to how a person *lives*. Walking is a present tense participle which communicates continual activity. This is what this mother's children were known for. They walked "in the truth."

What's "the truth"? Fundamentally, Jesus Himself is the truth as He proclaimed, "I am the way, *the truth*, and the life (John 14:6)." The truth is also what Jesus taught. "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free (John 8:31-32)." So, *the truth* refers in essence to the person and teaching of Christ.

So put it all together and here's what you get. To say your children are walking in the truth is to say...

2. *Your children are living lives guided by the person and word of Christ.* When this woman's children made decisions about which job to pursue, or who to marry, or what kind of house to buy, or whatever, they didn't look within themselves for answers. They looked to *the truth*. They made their decisions by thinking about what would please Christ and be consistent with His Word. Truth wasn't merely something they heard and said they believed on Sunday. Truth was the realm in which they lived 24/7.

Let's be honest about something. The fact is, we operate by a Greek model of learning in the church, influenced by Plato. Even the very architecture of our churches

adds to this. We herd people into pews sitting in rows (just like in a school setting). We open our heads, and allow the speaker to dump information from his page and mouth into our heads, and call that learning.

What's missing? If we have really learned truth, what will it affect? What *must* it affect? Our *walk*, in other words, our actions, attitudes, and thoughts, our very *lives*.

And that's what thrilled John. It produced great joy in his heart to see a woman's children *walking in the truth*. It wasn't the amount of money they made or what the world thought of them. It's what they did with the truth.

Moms and dads, we need to commend our kids for the right things. For that matter, we need to commend parents who are passing on the right values to their children, like John did with this woman.

Last Sunday Sherry and I had our youth and their leaders to our house for a meal. We had a great time. They ate well, played well, and interacted well. They even cleaned up well and left the house like it was before they came.

That didn't just happen. I commend you parents for how you are teaching your children to respect other people's property. And I commend you teens for heeding it.

So what does it take to produce children who walk in the truth? There's no pat formula. Someone could be a perfect parent and have their children go astray (God did; see Isaiah 1:2). But parents do have an influence. Here are some essentials.

The first is a personal commitment to the truth. If we want our children to walk in the truth, they must see *us* walking in the truth. There's no substitute for example.

The second essential is to teach them. If I want my kids to walk in the truth, I must make sure I am helping them learn the truth. And where will that happen? At home. And at church. There's no substitute for either. I teach them at home, and I take them to church.

Moms, dads, kids, grandparents...learning to succeed in sports is fine, or in music, or in the classroom, and you're getting all kinds of pressure to make those pursuits priority. But God's Word reminds us those potentially good things don't even begin to compare with the eternally best thing. We must do all we can to help our children and grandchildren walk in the truth.

That's the commendation we're living for. Your kids are walking in the truth.

II. A command (5-6)

Verse 5—"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." Here's the command...

A. We must love one another (5). John says that this isn't anything new. This is Christianity 101. Jesus said this the night before His crucifixion (John 13:34-35), "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Who are we to love? Everyone? Yes, but especially *one another*, the brethren. We have particular responsibility to demonstrate love to our fellow family members in the church.

Now what exactly is love? John clarifies in verse 6, "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."

So we must love one another. And what does that mean? It means that...

B. We must walk in obedience to His commands (6). Let that sink in...

1. *Love isn't simply a feeling.* Sure, it involves feelings, but love is not fundamentally a feeling. It's a choice that has to do with our walk and Jesus' commands. Based on John's teaching here, let me offer a definition of love.

2. *Love is choosing to obey Jesus in the way I treat you.* My motivation for loving you is vertical. My aim is to obey Jesus, to "walk in obedience to His commands."

Let this sink in. Love is OBEDIENCE. Frankly, one of the reasons we don't love other people as we ought is because we let our feelings get in the way. Let me illustrate (all hypothetical):

⇒ Sally avoids Ann at church. In fact, it's so obvious that you ask her about it. "Well, she hurt my feelings six months ago."

"How? What'd she do?" you ask.

"I was sick for two weeks and she didn't call me even once to see how I was feeling. If that's the way she's going to treat me then I don't want to be around her."

Answer this. What's Sally doing? In her own words, she's letting her *feelings* keep her from obeying God's commands, for Hebrews 10:25 says, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

⇒ Sam hears that the Jones family is going through a hard time. Due to a job loss the Jones's are unable to make house payments. On the other hand, this has been a bumper crop year for Sam at work. Yet when Sam hears that the Sunday School class is asking for a love gift to help the Jones he chooses not to participate. He convinces himself, "Oh, I love the Jones family, but somebody else can help them."

Does Sam really love the Jones'? Listen to 1 John 3:16-18: "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth."

⇒ Amy is upset with her husband for "not meeting my needs." She gives him the silent treatment. He senses that something's wrong, acknowledges his guilt, and asks her for forgiveness. She responds, "No. I can't. I don't feel like forgiving you."

What's Amy's problem? She's living by her feelings rather than choosing to obey the Lord's commands, who said in Matthew 5:38-42, "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. *Give to the one who asks you*, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you."

Which raises the important question, "But how can I do what I don't feel like doing?" The answer is, *we* can't. We can't keep God's commands in our own strength. We need Christ. Christ gives the power. He enables us to do what He commands. And He expects us to do what He enables us to do.

"So are you saying we should always give to people who ask for help? Is that what love requires?" The answer is, no. And that's the very issue John addressed next with this first century mother. After giving her a commendation and a command...

III. John gave her a caution (7-11).

We need some background to appreciate what follows. As the first century church grew, the believers faced a dilemma.

Suppose you were a Christian businessman who needed to travel from Ephesus to Rome. Or if you were a traveling missionary or evangelist. Where would you stay? In a motel? No, not only were the motels uncomfortable and unsafe, they were also immoral traps. You'd stay in the homes of fellow Christians. Paul was entertained by Lydia in Philippi, Jason in Thessalonica, Gaius in Corinth, and Philip the evangelist in Caesarea.

Yet good things can be abused. Such happened to Christian hospitality. Folks soon learned the Christians offered nice "bed and breakfasts" at no charge. All you had to do was call yourself a Christian. Or better than that, become a preacher, travel around, and get lots of free meals.

So should Christians show hospitality to swindlers and false teachers? Should they share their food with those who are motivated more by greed than creed?⁴ That's the issue John is addressing in 2 John (and even in 3 John). Who do you welcome? Who do you refuse? And why?

And he sent this instruction to a mother. That's interesting. Most moms I know are big-hearted. They love to give to those who enter their home. A hug. Something to drink. Perhaps a meal. And giving is a good thing, a God-like thing.

Yet John gave this mother two words of caution, for love, even a mother's love, can be well-intentioned but misguided.

A. Make sure you finish the job well (7-9). "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."

Note again that charge in verse 8, "Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for." It's a command. Don't lose what you have. That's exactly what some other folks in this lady's church had just done. They had "gone out into the world" (7). They had "run ahead" of the teaching of Christ (9). Make sure that what happened to them does not happen to you and your children, dear lady.

Simply put, here are a couple of things some people were doing that we must not do.

1. Some abandon the person of Christ (7). In verse 7 John says there were *many* deceivers who had gone out into the world. They were deceivers because they portrayed themselves as being something (a gospel preacher) they weren't. What gave them away? John says they "do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh."

Since Satan can't rewind the clock of history and undo what Jesus did, he does the next best (worst) thing. He seduces people into redefining the event.

"The Son of God didn't really become a man," he whispers. "God is too pure to contaminate Himself with a human body."

And so Satan hoodwinks people into believing either that Jesus was a man but not God, or the Son of God but not a man, and thereby guts God's redemptive work of its power to save sinners. He had to be man in order to identify with man, and He had to be God in order to provide God's remedy for man's problem.

⁴ Stott, 202

And please notice carefully. John doesn't tell us that these deceivers DENIED the incarnation, but that they didn't confess it. As Stott observes, "Perhaps they were subtle enough to counterfeit rather than contradict it."

I took some time to read material produced by a cult, and was amazed at how many true things I read (emphasis on family values, morality, the Bible, etc). Yet the truth was subtly corrupted by dangerous error.⁵

Don't miss this. The deceivers John had in mind would have identified themselves as *Christian*. From their point of view they were Christian missionaries. From John's they were imposters.⁶

Don't let that happen to you and your children, John cautioned this mother. Don't abandon the person of Christ. A second caution...

2. *Some abandon the teaching of Christ (9)*. John specifically says these folks did not "abide in the teaching of Christ (ESV)." They had the teaching. They knew the teaching. But they left it. They did not remain in it.

Is that serious? Indeed. John says that if a person doesn't continue in Christ's teaching, he doesn't "have God." To not have God is to not have life. To not have God is to perish in darkness, for God is light.

John Stott is right, "Many today want God without Jesus Christ. They believe in God, they say, but see no necessity for Jesus. Or they regard other religions, whether ancient or modern, as alternate roads to God."⁷

No, says The Elder. If you don't continue in the teaching of Christ, you don't have a relationship with God. "Watch out," he says to this mother and her children. "Don't let that happen to you." Or to put it in positive terms, "Make sure you finish the job well."

So what about the person who doesn't? If we're commanded to love people, does that mean we're to open our arms to people who have left and are undermining the gospel?

Again, John says no, for true love is more than being big-hearted. Caution #2...

B. Make sure your love is guided by the truth (10-11). "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."

Verse 10 is a difficult, even somewhat controversial verse. John Stott rightly urges us to keep some things in mind.

First of all, John is referring to *teachers* of false doctrine, not merely those who believe it. The key phrase in verse 10 is "comes to you." This is NOT a casual visitor, but a teacher. This visitor not only believes false doctrine, but is "bringing" false doctrine to you (like a salesperson who brings his goods to sell).

Are we to cut ourselves off from people who believe false doctrine? No. Frankly, every non-Christian believes false doctrine, and we need to open our lives to them, to help them come to know the truth. This has to do with those spreading falsehood.

There's a second factor to keep in mind. John may not have in mind private hospitality, but an official church welcome. Where were the deceivers to be prohibited in verse 10? "Into your house." That of course is where churches met in John's day. In a house. Perhaps *this* woman's house.

⁵ See statements taken from "Word and Deed: The Unification Movement" (see pp. 7-9)

⁶ Stott, 211

⁷ John Stott, pp. 213-4.

So John may be saying, “Dear woman, if someone comes to your house church who isn’t bringing the teaching you received from us, don’t let him in. Don’t give him a platform to speak.”

Thirdly, keep in mind that John is referring to those who teach falsely about the *incarnation*, not to secondary issues. It’s one thing to differ over something where the Bible is unclear. This is about the person and work of Christ, His incarnation.

So when that happens, when someone wants to bring false teaching about Jesus into your home, what’s a mother to do? Her motherly, protective instincts should kick in, and she should say *no*. As John puts it in verse 10, “Do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting (ESV).”

And if you do? “Whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works (ESV).” This is serious. If you give ear and aid to someone who does not speak the truth about Jesus, you are sharing in (the word is *koinoneo*, fellowshiping in) his wicked work.

Think of the implications. Should we fellowship with everyone who says they believe in Christ? I remind you that Muslims believe in Christ. Mormons believe in Christ. In fact, the people John had in mind in verse 7 believed in Christ. But no fellowship was possible. Why not? They didn’t believe in the Christ presented in the Scriptures, for they were denying that He had come in the flesh.

I see two practical lessons here.

1. *Sometimes love chooses NOT to help.* When I was in college I was in my dorm room one day when a young man knocked on the door... He told me his story about his ministry work and how he needed money to keep doing it. I felt sorry for him and gave him some money. Later I found out he was part of a cult.

That’s the very issue John is warning us about here. Sometimes love chooses NOT to help. When? If my act of helping would actually hinder true gospel ministry, or aid counterfeit gospel ministry, I must choose *not* to help.

So when you’re watching television and hear a tear-jerking story from a preacher and start to reach for your wallet, stop, and check the source. Is this preacher presenting the true gospel? It’s not unloving to exercise discretion. It’s what John urged this mother to do, for the sake of her kids and everyone else under her influence. Sometimes love chooses NOT to help.

2. *At all times love chooses to please Christ.* There’s nothing more important. The Perfect Son who left heaven to come to earth and die for sinners deserves our all. He who conquered the grave deserves our trust and allegiance. The One who made such a great sacrifice for us deserves that, yes, at times we will choose *not* to help, but at all times we will choose to please Him, no matter what the cost.

Suddenly, at that point in the letter, John stopped. He acknowledged he had much more to say (verse 12), but that he would wait until he could share it in person, saying he hoped to come and visit face to face. His intent? “That our joy may be complete.” Then, after passing on greetings from the children of the “chosen sister” in verse 13, he lay down his pen. He’d already given this mother and her children plenty to think about.

And us too. So let’s take it to heart. We’ve seen the **commendation**—your children are walking in the truth, that’s what matters. Is that what matters most in your family, seeing your kids and grandkids and everyone else walk in the truth? Are you praying to that end? Are you scheduling your time to that end?

We've seen the **command**—we must love one another, and that means we must walk in obedience to Jesus' commands. Do you love each other in your home? Do you tell each other? Do you show it by obeying Jesus' commands as you relate to each other?

And we've seen the **caution**—look out for those who've adopted a worldly view of Christ rather than the biblical one; don't be like them, and don't help them spread their message. There are some things that we need to keep out of our homes, for like cancer, they will destroy us if given the chance.

Do you have a deadbolt in your house? Do you set it at night? Many who do that fail to set a deadbolt to keep out the destructive forces of evil. They just turn on the television, and the video games, and the computer, and let it all come in.

Listen to John's caution. We must be discerning. If something isn't consistent with the person, work, and teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ, it has no place in our homes. We say no to it because we're enjoying and living for something so much better.

As we finish, I want to give you a couple of questions to think about. We'll be discussing them later today in our community groups.

Getting Intentional about Application: Some questions to consider...

1. *How would the world answer the question, "What is a successful family?" How does the Bible answer the question?*

2. *What are some ways we can help each another please God in our families?*

-Communion to follow

-Praying with our deacon care groups

-Benevolent offering