

The Second Epistle of John: A Study Guide

by Bryan Gibson

Here's your assignment for today: read 2 John. It will only take about two minutes, because it's just one chapter with thirteen verses. To help you get the most out of your reading and any additional study, here's a short study guide. We'll divide this one chapter into four sections, and make a few comments about each one.

Introduction and Commendation (vv. 1-4). Don't concern yourself too much with identifying the "elect lady and her children," to whom this epistle is addressed. It's difficult to know for sure (an actual lady and her children? a local church?), and it matters little to the practical meaning of this short letter. Do pay attention, though, to the good things said about them. Notice especially the emphasis on two things: **love** and **truth**. The union of these two is really the main theme of this letter, and the tone for that is set right here in the introduction.

A Plea to Walk in Love and Truth (vv. 5-6). "Love one another"—that's the commandment issued in verse 5, but notice how love is defined in verse 6: "This is love, that we walk according to His commandments." Let that soak for a minute. Any teaching about love is incomplete, unless it emphasizes the necessity of keeping God's commandments. You cannot talk about one without talking about the other. Do you see the theme developing? Love and truth go hand in hand—in teaching and in practice. Want further evidence? Look at the next section.

The Reason for the Plea: The Threat of False Teachers (vv. 7-11). How does love respond to those who teach error, to those who do not abide in the doctrine of Christ? "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds" (vv. 10-11). They've lost the support of the Father and the Son (v. 9), and so we can't offer ours either. Love is loyal to the truth; it simply cannot tolerate false doctrine. Now, flip the page to 3 John and notice an interesting contrast. How does love respond to those who teach the truth? "We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow-workers for the truth" (v. 8). Support those who teach error, and you become a partner with them; support those who teach the truth, and you become a partner with them. Love always sides with truth—that's the message of this epistle.

Conclusion (vv. 12-13). John wanted to say more to the elect lady and her children, but he wanted say it "face to face" (v. 12), and the reason he gives is "that our joy may be full" (v. 12). A face to face meeting would give John an opportunity to find out if they heeded his instructions in this epistle, if they were still walking in truth and love. He had rejoiced earlier when he heard about them walking in the truth (v. 4); to see them still doing it would make his joy complete.