**2 John Commentary**

**2 John Chapter 1**

2Jo 1:1

**“Elder.”** This was an honorary title given to the apostle John because of his advanced age. He outlived all the other apostles.

**“chosen.”** From the Greek adjective, *eklektos* (#1588 ἐκλεκτός).

[For more information on “chosen,” see commentary on 2 Tim. 2:10.]

**“lady.”** This “lady” is almost certainly a specific Christian church. “Lady” is translated from the Greek word *kuria* (#2959 κυρία), which is the feminine form of *kurios*, “Lord.” *“Kuria”* is hard to translate into English because we do not have a word like “lordess,” and the phrase “female lord” would be awkward. Also, “mistress” or “dame” would give a totally wrong impression. The terminology “lords and ladies” was commonly used of the ruling class of society at the time of the writing of the King James Version, and the term “Lady” is still used in some circles in the sense of a woman who is in authority or control of a household or holds a position of authority in government. Therefore, although the meaning of “lady” as one who had some authority over others was much clearer during the time of King James, when the culture of lords and ladies was much more prominent, still today it seems the best choice we can make for *kuria*. Picturing a church as a woman is not out of line with the Bible, which sometimes figuratively speaks of the Christian Church as a woman (cf. 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:26). Unfortunately, for most people today the term “lady” brings to mind a “well-mannered woman” regardless of the authority she has. Thus, the translation, “lady” is imperfect at best, and an example of why there is a need for commentary and footnotes to help explain the biblical text.

The majority of lexicographers believe the term is used metaphorically for the church (BDAG; Louw-Nida; *TDNT*; Gingrich; Metzger[[1]](#footnote-11402)) and we agree with this for a number of reasons. The adjective “elect” is used of a church in 1 Peter 5:13; in Galatians 4:22-31 the church (new covenant) is referred to as our mother, while we, its members, are the children. However, Thayer and Vine maintain that it is a proper noun, *Cyria*; that is, the name of an actual woman to whom the Epistle is addressed. However, this is refuted by BDAG, which claims it is late and rare as a proper name. Some other commentators hold that it is simply a general designation for an unspecified woman. Although it is possible, but not likely, that there was a woman to whom the Epistle was addressed, if that is the case then she and the authority she held would represent the authority of the church in which she had authority, which would have been a “mother” church. It is most likely that the majority of the lexicographers are correct and the verse is referring to a mother church. Applying the term “lady” to a church follows well the example of using “mother” in the Old Testament for a mother-city and “daughters” for the small cities near the “mother” who were supported by her (cf. Ezek. 26:6, and see commentary on Josh. 15:45).

Further evidence for the chosen lady being a mother church is the last verse in the Epistle, which reads, “The children of your chosen sister greet you.” It is much less likely that John would refer to a woman’s Christian sister as a “chosen sister,” than he would refer to a “sister church” as a “chosen sister,” and why, if her literal sister was “chosen” (saved) too, would her nieces and nephews send greetings but not the sister herself? In the Epistles, the word “chosen” (*eklektos*, #1588 ἐκλεκτός) only refers to an individual Christian one time, and when it does it specifically says his name (“Rufus;” Rom. 16:13), whereas “chosen” is a common designation for the Christian Church or a larger body of Christians (cf. Rom. 8:33; Col. 3:12; 2 Tim. 2:10; 1 Pet. 1:1; etc.). Also, although at the end of the Epistles it was common for people to send greetings, when they did, they were always specifically named. It was also common for a local church (a “sister” congregation”) to send greetings, and of course, in those situations, the people were not named, but the greeting came from the church (cf. Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 16:19).

2Jo 1:2

**“remains.”** The Greek word *menō* (#3306 μένω) has the basic meaning of “remain.” It can mean “remain” as in, “live, dwell” or “continue, stay.” Here it means both, for the truth lives in and also remains (stays) in the believer.

[For more on *menō*, see commentary on 1 John 2:6.]

2Jo 1:4

**“some of your children.”** This is the genitive of partition, which indicates a part of some greater whole by putting the larger group in the genitive case.[[2]](#footnote-17525) In this instance, the larger whole would be all the children, some of which John found walking in the truth. This is a statement of encouragement and reproof at the same time. It is encouraging that some of the “children” were walking in truth but reproof that some of them had turned away from the truth. This verse is good evidence that the “lady” 2 John is addressed to is a “mother church” and not a person because there would certainly be no need for John to write a mother and point out to her that “some” of her children were walking in the truth. She would be aware of that, whereas that fact would not be as obvious to an entire church due to the differences in opinion that always exist in any given congregation.

2Jo 1:5

**“And now I ask.”** At first 2 John 1:4-6 can seem a bit circular because the commandment is to love, but then love is to walk according to the commandments. However this is easily understood when we realize the difference between the command (singular) and the commandments (plural), and that this is a reference to Christ’s summing up of the Law and Prophets spoken of in Matthew 22:37-40. The command (singular) is to walk in love, but how do we do that? By walking according to Jesus’ commandments (plural) that sum up the whole of the law.

**“O lady.”** The noun is in the vocative case, hence the “O lady.”

**“love one another.”** The command to “love one another” was the new commandment that Jesus gave his disciples in John 13:34, and it is so central to Christian life that it occurs 13 times in the New Testament—and besides those, there are also similar commands to love our fellow believers (cf. 1 John 2:10; 3:10, 14; 4:20-21). It is vital to understand the impact of this command, that it is not a general call to love everyone, although we are supposed to love everyone. It is a specific command to especially love fellow Christians, and thus is similar to Galatians 6:10, be especially good to the household of faith; that is, fellow Christians.

[For more on “love one another,” see commentary on John 13:34. For more on other ways we are to love one another, see commentary on Gal. 5:13, “one another.”]

2Jo 1:6

See commentary on 2 John 5.

2Jo 1:8

**“we have worked for.”** John is saying that ministers are co-laborers, working toward a full reward for believers (cf. 1 Cor. 3:5-15; 2 Cor. 1:24; Phil. 2:16). There is a textual variation that reads, “What you worked for,” using “you” not “we,” (NIV). Although this reading has considerable textual support, it is less favored due to internal considerations.[[3]](#footnote-20784) “We” is more likely to be original in that it is unlikely a copyist would have changed “you” to “we.” It makes sense, however, that a copyist would change “we” to match the second-person verbs in the rest of the verse (“watch yourselves… you do not lose…you may receive”).

**“do not lose.”** The Greek word translated “lose” is *apollumi* (#622 ἀπόλλυμι), often translated “destroy.” To understand this verse we must understand the difference between salvation and rewards in the Kingdom. It is not possible for Christians to lose their salvation, but it is possible for believers to lose the rewards they have worked for if they do not stay faithful to Christ.

[For more information on Christian salvation, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.” For rewards in the future Kingdom of Christ, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil.” For how many rewards we can lose if we turn from God, see commentary on 1 Cor. 3:13.]

2Jo 1:9

**“goes too far.”** This translation is from the Greek *proagō* (#4254 προάγω). In this context, the BDAG has, “to go further than is right or proper…to transgress the limits of true doctrine.[[4]](#footnote-20755) God is the source of all truth and thus all right teaching (doctrine). Yet many people go beyond right doctrine into wrong doctrine. Many verses warn people to make sure their doctrine is what God has revealed and not something made up and beyond the truth (cf. 1 Cor. 4:6). Christ is called the Good Shepherd who leads us as a flock; we are to follow him and stay within the limits of truth, not lead ourselves and others astray from his teachings (John 10:2-16).

2Jo 1:10

**“this teaching.”** The teaching that Jesus Christ came in the flesh (2 John 7).

**“do not offer him greetings.”** This prohibition is not meant to be elitist or snobby, but to prevent the spread of false teachings. To give one “greetings,” from the Greek *chairō* (#5463 χαίρω), would be to say, “rejoice, be glad,” when instead you ought to be rebuking and correcting such a one (Titus 1:9). One Greek lexicon speaks of using *chairō* as “a formalized greeting wishing one well… in effect, to express that one is on good terms with the other.”[[5]](#footnote-12284) It is this associating oneself with the other on good terms that causes participation in their evil works (2 John 11). God does not want us to just bear with people who preach a different Jesus or different gospel, pretending that nothing is wrong with their teaching, greeting them as friends, and welcoming them into our homes. This gives an implicit endorsement of their false teaching; He rebuked the Corinthians for doing this very thing. “For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough” (2 Cor. 11:4 NRSV).

Rather than submit to false teaching, we are called to lovingly correct those who contradict sound doctrine.

2Jo 1:13

**“chosen sister.”** Like the “chosen lady” in 2 John 1:1, this refers to a church, not an individual person. See commentary on 2 John 1:1, “lady.”

1. Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 719. [↑](#footnote-ref-11402)
2. Dana and Mantey, *Grammar*, §90. [↑](#footnote-ref-17525)
3. Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 719. [↑](#footnote-ref-20784)
4. BDAG, s.v. “προάγω”. [↑](#footnote-ref-20755)
5. BDAG, s.v. “χαίρω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-12284)