**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-14901)) 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-18456) 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

**“(And this is love: that we walk according to his commandments.)”** Making this sentence parenthetical brings great clarity to the logic of John’s thoughts in 2 John 1:5-6.

The REV has followed the NET in making this sentence parenthetical. In 2 John 1:5, John introduced a commandment, “that we love one another,” yet in 2 John 1:6a, John refers to multiple “commandments,” and then in 2 John 1:6b, John again refers to the singular “commandment” that they have heard “from the beginning.” When 2 John 1:6a is put in parentheses, John’s logic is consistent such that he is speaking of one commandment the whole time, “that we love one another” (2 John 1:5). This is the same command that John says that they have “heard from the beginning,” and the same command that they are to “walk in” (i.e., “walk in *love*”). There are quite a few scholars who also understand the antecedent of “it” in the phrase, “you are to walk in it,” as “love.”[[3]](#footnote-30608)

This aside in 2 John 1:6a is simply explaining how one loves, namely, by walking “according to his commandments.”

**“so you are to walk in it.”** Many translations follow John’s typical pattern in 1 and 2 John and translate the last sentence something like, “This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning: that you walk in it.” However, it is not preferrable because not only does it unnecessarily create two commandments that the Johannine community has “heard from the beginning,” which is quite strange, but secondly, if “walk in it” is a separate command from 2 John 1:5, then John never specifies what they are supposed to walk in. He just says, “walk in it.” One might rightly ask, “What is ‘it’ that we are supposed to walk in?” This question has led to much debate and speculation, and, at the very least, is quite odd for John to ask his community to walk in an unspecified commandment. However, all of this confusion disappears when one understands that 2 John 1:6a is parenthetical, and that John has been speaking of one commandment the whole time, “to love one another.” This makes sense as to why John would not feel the need to specify the “it.”

In this seemingly complicated passage, John’s message is actually quite simple and clear. He wants his community to love one another, just as they have heard from the beginning, from Jesus (John 13:34).

2Jo 1:7

**“has come.”** The Greek is a present participle, literally “coming,” but the point of the confession is directed toward a past reality, i.e., that Jesus was genuinely a flesh and blood human. Thus, the rendering “has come” more clearly points to that past reality as what the “deceivers” do not confess.

**“a deceiver and antichrist.”** Although many translations translate this portion of the verse as “the deceiver and the antichrist” (NIV, ESV, NASB, CSB), the presence of the article in Greek before “deceiver” and “antichrist” does not necessitate using “the” in English. Translating this as “the antichrist” is also misleading because it could be taken to mean that the end time figure, “the Antichrist” (1 John 2:18; 4:3), is being referred to here, which is not John’s intention. The article in Greek can function as an identifier that “is used predominantly to stress the identity of an individual or class or quality.”[[4]](#footnote-31235) In this context, the article is stressing the identity of a class or group of people. Namely, “whoever does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh,” falls into the class of “a deceiver and antichrist.”

John is teaching a principle, not giving a prophecy about the one person, the Antichrist. Namely, that if anyone does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (i.e., confess that Jesus is a real person), then that person is a “deceiver” and is “anti-christ,” meaning, they are against the true Christ.

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,” (RSV). Although this reading has considerable textual support, it is less favored due to internal considerations.[[5]](#footnote-20442) “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.” The future holds great promise for believers due to the work of Jesus Christ; those who trust in him will receive everlasting life (Rom. 10:9). For the faithful believer, the future holds both salvation and rewards. “Salvation” refers to obtaining everlasting life and wholeness in other ways as well. At the Rapture of the Church when Christians receive everlasting life, we will also receive wholeness in every way: mental, physical, and emotional. In fact, we will have new bodies like Christ’s glorious body (Phil. 3:21; 1 John 3:2; 1 Cor. 15:42-44).

The faithful believer will also receive rewards in the kingdom (1 Cor. 3:14). The future Kingdom of Christ on earth will be like any other kingdom in that there will be all kinds of jobs to do, and some of those jobs and positions will have more authority and glory than others (Luke 22:28-30; also see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth”). Every Christian should want to work diligently for God so they are richly rewarded. It is not wrong to work for the rewards that God will give to those who are faithful to Him. Moses forsook the pleasures of sin in order to get his reward (Heb. 11:24-26). Christians need to follow the advice of the Apostle John and watch ourselves so that we do not turn away from God and Christ and then lose what we have trusted God and worked for.

[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 beyond.”** This translation is from the Greek *proagō* (#4254 προάγω). In this context, BDAG has, “to go further than is right or proper…to transgress the limits of true doctrine.[[6]](#footnote-19077) 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).

**“the teaching about Christ.”** There is considerable debate as to whether this genitive construction should be translated, “Christ’s teaching,” which would be a possessive genitive in which Christ owned and gave the teaching, or if it should be translated as “the teaching about Christ,” which is an objective genitive.

The possessive genitive “Christ’s teaching” would likely be referring to Christ’s teaching in John 13:34 to “Love one another,” which is reiterated in this very letter in 2 John 1:5, “that we love one another.” However, it is quite unlikely that John is addressing false teachers who are claiming to be Christians but are teaching people not to love others. Those people would be immediately discredited by any Christians because loving others is the second greatest commandment (Matt. 22:39; Lev. 19:18). On the other hand, if these false teachers were “going beyond” the teaching about Christ and teaching that Christ did not “come in the flesh” (e.g., teaching docetism; cf. 2 John 1:7), this is much more plausible to actually have been an idea being taught by false teachers in the early church, and scholars acknowledge it was prevalent in the early church. Many scholars have suggested that one of the groups John is writing against was the Docetists (1 John 4:2; 2 John 1:7), who believed that Jesus was not really human.

Therefore, since we know that Docetists were prevalent in the Johannine community and that it is highly unlikely false teachers would be going around teaching people not to love others, it is best to understand and translate this phrase as “the teaching about Christ.”

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.”[[7]](#footnote-11425) 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-14901)
2. Dana and Mantey, Grammar, §90. [↑](#footnote-ref-18456)
3. Marshall [NICNT]; Kruse [PNTC]; Akin [NAC]. [↑](#footnote-ref-30608)
4. Daniel Wallace, Greek Grammar, 210. [↑](#footnote-ref-31235)
5. Metzger, Textual Commentary, 719. [↑](#footnote-ref-20442)
6. BDAG, s.v. “προάγω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-19077)
7. BDAG, s.v. “χαίρω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-11425)