

NEW TESTAMENT POSTCARDS  
A POSTCARD TO A LADY AND HER KIDS  
2 JOHN



## The Heart of the Matter

There are few words that better characterize Scripture than *balance*. Time after time we see a balanced reminder of warning and encouragement, grace and truth, doctrine and practice, dos and don'ts. This observation comes through loud and clear in the “postcard” written by the apostle John to a lady and her family. Although tiny and obscure, the second letter of John still penetrates our hearts and minds today. This postcard provides instruction in the area of discernment by reinforcing the importance of both love and truth. While commending the lady and her family for walking in the truth (2 John 4–5), John exhorted her to be on alert for deceivers and to refuse hospitality to false teachers (verses 7–11). Just as a river without the boundaries of the shorelines can become a devastating force, love without discernment can sweep away the reality of sin and the power of grace. John's letter to a lady and her children provides for us guidance as we seek to balance truth and love.



## Discovering the Way

### 1. Introductory Questions

Before we examine this letter we must answer several questions.

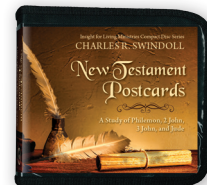
- **Who was “the elder”?** The writer of this letter calls himself “the elder” (verse 1). There's no doubt this letter came from John because it matches the style and content of his other letters. He most likely wrote all three of his three letters, the gospel that bears his name, and Revelation during his time of exile on the island of Patmos.
- **Who was “the chosen lady”?** John wrote to a well-known, chosen lady and her children, whom John and other individuals in the church loved (verse 1).
- **What was the situation?** During the first century, churches met in homes. They didn't have a complete set of New Testament Scriptures or knowledge gained by years of instruction under expository preachers. Churches depended on the training provided by itinerant evangelists. There were no reputable hotels for these traveling teachers, so Christians housed and provided for them. But some of the traveling teachers were heretical con artists who posed as true Christians. Apparently, the “chosen lady” had the gift of hospitality, but her love sometimes outweighed her discernment. John warned her not to house false teachers.



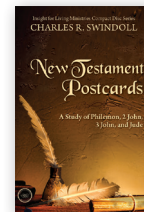
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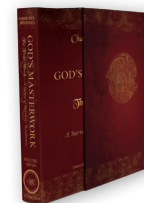
## Tools for Digging Deeper



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**2. Expository Investigation (2 John 1–13)**

John wanted to teach the chosen lady and her family the importance of balancing love with truth. In the introduction alone (2 John 1–4), John mentioned “truth” five times. And John commended her children for setting an example of walking in the truth (verse 4). Then in verses 5 through 13, John exhorted the lady to continue loving the saints and instructed her to give the proper kind of love. John explained that the most God-honoring love is consistent with His truth. John warned her that many deceivers had infiltrated the church, trying to sabotage it. As the chosen lady and her family sought to show hospitality to itinerant preachers, John reminded them that they must test these preachers according to the truth about Jesus Christ. And those who denied the incarnation, person, and works of Christ didn’t deserve a place in her home.



**DOORWAY TO HISTORY**

***Beware of Freeloaders and False Teachers<sup>1</sup>***

In the first century, religious teachers, political pundits, and philosophers traveled from town to town addressing large crowds who gathered to listen. Such speakers served as the primary form of mass communication, and they made their livelihood from the financial support of followers at each location. As inns were expensive and often known for immorality, these speakers also sought their followers’ hospitality for overnight accommodations.

Many of the religious speakers were in the business of tickling the ears of their audiences than in delivering doctrine because they were more interested in the tithes—the money—than in the truth. Because of this, the tradition of itinerant speakers unfortunately introduced the early church to many false teachers. With few pastors and even fewer copies of Scripture, leaders of the young churches, which often met in their homes, needed both caution and discernment. They had to be on guard so as not to be taken in by those who were more interested in financial gain than scriptural truth.

Second John is a call to wisdom from the apostle John to a woman, her family, and her fellow church members (2 John 1). This woman often provided hospitality for itinerant teachers, so John gave church members a measuring stick by which to judge visitors. If a teacher contradicted what the church had been taught about the supremacy of Jesus Christ, the host was to pull in the welcome mat (verses 9–10). Christian love and generosity must adhere to God’s Word and the truths passed down from the apostles.



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## Starting Your Journey

John's message has as much relevance today as it did then. As Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and other cults knock on our doors seeking an audience, how must we respond? How can we best show love informed by the true doctrines of our faith? This postcard serves as a word of admonition to all of us, reminding us that love must always coexist with the truth. If we desire to walk in truth and love as Christ did, we must exercise Spirit-directed discernment.

**How will you show discerning love to the people you meet today? How will you equip yourself and your family to walk in the truth of God's Word?**

### ENDNOTE

1. Adapted from Insight for Living, "Second John," in *Insight's Handbook of New Testament Backgrounds: Key Customs from Each Book* (Plano, Tex.: IFL Publishing House, 2012), 111.



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