

A Little Letter to a Mother

2 John

Second John is the second shortest book of the Bible, with third John being the smallest. 245 words filled a one-sheet letter from the same author of 1 John.

The beloved Apostle refers to himself as simply “the elder” – referring more to his age and father-like status than to an office. He writes to an unnamed woman with her children, addressing her as “elect lady”.

So this is a letter to a mom. Beginning in the 4th century some Christian teachers began suggesting that this woman is symbolic of a local church and her children as her members. But in the end, mirroring as it does 3rd John written to a man named Gaius, seems to tilt in favor of a personal and not public epistle.

To be clear, there are truths here for every believer and for the whole church, but we want to orient this powerful and sweet little letter to mothers today.

It is an encouraging letter to a successful mother – and by successful, I mean one who saw her children taking hold of her faith and living for the Lord.

Many mom’s will have messages today of thanks or of the high calling of mothers; and we are grateful for how God has blessed us with our moms and know that this is no easy labor of love.

But this short note beautifully and briefly highlights some key parts of a mother’s love to her children, to raise them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord!

John had apparently encountered certain of her children, and writes back this joyful encouragement to her. He also encourages her in continued faithfulness and to beware of deceivers.

So here is message for all of us, but a more pointed one to moms who are in the trenches.

We all should be strongly reminded of the importance of family. We live in an instant society and that which takes time and patience is diminished.

But the home is the foundation for the individual, for culture, for education, for the work place, for the church, for the nation – it is even the foundation for eternity. Mothers and children will be united in heaven, blessing God for one another; fathers and children will meet in hell cursing God for one another.

So let us begin with the first three verses – this rich opening greeting: read.

Mothers, these words set the greater and wider dimension to your hearts and lives with your children.

Here is the vertical relationship with the triune God – God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son of the Father – v. 3

Here is a wider consideration – a fellowship outside your four walls – this elder professing love for her family along with the whole body of Christ – all who know the truth – v. 1.

Here is a depth to the anchor of our households – the truth, referring mostly to the truth of God, repeated 4 times – and especially in our hearts – v. 2.

Here is that which lasts forever – the truth abiding in us and will be in us – referring to the Holy Spirit's role in uniting us to the riches of the gospel – v. 2.

I suppose we could have a whole message just on this rich paragraph.

But let us summarize in this way: how mothers need the Lord in their own hearts, in their own personal walk and devotion day by day, in your households!

See here **Her Worship in Grace**

She is called ‘elect lady’ – she knows her election, her being loved by God with and everlasting love; a love which called her out of darkness into light and fellowship a heavenly Father and with Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Like Peter in Matthew 16, she confesses, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!”

She is a sinner and a saint; a soul redeemed and concerned not just for herself but her children whom the Lord has given her.

Her great concern is that Christ is the Lord of her house, her home; that her family is built in truth and love which the gospel alone can supply. No other foundation or roof will do!

And she is not alone in this; she walks with others in the church who love the Lord, and receives love from older wiser saints and fellow servants of their King.

How easy it is to become all focused inwardly in your own four walls; almost as easy as it is to ignore the home and focus all outwardly!

How mothers need these three things from God – grace, mercy, peace – to fill them and their home!

Grace – undeserved, unmerited favor – God’s free reward of life and eternal blessedness – important for everyone, especially those who are doing well in the Lord. Your reward is not first in your lovely children, or in a job well done; your treasure is always, always, always in Christ. This helps you not idolize the home or the works of your hands.

And mercy – this is the Lord’s not giving what we do merit, what we do deserve! A sensitive soul sees and feels the parental failures; in their own example, in their own words, in their own practices. Gladly, parenting is not for the perfect; God models in us how to deal with sins in a gospel way, in a way of contrition and forgiveness and renewed obedience. Or are we Pharisees, raising little legalists?!

Notice how John says grace will be with you, with us, really; it is sure and steadfast; mercy will be with you; and now peace will be with you, in a way of truth and love.

The Father has bestowed a such a love that has made you a part of his own family, calling you children of God!

The Son has brought such a truth of His full and free redemption by his cross and exaltation that reaches our households in the covenant!

The peace of God then – which passes understanding – will be with us now and forevermore.

Aren't we all in need of such a gospel peace? Not only one which stills the waves of our own hearts – needy as they are; but a peace which brings joy and peace to those around us; to be peacemakers.

And moms can have this in spades! Happy the home where mom bears the calm scepter of right, good and mercy!

We have to move on to the next three verses to find **Her Walk of Love**

Here is where part of the reason for the letter emerges – the encounter John had with certain of her children, walking as they were in truth.

He rejoices and praises the Father for this – but he also seizes an opportunity to encourage her to continue to so walk herself – a walk which they had picked up from her!

The measure of our children is not what they say but how they live, and how they live when they are out of our sight.

So the beloved apostle gives us several qualities, especially suited for Christ-following mothers.

Number One: Praising virtue. What we praise we encourage. Do we encourage godly living and obedience in our children with more than commands?

Number Two: The centrality of truth. WE have found the truth, or better, the truth has found us; this is the truth of the Bible, which abides in us, indwells, becomes a part of us.

Number Three: the spiritual nature of life, this truth getting into our hearts by grace, and coming out of us in good fruit.

Number Four: The importance of authority. Children are tied to the trust of their parents, a trust that is to be transferred in due time to God's authority. Think here of the 5th commandment and its relationship to the 1st commandment. If parents don't live under authority, their children won't either once they leave the nest. And what is your authority? God's Word!

Number Five: Commandments – clearly defined rules according to the truth of God's law. Moms and dads bow the knee to Christ, and his rule is the Word of God, especially the Ten Commandments. These are divine commands – from the Father. Obedience begins with embracing what is right and good; without the commands, obedience becomes a moving target, undefined.

Number Six: Love. Authority and commands without love is not a family, it is a boot camp! The new old commandment is the command to love one another. It is old in that it was the standard from the beginning of time – love your neighbor. But it is new in that we are now to love one another as the Son of God has come and loved us; love as he has loved! This is where 'What would Jesus do' is a great question to ask. Two children were fighting over a toy, and mom broke it up and asked them both, What would Jesus do. And both said, "Let my brother have the toy!" "That's right, mom said." Then after a few moments, the one brother said to the other, "Ok, you be Jesus!"

Number Seven: walking in holiness and obedience. The practical quality here cannot be missed. Three times this verb is used. If the love in our hearts and the obedience we profess is not turned into the gold of living for Christ, then what do we have? A good tree bears good fruit; but a mere profession of goodness that is barren or produces bad fruit – says something about the heart. John

wrote: ¹⁸ Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. (1Jo 3:18 NAU)

This leads to broader considerations in the next 5 verses.

Moms are not just fixated on their own home. They have a ministry and service in wider fields.

Hospitality, especially to missionaries, was a common thing in the first century. But heretics were abusing this advantage, and perhaps this elect lady had been taken in by some who were denying the incarnation; a teaching known as Docetism – the root meaning is ‘seems’; Jesus only seemed to have a body!

So it is possible for the love and service of a loving mother to be carried too far and do what is wrong.

And again, elect mothers are given pithy and wise counsel in the second half of this note.

We can call this **Her Watchfulness against Evil**

Very briefly here, I want us to see the positives first before the call to beware.

We are to be on our guard not just in the name of orthodoxy – but because of the blessedness found that orthodox faith!

What is under attack here? What is this antichristian deception all about? It has to do with the incarnation – of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, becoming man!

John has already emphasized the blessings of the Father and the Son in verse 3.

Moms, Christian moms, build your house in what Jesus has become as your Savior! The message of Christmas should ring in your heart and hearth all the year round! God has drawn near! He has come into this fallen world to save sinners, by bleeding and dying for them on the cross in His body!

Be very realistic and concrete with your children! We are sinners! We need forgiveness of all of our sins. That comes by an atonement for sin. And that atonement is Jesus Christ! He is how we deal with our sins before the Lord.

And in and behind all this – is the great love of both the Father and the Son. In the flesh, Jesus brought near to you this saving love. God LOVES people, God loves His church, God loves His saints one by one, and God loves our family!

See another positive thing in the next verse, verse 8. Here is a fixedness upon the future and eternity; what counts the most and the best is not in and of this world. This life is fleeting at best. But moms are to aim at this reward, Christ's reward! Do your children know that their greatest interest in this world is to gain an interest in the next? This world is not the end; life here does not end with a period but a comma. Jesus has come to go ahead of us and prepare a place for us. How can this not result in praise and desires for things above; for seeking Him, His face, His answers, His presence, in prayer!

Let us add one more positive, just briefly. John already exalted the truth, the commands, following the Lord in love. But here is an appreciation and attachment to teaching. The Word must be taught, and teachers and preachers need to be raised up to do that. The godly should love the ministry of the Word, which is the instrument of abiding in the Father and the Son. Those who bring the gospel to you are to be well received, as you participate in the ongoing work of spreading the Word!

Now it is here that that these precious realities demand we put on the whole armor of God.

In verse 7, it is not enough to hold to the truth, but mothers, beware of counterfeits. And warn your children. If you follow the method of John Newton – I will only preach for the truth, but will not resist and criticize wrong views in others – you may like him lose your children in the next generation.

7, 8 and 9 speak about having very decided convictions about truth and error. First, don't be surprised that this is the case; don't be blindsided by common

heresy. Second, recognize what is at stake – eternal salvation, which you have already tasted and long to have more. Third, going beyond the Bible; or perhaps, having way out doctrine contrary to what the Bible says. Have very decided convictions.

Then 10-11 carries this elect mother further – do not aid those in their career of error and evil, much less participate with them.

Hospitality was a necessity in the first century world. The inns of the day were very bad, notorious for destroying both health and wealth. Christians depended on each other, and especially itinerant ministers.

This passage turns those out of doors who are coming with another gospel.

And it seems that more than mere hospitality is going on. I believe it is Bruce who said that this prohibits acknowledging these teachers as Christians, and embracing their mission and authority in the process.

This is not forbidding us to invite a Jehovah's witness into our living room for a cup of coffee as we tell them the truth about Jesus. It does forbid accepting their invitation to sit under their false teachers at the Kingdom Hall.

Be watchful over your children, moms! Learn about what they are learning, what they are believing, where they are leaning, and how they may be following what is wrong.

Well, the letter ends where we will have to end also.

The encouragements to mothers and their children here in this letter is not just a bunch of words and ideas; they are body and soul realities ministered to us face to face, written not with ink and parchment, but by the Spirit on tablets of flesh; they touch other families – cousins and aunts, who love Jesus!

12-13 – do children see face to face their teachers, their pastors and elders; writing of epistles not with ink but the Spirit, on tablets of flesh and not papyrus; with other families, cousins and aunts who love Jesus.

May the hospitality of the gospel, of heaven, translate properly into our welcome of others into our hearts and homes, and make our churches ring out with the joy of the Lord being made full. And mom, what a vital role you place in the lives of your children!