

How To Identify a True Disciple

2 John

The letter of 2 John was written by the apostle John, calling himself the “elder”, around 90 AD.¹ It is addressed to the “chosen lady” or “elect lady” and “her children”.² In it John reaffirms his love for the church and all who know the truth. He is writing because he wants them to know how to discern who is a true disciple and who isn't. This message / warning is a universal one that still applies today.

There and Then

Outline:

A complete outline for 2 John is available on the *Downloads* page in the [Outlines & Word Lists](#) folder.

Group ³	C	V	Description
(no headings in the NASB text)	1	1-3	Greetings
		4-6	John's reminder of the commandment—love one another
		7-11	Beware of deceivers—“those who don't acknowledge Jesus as coming in the flesh”
		12	John's plan to visit
		13	Greetings from other Christians

People:⁴

- **elder** - G4245 - πρεσβύτερος, presbuteros, *pres-boo'-ter-os*
 - *elder*: - elder (3), elders (57), men of old (1), old men (1), older (1), older man (1), older ones (1), older women (1), women (1).
- **chosen lady** - G1588 - ἐκλεκτός, eklektos, *ek-lek-tos'*; G2959 - Κυρία, Kuria, *koo-ree'-ah*
 - *favorite*: - choice (2), choice man (1), chosen (1), chosen (9), chosen one (1), elect (8).
 - *a lady*: - lady (2).
- **God the Father** - G2316 - θεός, theos, *theh'-os*; G3962 - πατήρ, patēr, *pat-ayr'*
 - *God, a god*: - divinely (1), God (1267), god (6), God's (27), God-fearing (1), godly (2), godly *(1), gods (8), Lord (1).
 - *a father*: - father (348), father's (13), fathers (53), parents (1).
- **Jesus Christ** - G2424 - Ἰησοῦς, Iēsous, *ee-ay-sooce'*; G5547 Χριστός, Christos, *khris-tos'*
 - *Jesus or Joshua*, the name of the Messiah, also three other Isr.: - Jesus (904), Jesus' (7), Joshua (3).
 - *the Anointed One, Messiah, Christ*: - Christ (516), Christ's (11), Messiah (4).

1 (Galan et al. 254-257; Fee and Stuart 411, 417-419; Smith 1480).

2 See “2 John - Comparison of Text of Verse 1” on the *Downloads* page under [Topical Studies](#).

3 (NASB) “Group” column from the headings in the NASB text.

4 (NASEC; Strong) usage in the (NASB) text.

How To Identify a True Disciple

- **deceivers** - G4108 - πλάνος, planos, *plan'-os*
 - *wandering, leading astray* (adj.), *a deceiver* (subst.): - deceitful (1), deceiver (2), deceivers (2).

Location:

No specific location is mentioned as to where John was when he wrote the letter or to which church he wrote it, but we do know from church history that John led the church in Ephesus for many years.⁵

Context:

John is writing to warn the readers about many so called teachers who have gone out into churches, who are teaching that Jesus was a great prophet but that He wasn't really the Son of God come to earth in the flesh, human form. He describes these people as deceivers, using a word that has express the idea of leading astray. In verse 9, we see that he uses image of leading astray or wandering too far from the truth, "Anyone who goes too far.." (v. 9) in a comparison to those who remain faithful to the teachings of Jesus.⁶

Key Words:

New Testament, Letters, 2 John, John, Church, Spiritual Deceivers, Antichrist, Love, Commandment

Key Verse(s):

2 John 1:4-6 NASB I was very glad to find *some* of your children walking in truth, just as we have received commandment *to do* from the Father. **5** Now I ask you, lady, not as though *I were* writing to you a new commandment, but the one which we have had from the beginning, that we love one another. **6** And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it.

Cross References⁷, Questions, Notes, and Commentaries:

- "Grace, mercy and peace" - this appears to be a common greeting form as is evidenced below. Paul normally uses "Grace to you and peace" or "Grace and peace" exceptions: "Grace, mercy and peace" to Timothy like here in 2 John. Jude greets with "mercy, peace and love". John in his third letter is writing to a Gaius and wishes him to "prosper and be in good health".
 - Note: Paul consistently offers a greeting of "grace and peace" even when he has to write a letter that has a serious tone in responding to critics liken in 1 & 2 Corinthians.

Romans 1:7 NASB to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called <i>as</i> saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.	1 Corinthians 1:3 NASB Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.	2 Corinthians 1:2 NASB Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
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⁵ (Fox) entry on John the Apostle.

⁶ (Walton et al.; Gill; Kistemaker)

⁷ (Smith)

How To Identify a True Disciple

Galatians 1:3 NASB Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,	Ephesians 1:2 NASB Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.	Philippians 1:2 NASB Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Colossians 1:2 NASB To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ <i>who are</i> at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.	1 Thessalonians 1:1 NASB 1 Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.	2 Thessalonians 1:2 NASB 2 Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
1 Timothy 1:2 NASB To Timothy, <i>my</i> true child in <i>the</i> faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.	2 Timothy 1:2 NASB To Timothy, my beloved son: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.	Titus 1:4 NASB To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.
Philemon 1:3 NASB Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.	James 1:1 NASB James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings.	1 Peter 1:2 NASB according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.
2 Peter 1:2 NASB Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord;	2 John 1:3 NASB Grace, mercy and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.	3 John 1:2 NASB Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers. (John is writing to an individual)
Jude 1:2 NASB May mercy and peace and love be multiplied to you.	Hebrews, 1 John, & Revelation (no formal greeting in these letters)	

- **BNTC**⁸—“What is the meaning of this salutation? In his inimitable manner, John Albert Bengel summarizes the meaning of the phrase *grace, mercy and peace* in these words: “*Grace* removes guilt; *mercy* removes misery; *peace* expresses a continuance in grace and mercy.” And B. F. Westcott makes the following distinction: “ ‘Grace’ points to the absolute freedom of God’s love in relation to man’s helplessness to win it; and ‘mercy’ to His tenderness towards man’s misery.” Peace stands for harmony, trust, rest, safety, and freedom; it is God’s gift to man.”
- **Standard Lesson Commentary**⁹—“In this context, grace is the special favor of God (compare 1 Corinthians 15:10), mercy is the kindness and compassion of God in light of our shortcomings (compare Luke 1:50), and peace is both a lack of personal turmoil and the presence of personal well-being (compare John 14:27).”
 - **1 Corinthians 15:10 NASB 10** But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace

8 (Kistemaker) on 2 John 1:3.

9 (Nickelson and Underwood 292) on 2 John 1:3.

How To Identify a True Disciple

toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.

- **Luke 1:50 NASB** "AND HIS MERCY IS UPON GENERATION AFTER GENERATION TOWARD THOSE WHO FEAR HIM.
 - **John 14:27 NASB** "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.
- "... that we love one another. And this is love ... " - This commandment is repeatedly given by Jesus during His last supper discourse in the John 13-16 and is repeated by Paul, Peter, and John in their letters.

Jesus	John 13:34 NASB "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.
	John 15:12 NASB "This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.
	John 15:17 NASB "This I command you, that you love one another.
Paul	Romans 13:8 NASB Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled <i>the</i> law.
	1 Thessalonians 4:9 NASB Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for <i>anyone</i> to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another;
Peter	1 Peter 1:22 NASB Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart,
John	1 John 3:11 NASB For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another;
	1 John 3:23 NASB This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us.
	1 John 4:7 NASB Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.
	1 John 4:11 NASB Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.
	1 John 4:12 NASB No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.
	2 John 1:5 NASB Now I ask you, lady, not as though <i>I were</i> writing to you a new commandment, but the one which we have had from the beginning, that we love one another.

- Jesus identified the greatest commandments as: Love God with everything you are and everything you have (Deu 6:4-6, my paraphrase) and love your neighbor as yourself (Lev 19:18). So when He commands His disciples to "love one another" He is maintaining a consistent message that was given by God the Father. When His apostles, repeat the command to the church through all generations, they too are consistent.
- John then explains how we are to love one another, walk in the commandments. Walk (G4043¹⁰ - περιπατέω, peripateō, *per-ee-pat-eh'-o*) has the connotation of "implying

10 (Strong)

How To Identify a True Disciple

manner or rule”.¹¹

- **Vines NT Words**¹² - “...figuratively, "signifying the whole round of the activities of the individual life, whether of the unregenerate, [Eph 4:17](#), or of the believer, [1Co 7:17](#); [Col 2:6](#). It is applied to the observance of religious ordinances, [Act 21:21](#); [Heb 13:9](#), marg., as well as to moral conduct. The Christian is to walk in newness of life, [Rom 6:4](#), after the spirit, [Rom 8:4](#), in honesty, [Rom 13:13](#), by faith, [2Co 5:7](#), in good works, [Eph 2:10](#), in love, [Eph 5:2](#), in wisdom, [Col 4:5](#), in truth, [2Jo 1:4](#), after the commandments of the Lord, [2Jo 1:6](#).”
- **BNTC**¹³ - “When we obey God's commands, we demonstrate our love to him. ... John describes our daily conduct with the verb *to walk*—a verb he uses three times in this passage. As we walk about from place to place with confidence and assurance, so we ought to reflect steadfastness in obeying God's commands to love him and our neighbor.”
- **Standard Lesson Commentary**¹⁴ - “God did not create us to love Him and hate others. ... Perhaps we can modify the cultural expression 'shoot first and ask questions later' to be 'love first and ask questions later.’”
- **“For many deceivers have gone out”** - John makes it clear how to discern who a deceiver is by what they teach. That is, they teach that Jesus didn't really come in the flesh. This is one of the tenets of what became known as Gnosticism. Paul might be alluding to this same idea in 1 Timothy 6:20.¹⁵ In Revelation 2-3, Jesus, through John, repeatedly commends and admonishes the churches for either shunning or following after such teaching. This warning is one to be taken seriously and not lightly.

Tenets of Gnosticism - (summarized from ISBE article on Gnosticism)

- A claim to special knowledge and that it was superior to faith, which ordinary Christians did not have.
 - Separation of matter and spirit, of which matter was the source of evil.
 - Attempted to explain the source of evil coming from a creator, separate from the Supreme Deity.
 - Denial of the true humanity of Christ.
 - Denial of the personality of the Supreme God, and the free will of man.
 - Dichotomy of teaching spiritual communion with God and living licentiously. Treated the body (physical) and soul (spirit) separately, resulting in both following spiritual pursuits and doing whatever they wanted in the flesh, contrary to scripture.
 - Redemption was limited to the spiritual, without a necessary change in the physical.
 - Blended ideas from a variety of sources, not the Scriptures alone - Philo of Alexandria –interpreted the OT using Plato's philosophical ideas, and Zoroastrianism (Persian religion)—promoted the ideas of duality: good (*Ormuzd*, heaven, spiritual) and evil (*Ahriman*, creation, physical).
 - Old Testament was given by an inferior creator of the world, not the Supreme God.
- **“does not have God”** - this is consistent with what Jesus taught.
 - [Matthew 10:32-33 NASB](#) **“Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also**

11 (Zhodiatas, Baker, and Carpenter)

12 (Vine, Unger, and White, Jr.)

13 (Kistemaker) on 2 John 1:6.

14 (Nickelson and Underwood 293) on 2 John 1:6.

15 (Orr) article on Gnosticism.

How To Identify a True Disciple

confess him before My Father who is in heaven. 33 "But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.

- Luke 10:21-24 NASB At that very time He rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit, and said, "I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from *the* wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. 22 "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal *Him*." 23 Turning to the disciples, He said privately, "Blessed *are* the eyes which see the things you see, 24 for I say to you, that many prophets and kings wished to see the things which you see, and did not see *them*, and to hear the things which you hear, and did not hear *them*."
- John 5:17 NASB But He answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working."
- John 8:18-19 NASB "I am He who testifies about Myself, and the Father who sent Me testifies about Me." 19 So they were saying to Him, "Where is Your Father?" Jesus answered, "You know neither Me nor My Father; if you knew Me, you would know My Father also."
- John 14:6-7 NASB Jesus *said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. 7 "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him."
- John 14:20-21 NASB "In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. 21 "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him."
- John 14:23-24 NASB Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. 24 "He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me."
- John 15:23-24 NASB "He who hates Me hates My Father also. 24 "If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have both seen and hated Me and My Father as well."
- "antichrist" - Jesus is not referring to a particular individual in this case but to an attitude.
- "do not receive him" - John instructs the disciples to be careful regarding these false teachers, deceivers or antichrist. This is different than what Priscilla and Aquila did for Apollos in Acts 18:24-28. We are to aid those who accurately teach God's word. Also, consider the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and His warning about stumbling blocks in Luke 17.
 - Acts 18:26b NASB ... But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.
 - Matthew 7:15-20 NASB "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn *bushes* nor figs from thistles, are they? 17 "So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. 19 "Every tree that does not

How To Identify a True Disciple

- bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 "So then, you will know them by their fruits.
- Luke 17:1-2 NASB He said to His disciples, "It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come, but woe to him through whom they come! 2 "It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he would cause one of these little ones to stumble.
 - BNTC¹⁶ - "If a Christian welcomes the false prophet into his home, he agrees to submit to the prophet's instruction and accordingly destroys his own faith. Hence John warns the readers not to welcome a false teacher into their homes."
 - Standard Lesson Commentary¹⁷ - "The false teacher must be rejected as an act of self-preservation (compare Romans 16:17; Ephesians 5:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:6)."
 - Romans 16:17 NASB Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them.
 - Ephesians 5:11 NASB Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them;
 - 2 Thessalonians 3:6 NASB 6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us.
 - "and speak face to face" - This is the best form of communication as it allows for clarity and fits what Jesus taught regarding dealing with issues in the church.
 - Matthew 5:22-25 NASB "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. 23 "Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. 25 "Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.
 - Matthew 18:15-22 NASB "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16 "But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. 17 "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. 18 "Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. 19 "Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. 20 "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst." 21 Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" 22 Jesus *said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

16 (Kistemaker) on 2 John 1:10.

17 (Nickelson and Underwood 294) on 2 John 1:10-11.

How To Identify a True Disciple

- [Luke 17:3-4 NAS77](#) "Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. 4 "And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him."
- [Luke 17:3-4 NASB](#) "Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. 4 "And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him."

Here and Now

my LOG vs others SPECK: Answer the questions below as you reflect on your own life and this study.¹⁸

S – Are there *sins* to avoid or confess?

- Do I ever not show my love for God and others by not keeping His commandments?

P – Are there *promises* from God to claim?

- If we remain faithful to the truth of God's word, we will receive a full reward.

E – Are there *examples* to follow or avoid?

- Follow → those who keep God's commandments and love others, especially other Christians.
- Avoid → those who say Jesus did not come in the flesh or that He wasn't the Son of God.

C – Are there *commands* to obey?

- Love God by keeping His commandments.
- Love one another.
- Be wary of false, deceiving teachers.

K – How can this passage increase my *knowledge* about God / Jesus Christ / Holy Spirit?

- Jesus is God's Son, come to earth in the flesh—fully God, fully man.

Other Application Questions

Are there principles to guide?

Are there warnings to heed?

Are there attitudes to adopt?

Are there actions to take?

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¹⁸ (The Navigators) [with additions] & Matthew 7:1-5.

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