

## JOHN WRITES TO MRS. SOMEBODY

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The elder unto the elect lady and her children (2 John 1).

The second epistle of John should attract the attention of every Christian woman; it is the only book in the Bible addressed to a female. Throughout the history of the church the identity of this recipient has been debated by theologians, and two interpretations have been offered. First, it has been suggested that the apostle was writing to a church and its converts and that the author avoided mentioning names in order to protect his friends from persecution. Secondly, most commentators agree the contents of the letter support the conclusion that John was addressing a specific woman who also had a sister (see verse 13). A home is mentioned into which false teachers were not to be granted admittance. It might be claimed the letter would apply in both situations.

The fact that the addressee remained unidentified might have been inspired, for the letter may now be considered a message to every Christian mother. Perhaps this woman had not gained a place of eminence within the assembly, yet she was one of God's elect. She was Mrs. Somebody who had found favor with God and was sufficiently important that the last surviving apostle considered her to be his friend. Every Christian woman should be able to read the letter and find a message applicable to herself. Today the elect lady and her children could be living anywhere. This brief letter may be considered under four headings.

Be Congratulated... You Are Chosen

The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth. For the truth's sake, that dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever. Grace be with you, mercy, and peace from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love (2 John 1-3).

When John wrote this letter, he warned his friend about the

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dangers of false teachers. He knew that heresy had challenged the Gospel, and within four brief verses he mentioned the truth five times. What was meant by this definition is uncertain. The Savior had said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). The Lord was the embodiment of all truth, and therefore His statements were accurate and reliable. Was the apostle implying that because the new faith had made her a sister in Christ, the Holy Spirit of truth resided within her soul? John believed what he had heard from Christ, and was concerned that legalism would damage the spiritual health of his friend. Discussing the identity of "the elect lady," Adam Clark says: "I am satisfied the letter was sent to some eminent Christian matron who lived not far from Ephesus, and who was probably a deaconess of the church. It is possible that she had a church in her house where the apostles and traveling evangelists frequently ministered and enjoyed her hospitality. She was well known in the church where many had witnessed or heard of her fidelity, and partaken of her hospitality."

Webster's Dictionary defines election as "The divine choice by God by which persons are distinguished as objects of mer-

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cy, become subjects of grace, sanctified and prepared for eternal life in heaven." John therefore looked upon his friend as a woman who had been selected and purified by God, and made worthy of sharing eternal life in God's kingdom. She was

"chosen of God and precious" (1 Peter 2:4).

Be Concerned ... You Are Commanded

I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father. And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another (2 John 45).

John was delighted to know the elect lady had transformed her home into a sanctuary where her family worshiped. Her children had not only heard the gospel from their mother, they had emulated her example. Unfortunately many professed believers did not practice what was preached. Their heads were

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filled with religious ideas, but their feet walked in the wrong direction. This delightful mother was filled with affection. Her conduct exemplified her faith. She not only believed in Christ, she was like Him. If a woman's home is her castle, the elect lady lived in a cathedral.

It was important that within the limited space of three verses, the apostle mentioned the commandments four times. God not only offered advice to His children; he issued commandments which He expected all Christians to obey. The outstanding characteristic of the new faith was the ability to love. Blind observances were not always indicative of affection. The heathen exhibited obedience to traditional ideas when they placed food before their idols. The Lord not only desired to be loved. He commanded His people to share it with their neighbors, and help to unite all nations in one family. This desire had been expressed from the beginning; it was not a new doctrine conceived in the minds of philosophers. Any person who refrained from helping other humans was unworthy of preferential treatment from the Lord. Unless the love of God is shared with other people the church becomes a shrine for dead dogma. No man has the right to enjoy God's forgiving grace unless he shares it with undeserving people.

Be Careful ... You Are Cautioned

Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. . . . If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed. For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 8-11).

John was passionately loyal to the doctrine of Christ (v. 9); other messages were unreliable, unauthorized, and evil. The apostle would not be an advocate for the World Council of Churches. The fourth gospel had already been written and was regarded by the assemblies to be inspired and authentic. John and Paul would have shared a common view. Paul said: "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other

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gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:8). It is significant that when he had written this message, immediately he repeated his words to impress his readers with the importance of the message (compare Gal. 1:8 and 9). John stressed the fact that any preacher who denied the basic truths of the gospel was anti-christ. The idea of compromise to promote fellowship did not even exist in the minds of the two apostles. False teaching was threatening the stability of the church, and John feared persuasive eloquence would undermine the faith of the elect lady and her children. She was instructed to deny the strangers entry into her home and not even to wish them God speed. Christians should be conversant with the doctrine of Christ, and able to recognize anything which denies the faith. That message may be easily summarized.

#### Who Was the Christ?

John wrote: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God" (John 1:1-2). "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Later the same apostle said: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our

hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us)" (1 John 1:1-2). Jesus said to Philip: "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me?" (John 14:9-10).

#### What Was His Mission?

The Savior said: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should

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not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Accepting this fact, the apostle wrote: "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). The early Christians taught that salvation was made possible through the redeeming death of the Lord. That was the basic principle of the doctrine of Christ; He came to save sinners.

#### How Was that Mission Accomplished?

John believed (1) Christ died to save men from the penalty of sin; (2) He rose from the dead to save them from the power of sin; (3) He will return to earth to save His people from the presence of sin. He wrote: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him: for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). God had made salvation possible, and any person who denied that fact should be avoided. If Paul and John were preachers in today's world, they would probably be known as agitators threatening the unity of the churches. They would refuse to compromise their faith to promote harmony. The modern church needs men of

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their caliber, for their "Old Time Gospel" is sadly needed in our degraded world.

Be Comforted ... I Am Coming

Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink: but I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face, that our joy may be full. The children of thy elect sister greet thee (2 John 12-13).

When John wrote this letter, he had reached the age when writing letters was not his favorite occupation. He wrote five books; his gospel, the Revelation, and three epistles, but the time had arrived when he preferred to speak with people "face to face." He explained this to the elect lady, and also mentioned that fact when he wrote to "the beloved Gaius" (3 John 13-14). When John spoke, he liked to look into the listener's eyes. Maybe he learned this from his Master who said: "More-

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over if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee. thou hast gained thy brother" (Matt. 18:15). In spite of his great age the apostle was still able to travel, and one of his greatest delights was to meet people who adored his Lord. To see their glowing faces and feel the warmth of their devotion enriched his soul.

Dr. William Barclay, whose expositions of Scripture are acclaimed by innumerable Christians, made an illuminating comment. "There has been much speculation as to who The Elect Lady might be. We mention only two of the suggestions. (a) It has been suggested that The Elect Lady is Mary, the mother of our Lord. She was to be a mother to John and he was to be a son to her (John 19:26-27), and a personal letter from John might well be a letter to her. (b) Kurios means Master; and Kuria as a proper name would mean Mistress. In Latin, Domina is the same name and in Aramaic, Martha: both meaning Mistress or Lady'. It has, therefore, been suggested that the letter was written to Martha of Bethany.

"It may well be that the address is deliberately unidentifiable. The letter was written at a time when persecution was a real possibility. If it were to fall into the wrong hands there might well be trouble. And it may be that the letter is addressed in such a way that to the insider its destination is quite clear, while to the outsider it would look like a personal letter from one friend to another."2

It is widely believed that John's letter might apply to an individual within the assembly, or to the church itself. Which interpretation may be valid is difficult to decide, but one fact remains evident. Christians should walk according to the commands expressed in the doctrine of Christ. They should be living, loving epistles of their Master.

1. The Bethany Parallel Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1985).
2. William Barclay, The Lectures of John and Jude (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976).

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