

# Dr. Robert Yarbrough, The Johannine Epistles, Session 4, 2 John, Notes to a Trusted Church

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## **Abstract:**

This academic text offers a lecture on the second letter of John, focusing on its address to a "trusted church." The speaker emphasizes a two-step interpretive method of "seeing" what is present in the text before "saying" what it means, highlighting the importance of understanding the historical context. The lecture explores the letter's themes, including John's love and joy for the church, balanced by concern about deceivers who deny the full reality of Christ's coming. The speaker also discusses the significance of **ecclesial solidarity, the connection to Old Testament godliness**, the importance of **truth, commandments, and love** in the Christian life, and the concept of **laboring for God's work and receiving a full reward**.

**Briefing Document:** Here is a detailed briefing document reviewing the main themes and most important ideas or facts presented in the provided excerpts from Dr. Robert Yarbrough's lecture notes on Second John:

**Briefing Document: Review of Dr. Robert Yarbrough's Lecture Notes on Second John**

**Source:** Excerpts from "Yarbrough\_JohannineEp04\_English.pdf" - Dr. Robert Yarbrough, The Johannine Epistles, Session 4, 2 John, Notes to a Trusted Church.

**Overview:** This document summarizes the key points from Dr. Robert Yarbrough's fourth lecture in his series on the Johannine Epistles, focusing on the book of Second John. Dr. Yarbrough approaches the text using a two-step method ("see" and "say"), emphasizing observation of the original context before applying its meaning to the present. He identifies the recipient as a trusted church (referred to as the "elect lady") and its members (her "children"). The lecture outlines the structure of Second John: John's love in truth, his joy and concern, a warning for the congregation, and a farewell.

## **Main Themes and Key Ideas/Facts:**

### **1. Method of Interpretation ("See" and "Say"):**

- Dr. Yarbrough stresses a two-step process for interpreting biblical texts:

- **See:** Carefully observe what is present in the text, considering its historical and linguistic context. This is a lifelong process.
- **Say:** State conclusions and apply the text's meaning to the present day, ensuring faithfulness to the original context.
- He warns against "saying without seeing," where a verse is applied out of context, citing political misuse of scripture as an example.
- His "saying part" (interpretations) will be separated from the biblical text to distinguish it from "God's holy word."

#### 1. **Recipient of Second John: The "Elect Lady" and Her "Children" (A Trusted Church):**

- Although initially appearing to address an individual woman and her children, further study reveals the "elect lady" represents a church congregation, and her "children" are its members.
- Dr. Yarbrough speculates that this letter might be addressed to the Ephesian congregation, a prominent church in Asia, and potentially served as a cover letter for First John.

#### 1. **Ecclesial Solidarity (Unity of the Church):**

- John expresses a sense of unity among believers: "not only I, but also all who know the truth."
- This echoes Paul's teaching on the unity of the church (Ephesians 4:1-6), highlighting the shared identity in Christ that transcends personal, social, and economic differences.
- The truth that unites believers refers to "Christ and the truth about Christ and God."
- "One of the major takeaways from these opening verses is that there is a strong sense of ecclesial solidarity in this little letter called 2 John."

#### 1. **Pastoral Optimism Grounded in God's Provision:**

- John's greeting includes a prediction: "Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us."
- Dr. Yarbrough interprets this as "pastoral optimism," grounded in John's experience of God's provision through difficult circumstances and John's "trauma" (suffering and death).

- This optimism comes "from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, in truth and love," not from John himself.

#### 1. **Interplay of Truth, Commandments, and Love:**

- The lecture highlights the significant connection between these three concepts in Second John:
- **Truth:** Refers to what is known, thought, or taught, specifically about Christ and God. It's a body of doctrine processed mentally.
- **Commandments:** Refer to actions, ethics, and the way believers live and behave.
- **Love:** Represents a disposition of the heart, interpersonal devotion, or rapport.
- These three elements largely define the readers as they relate to God and each other.

#### 1. **Old Testament Reverberations:**

- Contrary to some views, John's letters contain significant echoes of the Old Testament.
- John "reconceives Old Testament godliness in the wake of Christ's fulfillment of the Scriptures."
- Old Testament godliness was based on faith in God's promise (fulfilled in Christ), leading to a covenant relationship, friendship with God, and salvation.
- The great love commands ("Love the Lord your God, love your neighbor as yourself") are rooted in the Old Testament.

#### 1. **Joy and Concern: Walking in Truth vs. Deceivers:**

- John expresses joy because some of the congregation are "walking in the truth."
- However, he expresses concern because "many deceivers have gone out into the world."
- These deceivers are characterized by a "defective representation of Jesus Christ."

#### 1. **The Nature of the Deceivers and the Antichrist:**

- The deceivers "do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh." This is interpreted broadly as negating various aspects of Christ's mission (Incarnation, miracles, ascension, atonement).

- This denial of Christ's coming in the flesh is intentionally vague to alert believers to the "lot of ways to reject Jesus," even while using his name.
- The term "deceiver" (planos) implies wandering, instability regarding Christ, or causing others to stray by making disciples for themselves rather than Christ.
- Such a person is the "antichrist," meaning either Christ's substitute or opponent (or both). This person is connected to a "malign influence" often called the devil or Satan.
- Misrepresenting Christ, knowingly or unknowingly, can be doing the bidding of this "antichrist" spirit.

#### 1. **The Importance of Christian Labor and "Winning a Full Reward":**

- John urges the congregation to "watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward."
- He views himself as an "apostolic and pastoral leader" who has invested labor in the church.
- Work is presented as a fundamental aspect of the "human lot" and a means of glorifying God (tending the garden, obeying the Ten Commandments, being "co-laborers together with God").
- Caring for others (like parents for children) is a form of work.
- Christian labor has a "legacy" and involves overcoming "nefarious influences" and pagan opposition.
- "There's nothing wrong with realizing I'm working... and winning a full reward." This reward is seen as something greater than earthly fulfillment, received when believers "see him as he is."
- The lecture includes a personal anecdote about experiencing a storm and fallen trees, highlighting the challenge of understanding suffering but affirming faith in God's goodness and sovereignty, even when outcomes seem negative in the short term. Providentially, the author and his family were spared from being in a dangerous area during the storm.

#### 1. **Warning Against Abiding Outside Christ's Teaching:**

- "Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ does not have God."

- Going "on ahead" means getting outside the domain of "John and the apostolic message," which includes a body of confession, commandments, and a theological presence.
- The "teaching of Christ" can refer to teaching about Christ, Christ's teaching, or both.
- Abiding (staying stable, rooted, grounded) in this teaching is an "indicator of possessing God or not."

#### 1. **Warning Against Supporting False Teachers ("Do Not Receive Him"):**

- "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him to your house or give him any greeting. For whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works."
- This warning is primarily understood in the context of supporting traveling missionaries, evangelists, and church workers.
- Receiving false teachers into the house or giving them a greeting is seen as actively supporting their mission, making the host "a missionary outpost for deceivers."
- This is distinguished from normal hospitality towards non-Christian friends or family, as the context involves supporting individuals who claim to represent Christianity but teach falsely.
- The lecture notes acknowledge "fuzziness" in applying this passage and recommend seeking pastoral guidance.

#### 1. **Farewell and the Concept of "Complete Joy":**

- John concludes by hoping to visit the church face-to-face "so that our joy may be complete."
- This echoes Jesus' teaching about joy (John 15:11, 16:20, 16:24) and the Holy Spirit producing joy (Galatians 5).
- "Completing joy" is linked to seeing God's promise fulfilled, seeing Jesus again after sorrow, and having Jesus' joy fulfilled in believers.
- Christian "labor we perform in and for the Lord and in fellowship with him and fellowship with each other, there is a joy that attaches to it," which is both present ("joy of the moment") and ultimately fulfilled ("completing joy").

### **Most Important Ideas/Facts Summarized:**

- Second John is addressed to a specific church ("elect lady") and its members ("children").
- It emphasizes the unity of believers ("ecclesial solidarity") based on knowing the truth about Christ and God.
- It exhibits "pastoral optimism" grounded in God's faithfulness despite suffering.
- The letter highlights the interconnectedness of truth (doctrine), commandments (ethics), and love (disposition/relationships).
- A major concern is the presence of "many deceivers" who deny fundamental aspects of Christ's coming in the flesh.
- These deceivers are influenced by or acting as the "antichrist" and cause instability regarding Christ's truth.
- Believers are called to work faithfully for the Lord, recognizing the value of labor and anticipating a "full reward."
- A strong warning is issued against supporting false teachers or those who do not "abide in the teaching of Christ," as this aligns one with their "wicked works."
- The letter concludes with the hope for a "complete joy" shared in fellowship, echoing Jesus' promises about joy despite suffering and the fulfillment of God's promises.

This briefing document captures the core arguments, observations, and key themes presented in the provided lecture notes on Second John.

## **Study Guide: Studying Second John: Notes to a Trusted Church**

### Quiz

1. What is the two-step method of interpretation Dr. Yarbrough uses and emphasizes?
2. How does the author of 2 John refer to himself, and what is the significance of this title in relation to other biblical figures?
3. Who does the phrase "elect lady and her children" likely represent in 2 John?

4. What theological concept is highlighted in the opening verses of 2 John regarding believers?
5. What are the three key elements that interplay in the Christian life as discussed in the lecture?
6. How does the lecture explain the relationship between 2 John and the Old Testament?
7. What specific false teaching or characteristic defines the "deceivers" mentioned in 2 John?
8. What does John mean when he urges the readers to "watch yourselves so that you may not lose what we have worked for"?
9. What is the warning given in 2 John regarding those who "go on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ"?
10. Why does the author of 2 John prefer to visit the church in person rather than writing more?

#### Quiz Answer Key

1. The two-step method is "see" and "say." "See" involves observing what is in the text in its original context, and "say" involves making judgments and applications based on that observation.
2. The author refers to himself as "the elder," similar to how Peter refers to himself in 1 Peter 5:1. This title signifies a position of leadership and pastoral authority within the church.
3. The phrase "elect lady and her children" is interpreted as representing a local church congregation (the elect lady) and its members (her children).
4. The opening verses highlight ecclesial solidarity, emphasizing the oneness and commonality among believers who know the truth of Christ, transcending personal differences.
5. The three key elements are truth (what we know), commandments (what we do/ethics), and love (a disposition of the heart/interpersonal devotion).
6. The lecture explains that 2 John, like 1 John, reconceives Old Testament godliness in light of Christ's fulfillment of the Scriptures. It builds upon the Old Testament themes of God, commandments, covenant, and love.

7. The deceivers are characterized by a defective representation of Jesus Christ, specifically that they "do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh." This denies some aspect of His mission or nature.
8. This phrase refers to the collective effort and sacrifice put into establishing and building the Christian presence in the region. John urges them to be vigilant to protect this progress and ensure they receive a full reward for their labor.
9. The warning is that anyone who strays from or does not remain within the teaching of Christ "does not have God." Abiding in this teaching is an indicator of possessing both the Father and the Son.
10. The author prefers face-to-face communication so that their joy may be complete. This emphasizes the value of personal fellowship and interaction within the Christian community.

### Essay Questions

1. Analyze the significance of "truth" in 2 John as discussed in the lecture. How is it connected to the identity of Christ, the gospel message, and the life of believers?
2. Discuss the concept of "ecclesial solidarity" as presented in the opening verses of 2 John and elaborated upon in the lecture. How does this concept challenge societal divisions and what are its implications for the church today?
3. Explain the interplay between truth, commandments, and love as described in the lecture's analysis of 2 John. How do these three elements contribute to a balanced Christian life?
4. Examine the nature of the "deceivers" and the "antichrist" as presented in 2 John and discussed in the lecture. What are the potential ways of denying Jesus' coming in the flesh, and why is vigilance against such teachings crucial for the church?
5. Interpret the warning in 2 John about not receiving certain individuals into one's house or giving them a greeting. How does the lecture clarify the context and application of this warning, and what principles can be derived for engaging with those who misrepresent Christ?

### Glossary of Key Terms

**See and Say:** A two-step method of biblical interpretation emphasized in the lecture. "See" involves careful observation of the text in its original context, while "Say" involves formulating conclusions and applications based on that observation.

**Ecclesial Solidarity:** The oneness, unity, and commonality among the people of God, the church (ecclesia), who are united by their knowledge of Christ and the gospel, transcending personal, social, or tribal differences.

**Elect Lady and Her Children:** Symbolic language used in 2 John, interpreted as representing a local church congregation ("elect lady") and its members ("her children").

**Truth:** A central concept in 2 John, referring to the gospel message, the person of Christ (who is called the truth), and the body of doctrine about God and Christ.

**Commandments:** Referring to the ethical instructions and ways of living that believers are called to follow, reflecting their walk in accordance with God's will.

**Love:** A disposition of the heart and an interpersonal devotion that defines the relationships between believers and their relationship with God.

**Deceivers:** Individuals who have gone out into the world and are characterized by a defective representation of Jesus Christ, specifically denying His coming in the flesh.

**Antichrist:** A figure or spirit that is either a substitute for Christ or an opponent of Christ, working in connection with deceivers to misrepresent Christ and cause others to stray.

**Abide:** To remain stable, rooted, and grounded in something, specifically in the teaching of Christ.

**Teaching of Christ:** Refers to both the teachings given by Christ and the teachings about Christ, which form a foundational body of doctrine for believers.

**Pastoral Optimism:** A hopeful outlook grounded in experience and God's provision, not blind faith, anticipating that grace, mercy, and peace will be with believers despite challenging circumstances.

**Old Testament Reverb (Reverberations/Echoes):** The way in which themes, concepts, and godliness from the Old Testament are present and re-envisioned in light of Christ's fulfillment of Scripture.

**Confess the Coming of Jesus Christ in the Flesh:** To acknowledge and affirm the reality and significance of Jesus' incarnation and His full mission and status as the Messiah.

**Wicked Works:** Actions or teachings that are contrary to the truth of Christ and are associated with deceivers and the spirit of antichrist.

**Completing Joy:** The idea of experiencing a full and complete joy, which is a theme found in John's writings and connected to Jesus' desire for His followers.

## FAQs

How does Dr. Yarbrough approach interpreting the Johannine Epistles?

Dr. Yarbrough utilizes a simple two-step method for interpreting biblical texts, which he calls "see and say." The first step, "see," involves careful observation of the text in its original historical and linguistic context. This is emphasized as a continuous, lifelong process due to the distance in time and culture from the biblical period. The second step, "say," involves drawing conclusions and making judgments based on the observations in the "see" stage, applying the ancient text to contemporary life while striving for faithfulness to the original meaning. He highlights the danger of applying biblical verses without first understanding their original context, which he terms "saying without seeing."

Who is the intended audience of Second John, according to Dr. Yarbrough?

Dr. Yarbrough interprets the "elect lady and her children" addressed in Second John as a metaphorical reference to a local church and its members. While the initial reading might suggest a literal woman and her children, the language used later in the letter points towards a congregation. He proposes the possibility that John might be addressing the Ephesian congregation, which was a prominent church in Asia Minor and potentially served as a central point for distributing First John, which is seen as a letter addressing broader issues within the churches.

What are the main themes John addresses in the opening verses of Second John?

The greeting in Second John (verses 1-3) highlights John's love for his readers "in truth," his joy but also underlying concern, a warning for the congregation, and a farewell. A key theme observed in these opening verses is a strong sense of "ecclesial solidarity," emphasizing the unity of believers who know the truth of the gospel and Christ, regardless of their personal, social, or cultural differences. This solidarity is presented as transcending worldly distinctions and is rooted in their shared faith in God the Father and Jesus Christ.

How does John connect "truth," "commandments," and "love" in Second John?

Dr. Yarbrough notes the significant interplay between the concepts of "truth," "commandments," and "love" in Second John. He explains that "truth" relates to what believers know, think, and are taught, referring both to the gospel message and to Christ himself. "Commandments" represent ethical actions and the way believers are to live and behave. "Love" is described as a disposition of the heart and involves interpersonal devotion and rapport. These three elements are presented as defining characteristics of believers in their relationship with God and with one another, crucial for balancing the Christian life.

What concern does John raise about deceivers in Second John?

John expresses concern about "many deceivers" who have gone out into the world and are characterized by a "defective representation of Jesus Christ." These deceivers are those who "do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh," which Dr. Yarbrough interprets as a denial of some crucial aspect of Jesus' mission and identity, whether it's the Incarnation, his miracles, his ascension, or the atoning power of his death. These individuals are described as "wanderers" who cause others to stray and are connected to the "antichrist," who is both a substitute for and opponent of Christ, often working under the influence of the devil.

Why does John warn against receiving or greeting these deceivers?

John's warning against receiving or greeting those who do not bring the true teaching of Christ (verses 9-11) is interpreted as a caution against supporting or endorsing traveling missionaries or church workers who propagate false doctrines. This is contrasted with the commendation of hosting faithful brothers and sisters in Third John. The concern is that by offering hospitality or greetings to these deceivers, believers would be taking "part in his wicked works" and potentially undermining the truth and the efforts of those who faithfully serve Christ. Dr. Yarbrough clarifies that this is likely not a prohibition against showing kindness to non-Christian friends or family, but specifically about not providing a platform or support for those actively spreading false teachings within the Christian community.

What does John mean by the "teaching of Christ"?

The "teaching of Christ" is presented as the foundational truth and doctrine that believers must abide in. Dr. Yarbrough suggests this could refer to both the teaching *about* Christ and Christ's own teachings. Abiding in this teaching signifies stability, being rooted and grounded in the truth. Conversely, going "on ahead" and not abiding in this teaching means stepping outside the domain of Christ's reign and, consequently, not having God. This teaching serves as an indicator of whether or not someone truly possesses God and aligns with the apostolic message.

How does John's concluding farewell relate to the concept of "joy"?

John's farewell in Second John expresses a desire for face-to-face fellowship to make their "joy complete." Dr. Yarbrough connects this idea of "completing joy" to similar sentiments expressed by John the Baptist in the Gospel of John, whose joy was made complete in seeing the fulfillment of God's promise in the Messiah, Jesus. It is also linked to Jesus' own words in the Upper Room Discourse, where he speaks of his joy being in his disciples so that their joy may be full, even amidst persecution and sorrow. This highlights that while

Christian life involves work and struggle, there is an accompanying joy rooted in fellowship with God, fulfilling His will, and the promise of future complete joy in His presence.