

EPISTLE: 2 JOHN



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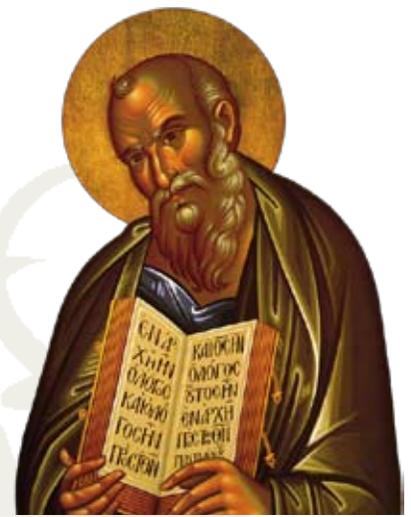
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PRACTICE QUIZ

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The second epistle of the Holy Apostle John begins with a bit of a mystery: it is addressed from “the elder, to the elect lady and her children” (v. 1), but who are these people? There have been many speculations, but it is commonly believed that “the elder” is St. John, and “the elect lady and her children” is a (now unknown) church and its members. These Christians were known throughout their area for their faithfulness to the truth (vv. 1-2).

The apostle then proclaims that, in truth and love, the church to whom he writes will receive grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Jesus Christ (v. 3); Oecumenius says that “here John is saying that good things arise out of perfect love.”

St. John apparently encountered some of the church’s faithful members, because he indicates that he is sending this letter with these members to be taken to the church (vv. 4-5). The theme of this epistle is similar to that of 1 John: love one another, and be faithful to the Orthodox teaching they had received (v. 5). Therefore, unlike those individuals who now believe or teach antichrist heresies denying that the Son of God had

become human, true Christians will make sure that they do not lose their faith and the reward of being a child of God (vv. 7-8).

St. John emphasizes the seriousness of this situation by stating that those who do not faithfully believe in Christ’s deity and humanity do not have God, whereas those who do believe this have both the Father and Son (v. 9). St. Innocent of Alaska adds the role of the Holy Spirit in faith and love, and—like St. John—contrasts the person filled with the Holy Spirit to the person who is not:

Faith and love which are gifts of the Holy Spirit are such great and powerful means that a person who has them can easily, and with joy and consolation, go the way Jesus Christ went. Besides this, the Holy Spirit gives man the power to resist the delusions of the world so that although he makes use of earthly good, yet he uses them as a temporary visitor, without attaching his heart to them. But a man who has not got the Holy Spirit, despite all his learning and prudence, is always more or less a slave and worshipper of the world.

All of this is so important that the apostle tells Christians to not only refuse to allow a travelling preacher who denies Christ to teach in their church, but even to refrain from any action—such as giving a simple greeting—that makes it appear we accept such a person as a Christian (vv. 10-

11). St. Basil the Great extends this point to those who, while themselves members of the Church, nonetheless have a spiritual relationship with those who deny Christ: “As for all those who pretend to confess the sound Orthodox Faith, but are in communion with people who hold a different opinion, if they are forewarned and still remain stubborn, you must not only not be in communion with them, but you must not even call them brothers.” In the end, as St. Theodore the Studite says, “Guard yourselves from soul-destroying heresy, communion with which is alienation from Christ.”

The apostle concludes his epistle by saying that, because he has far more to say than he can put into a letter, he hopes to soon visit the church to whom he writes (v. 12). He finishes with a greeting from the church—probably in Ephesus—in which he was staying (v. 13).

LIFE TIP

St. Gregory of Sinai explains how to know you have true faith: “Faith, like active prayer, is a grace. For prayer, when activated by love through the power of the Spirit, renders true faith manifest—the faith that reveals the life of Jesus. If, then, you are aware that such faith is not at work within you, that means your faith is dead and lifeless. In fact you should not even speak of yourself as one of the ‘faithful’ if your faith is merely theoretical and not actualized by the practice of the commandments or by the Spirit. Thus faith must be evidenced by progress in keeping the commandments, or it must be actualized and translucent in what we do.”

