

My Sweet Lady

♪♪ *Lady, are you crying, do the tears belong to me Did you think our time together was all gone? Lady, you've been dreaming I'm as close as I can be And I swear to you our time has just begun. Close your eyes and rest your weary mind I promise I will stay right here beside you Today our lives were joined, became entwined I wish that you could know how much I love you. Lady, are you happy, do you feel the way I do. Are there meanings that you've never seen before? Lady, my sweet lady, I just can't believe it's true. And it's like I've never ever loved before. Lady, are you crying, do the tears belong to me Did you think our time together was all gone? Lady, my sweet lady, I'm as close as I can be And I swear to you our time has just begun.* ♪♪ (John Denver, 1972 [youtube.com/watch?v=-rnJ8plfgOk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-rnJ8plfgOk))

Introduction

The two most difficult things to get straight in life are love and G-d. More often than not, the mess people make of their lives can be traced to failure or stupidity or meanness in one or both of these areas. Is it any wonder, then, that *Yochanan* had to write about love and G-d not once, not twice, but three times?

In his second letter, *Yochanan* corrects a “chosen lady” whose hospitality may have actually been harming the Work of G-d. Apparently lacking discernment, she had allowed her love to spill over the boundaries of truth—the truth about G-d revealed in Messiah *Yeshua*. And when the borders of the truth get washed away, people are set adrift in dangerous waters rather than moved from death to life. Love cannot be separated from the truth. And neither can truth be separated from love.

Yochanan identifies himself only as “*the elder*,” which can refer to his age or his religious office, or both. As the sole surviving apostle, *he* was a highly esteemed and well-loved patriarch of the messianic congregations in Asia. His gentle language and pastoral style indelibly mark this letter, which is perhaps why he didn't have to sign his name—the people knew he was the author. As a modern rabbi might sign a letter to his congregation, *Your Rabbi*, the omission of his name actually lends intimacy and warmth to his message.

The Beneficiaries

Yochanan addresses his brief words to “*the chosen lady and her children*.” Bible scholars debate whether the “lady” and “children” are actual people or metaphors for the congregations and its members. Elsewhere in the *B'rit Chadasha*, the body of believers is personified as a woman (see Eph. 5:22-32; Rev. 19:7), and *Yochanan* often spoke to his readers as “children” (see 1 John 2:1, 12, 13, 18, 28; 3:1, 2, 7, 10, 18; 4:4; 5:2, 21). However, personal references, such as “dear lady” (2 John 5), her “home” (v. 10), and her “chosen sister” (v. 13) could indicate that *Yochanan* is writing to a literal woman. Like Lydia in the book of Acts (see 16:14-15, 40), this lady of 2 John was a gracious hostess, opening her home for the sake of the ministry. Her love flowed freely to anyone who knocked on her door, including the traveling teachers and prophets who came to town.

The State of Affairs

Before the *B'rit Chadasha* was complete, Believers depended on itinerant prophets and teachers to communicate the divine truth they needed to build their faith. They revered these traveling preachers, often housing and feeding them in the finest style they could afford. Unfortunately, not all the roving reverends were worthy of such warm hospitality. It was not uncommon for fraudulent men to exploit the trusting Believers. Even the secular writers attested to their abuses:

Lucian, the Greek writer, in his work called the Peregrinus, draws the picture of a man who had found the easiest possible way of making a living without working. He was an itinerant charlatan who lived on the fat of the land by traveling round the various communities of the Believers, settling down wherever he liked and living luxuriously at their expense.

The problem was so widespread that strict rules were eventually laid down in *The Didache (The Teaching)* an early book of church order. Certain indicators were listed as red flags. For example, if the person stayed for more than three days; if he asked for money while speaking “in the Spirit;” or if, when he decided to settle down, he refused to work—this teacher was not to be trusted. He had heard that some of these insidious people were welcomed into this woman's home. Naively, she was taking them in, not realizing that by doing so she was helping spread heresy. While affirming her charitable spirit, he sends her an urgent message: make sure your love supports the truth.

A Love Note

Yochanan's letter can be divided into four sections: an introduction (2 John 1-3), exhortations to walk in truth and love (vv. 4-6), instruction to stand against error (vv. 7-11), and a conclusion (VV. 12-13).

Introduction (vv. 1-3)

At the outset, *Yochanan* expresses his deep feelings for his readers: “*The elder to the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in truth; and not only I, but also all who know the truth, for the sake of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever.* (VV.

1-2) His love for this lady and her children is grounded “in truth.” It is proper. It is pure. It reflects the reality of Messiah. And he writes “for the sake of the truth,” which is as eternal as G-d. In verse 3, Yochanan bestows G-d's blessing on his readers: “*Grace, mercy and peace will be with us, from G-d the Father and from Messiah Y'shua, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.*” The blessings of grace, mercy, and peace flow out of the Father and the Son by means of truth and love. In the same way, truth and love must be the channel through which we bless others.

Exhortations (vv. 4-6)

Yochanan next commends the lady's children: “*I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth, just as we have received commandment to do from the Father. (v. 4) .*” Notice, only some are walking in truth. Apparently, others are straying from it and that's where the problems lie. In verses 5-6, Yochanan reminds this lady to love others-but in the way Messiah prescribed, “according to His commandments” (vv. 6). “*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. 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.*”

Love does not contradict the commandments of Scripture. In fact, as Rabbi Sha'ul wrote: “*Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For this, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.*” (Rom. 13:8-10) However, true love never compromises its standards. Never consents to sin. Rather, it leads us and those we care about closer to Messiah.

Instruction (vv. 7-11)

And it is Messiah, and the accuracy of His Gospel, that should be our primary concern. “*For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Messiah as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the anti-Messiah. Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Messiah, does not have G-d; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son.*”(2 John 7-9)

Although these teachers (apparently Gnostics) spoke respectfully of the *Messiah*, they denied the truth about Him and were thus really against Him and His teaching—i.e., they are truly “anti-Messiah.” They went beyond *Messiah's* teaching, adding their own ideas and twisting His words. As a result, they had no part in G-d, and G-d had no part in them. By showing love to these false teachers, the lady was, in fact, aiding the enemy. This is why Yochanan says: “*If someone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, don't welcome him into your home. Don't even say, "Shalom!" to him; for the person who says, "Shalom!" to him shares in his evil deeds.* (vv. 10-11)

Taking these verses out of context, some Believers have used them to justify the most unloving behavior. Yochanan isn't telling us to slam the door in the face of everyone who disagrees with us. In his mind are false teachers who slip into our churches with their heresies about *Messiah* and cause people to stumble in their faith. To receive them is to become partners in their crime. The most loving thing to do-for our sake and the sake of those we care about is to draw a line and stand firm in the truth.

Finale (vv. 12-13)

With his characteristic warmth, Yochanan concludes his letter with hope and joy. “*Though I have many things to write to you, I do not want to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, so that your joy may be made full. The children of your chosen sister greet you.*” (vv. 12-13) In a day of relativism and tolerance, Yochanan's briefest letter sounds the loudest wake-up call. Be courageous! Stand for what G-d says is right! Telling someone the truth may be difficult, but, in the long run, it is the most loving thing to do.

Postscript

Our society would have us think that if we truly love people, we'll accept them regardless of their beliefs. This is called tolerance. Yet what kind of love lets someone believe a lie that eventually destroys them? That's not love; that's indifference, the opposite of love. To really care for someone is to tell him or her the truth-not in a demeaning way but with gentleness and respect. Love and truth must exist in balance.

Our love is not to be so blind as to ignore the views and conduct of others. Truth should make our love discriminating... On the other hand, we must never champion the truth in a harsh or bitter spirit...So the Messianic fellowship should be marked equally by love and truth, and we are to avoid the dangerous tendency to extremism, pursuing either at the expense of the other. Our love grows soft if it is not strengthened by truth, and our truth grows hard if it is not softened by love. We need to live according to Scripture which commands us both to love each other in the truth and to hold the truth in love. (John Stott)

Do you know someone who has placed his or her faith in a lie? If so, have you found it difficult to speak the truth in love to this person? The place to begin is to thoroughly know the truth yourself. Study the following essentials of the faith, and get to know their scriptural basis. Then jot down some thoughts concerning what truth this person needs to hear. Someone once said, "The man who loved me the most told me the truth." How about you? Are you willing to love that much?

Inerrancy of Scripture

Virgin birth and deity of Messiah

Ascension of Messiah and His present ministry

Substitutionary death of the Savior

Sinful nature of humanity

Effectiveness of *Yeshua's* blood to cleanse sin

Bodily resurrection of Messiah

Literal, future return of *Yeshua* to the earth

Sinless nature of *Yeshua*