

To what does 2 John 10 refer?

To answer this question, we need to at least see the larger idea of which John is speaking.

2 John 7-11 (NASB, emphasis mine)

7 For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist.

8 Watch yourselves, that you might not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward.

9 Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son.

10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring **this teaching**, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting;

11 for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.

During this early period of the church it is believed that there was a great deal of itinerant ministry, probably initially of the apostles themselves, and then later the direct disciples of the apostles. It was customary for the local church to welcome these itinerant teachers into private homes to care for them while they were in town. Westcott indicates the language assumes that itinerants will at some point show up at the door of “the chosen lady” (“if,” then, would mean “when”). Westcott considers that “comes to you” has the weight of an official visit of a teacher claiming authority [Westcott, *The Epistles of St. John*, 230].

John's reference to “this teaching” in verse 10 points back to verse 7, in which the reality of the coming of the incarnate Christ is affirmed. The one who denies that Christ has come *in the flesh* is “the deceiver and the antichrist.”

It would seem then, that the “teaching” has to do with the true nature of Jesus Christ as the God-man (the deceivers in John's day would deny either His true humanity (proto-Docetism) or His true deity (proto-Arianism), or teach some sort of proto-Gnostic variation on the theme).

Traveling itinerants who actively taught false doctrine (διδασκαλία) regarding Christ were not to be afforded either hospitality (“do not receive him into your house”) or even encouragement (“do not give him a greeting”). Why? Because they represented the spirit of Satan (the “deceiver”, v 7) and “antichrist,” in other words, they are the enemies of Christ and of the church.

Stott makes three suggestions as to the meaning of this injunction [Stott, *The Letters of John*, 215-217]. First, he says that John refers to not merely people who are in error, but who are, as he says, “missionaries of error;” false *teachers*, not merely people who are wrong about what they believe. Second, Stott views the letter as written to the Church rather than an individual, and

consequently suggests that the meaning is that they not be received and officially welcomed into the house-church, or the congregation. This is a bit of a stretch, to me. Third, John is referring specifically to those who are teaching falsehood about the Incarnation itself (or, in other words, about the nature of Christ).

In a helpful comment, Bruce points out that the injunction is against receiving such an one as a teacher, specifically. “It does not mean that (say) one of Jehovah's Witnesses should not be invited into the house for a cup of tea in order to be shown the way of God more perfectly in the sitting-room than would be convenient on the doorstep” [Bruce, *The Epistles of John*, 142].

This, I believe, is correct. The injunction of 2 John 10 has to do with receiving a “missionary of error” into your home with the perspective of supporting their platform to teach the church as though he/she was a teacher of truth. It has nothing to do with showing loving hospitality to a cult member or religionist in order to demonstrate the love of Christ, while you are seeking to teach them the truth about Christ. So you could invite a JW or Mormon, etc, into your home to join an evangelistic bible study that you or another believer is conducting, but you could not open your home to allow the JW or Mormon to conduct their own study to proselytize for their religion.