

Introduction

The Second Epistle of St. John to the Church is comprised of only 13 verses. The Epistle itself does not identify the author, using only the name “the Elder.” The Epistle is addressed to “the elect Lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all those who have known the truth,” a reference to the Church.

Early non-canonical Apostolic writings use much the same language as 2nd John (c. 50 A.D.; *Didache*, X.5; 96 A.D. *1 Clement* 49:5; 130 A.D.; *The Epistle of Barnabas*).¹ Eusebius cites Papias (c. 150 A.D.) as referring to “the former Epistle of John,” allowing obviously for a latter Epistle (*H.E.* 3.39.17). Similarly, and at about the same time, Clement of Alexandria refers to “the greater Epistle” of John. The early Church recognized 2nd John as having been written by John, son of Zebedee, the Disciple whom our Lord loved, the Apostle, the author of the Gospel that bears his name. (c. 180 A.D.; Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, I.xvi.3). It is Origen (253 A.D.) that first mentions all three Epistles of St. John, testifying that the authorship of 2nd John by John the Apostle was widely accepted in his day. He writes “He [John] has left also an epistle of a very few lines, and, it may be, a second and third; for not all say that these are genuine...” (*H.E.* VI. XXV. 10) Fewer early testimonies question the authorship of 2nd John, as does Dionysius of Alexandria (d. 265 A.D.), a pupil of Origen.

The Epistle was evidently written after 1st John, so can be dated before 95 A.D. (see our introduction to 1 John)

Luther’s preface to 2nd and 3rd John is quite short: “The other two epistles are not doctrinal epistles but examples of love and faith. They too have a true apostolic spirit.” (*A.E.* 35.393)

See also our introductory notes on the First Epistle of St. John.

Study Notes:

Verse 1: **The Elder** - The stature of St. John’s Apostolic Office is conveyed in his simple identification of himself as “The Elder.” All the churches would have known who this was. John was the Bishop of the Church in Asia, as Revelation testifies.

to the elect Lady and her children – further designates St. John’s relationship to the Church. The Church is a Lady, a “Mistress”, the Bride of Christ (Revelation 18:23; 21:2, 9; 22:17; also written by John). The Greek word here is κυρια, the feminine form of “Lord,” κυριος.

¹ Isagogical information drawn from: Harrison. *Introduction to the New Testament*. 1971. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, pg. 449; Carson, Moo & Morris. *New Testament Introduction*. 1992. Grand Rapids: Zondervon; Luther, Martin. *Prefaces to the New Testament*. In *A.E.* 35, pg. 393.

What a beautiful picture of the Church John paints with these words! “Elect” means chosen by God for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ (Matthew 24:24, 31; Romans 8:29-30, 33, 11:7; Colossians 3:12; 2 Timothy 2:10). The Church is the “Mother” of the believers, Her “children,” a term used 17x by John in his Epistles. (see 1 John 2:12-18, 3:1-2; Matthew 23:37)

... whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all those who have known the truth,

Love is a central theme of John’s Gospel and Epistles: see John 13:34-35, 15:13-17; 1 John 3:14-18.

Truth is a special theme of John’s Gospel and Epistles: revisit John 1:14-17, 14:6; 1 John, 3:18-19.

Verse 2 - because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever: See John 8:31-32, 1 John 1:6-8.

Note in this verse that “truth” is the cause of the love John expresses. From the Bible verses we just read, what does this mean? See John 4:24; Romans 1:18, 25; Colossians 1:2-6. What similarities do you see between Colossians 1:2-6 and 2 John 1-2? See 1 John 4:6-8. What relationship is there between truth and love? How does that relate to 2 John 1-2?

How is it that the truth abides in the believer? See John 14:17-18. Is the concept of “children of God” present in this passage?

How does truth relate to doctrine? That is to say: How is what we teach and confess to reflect what Scripture says?

How would you feel if you received a letter that opened with these two verses? Remember, O Christian – this Letter is to you too! You too are a child of the Elect Lady, the Bride of Christ, the Church.

Verse 3 - Grace, mercy, and peace will be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

See 1 Corinthians 1:3; 1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2; etc. Who are the two equal “Givers of grace”? See 1 John 5:20.

St. John goes further than St. Paul in this opening. With what two terms does he describe Jesus Christ? According to John, how is Jesus Christ the Son of the Father? How does this relate to John 1:14 and John 3:16?

Verse 4 - I was rejoiced greatly that I have found out of your children *ones* walking in truth, just as we received commandment from the Father.

Here St. John speaks as Pastor to the congregation. Some of the “children” (perhaps most of the children) are walking in the truth. The Scripture does not tell us how John knew, but several sources speculate that missionaries passing through Asia Minor brought back news to John about the churches there. (See 3 John 2-6).

“...walking in the truth...” From our reading of 1 John we know that this means that by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ these “children” were living according to the Commandments, the greatest of which is love. (See Joshua 22:5; Mark 12:30-31; John 13:34-35; John 14:31; John 15:12-14; Romans 13:9; 2 Corinthians 8:8; 1 John 3:23-24; 1 John 4:19-21. These verses will serve as the basis for the balance of our reading of 2 John.)

Verse 5 - And now I ask you, lady, not as writing a new commandment to you, but that which we continually had from the beginning: that we love one another.

Compare verse 5 with what St. Paul writes in Galatians 6:1-10, and with what St. James writes in 2:1-18.

Verse 6 – And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you heard from the beginning, that you *should* walk in it.

The Jewish treatment of the Scriptures resulted in two kinds of teachings. The first, *Haggadah*, was admonishment or encouragement. The second, *Halakah*, was specific instruction in how to live (walk - *HaLaK*) according to God’s Word. As in 1 John, here we see the distinctly Jewish nature of the Apostle’s writing. In accord with this concept is the calling of the early Christian Church “The Way.” See John 1:23, 14:6; Acts 9:1-2, 22:4.

Verse 7 - For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ *as* coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and antichrist.

Here, as in 3 John, St. John is concerned that the “children” not be led down the wrong “way,” into false doctrine and false belief, and thus lose salvation. In 3 John the offender is Diotrephes (see 3 John 9). On Antichrist, consult our previous study (1 John 2:18, pg. 4; 1 John 4:2-3). But note especially here the context – false Christology, which inevitably leads to false soteriology.

Verse 8 - Look to yourselves, that we do not lose that which we worked for, but we receive the full wage.

Here again St. John writes as a Pastor. “Mind yourselves” he would say, that your salvation is not lost by believing false doctrine from false teachers, but rather the full salvation Christ won for you.

Verse 9 – Everyone going ahead and not remaining in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. The one remaining in the doctrine has both the Father and the Son.

On “going ahead” see 3 John 6b-8.

To the early warning about losing salvation, St. John adds that false Christology is false theology – if you don’t have the Doctrine of the Son, you don’t have the Father. If you have the Doctrine of Christ, you have both.

Verse 10 - If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor speak greetings to him;

See Galatians 1:6-9. To receive such a one is forbidden, see Romans 16:17-18.

Verse 11 - for the one who speaks greetings to him has fellowship in his evil deeds.

St. John uses strong language here – the Greek word for “fellowship” is used in relation to Holy Communion (see Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 10:16; 2 Corinthians 6:14-17). He who receives teachers of false doctrine enters into an evil communion.

Does St. John write this to be mean? How does this relate to close Communion?

Verse 12 - Having many things to write to you, I did not desire *to do so* with paper and ink; but I hope to be with you and speak face to face (*mouth to mouth*), in order that our joy be full.

St. John is physically removed from the saints in the church to which he writes. So St. Paul writes to the church in Rome, Romans 1:10-13. Notice the similarity in the pericopes.

Verse 13 - The children of your elect sister greet you. Amen.

The church from which St. John writes is not identified. The relationship between churches is clear. This is an expression of true “fellowship.”