

Session 1:

Letters from John Speaking the Truth—2nd and 3rd John

Shortness of the two letters (2 John—3 John) speaks of the genuineness of the letters.

A standard papyrus sheet measured 10" x 8". The length of the letters would take up the whole page...probably no more.

Of course the best guarantee in our heart that these were genuine letters from John is our faith in believing that this is the whole Word of God...inspired and put together by men and authorized by God.

These were men who might not have known the plans of God to make the Word a love letter to His creation.

God's plans are far greater than men can comprehend.

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.....so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it..." (Isaiah 55:8, 9; 11)

Each letter (2 and 3 John) comes from "the elder."

"Elder" here assumes that he has the right to speak and that his word will carry weight in congregations where he is not actually present.

He speaks as one whose authority goes out to the Church at large.

The word is "presbuteros," which originally meant *an elder*, not in the official sense (within the local church body) but in the natural sense of the term. We would be better to translate it as *the ancient*, *the aged*, or the *one with the experience*, for it is not from a position in the Church that the writer of the letter draws his authority, but from:

- ✓ *His age*
- ✓ *His personal qualities and wisdom.*

Therefore....from all indications both of these letters were written by John, the disciple whom Jesus loved and in whom Jesus trusted His mother to.

He was now undoubtedly an old man....who had authority of a bishop in Ephesus and in the places around it. When he saw that a church was threatened with trouble and heresy, he wrote with gracious and loving correction to his people.

Here are the letters of one of the last of the first generation of Christians, a man whom all loved and respected.

We know that the letters came from the same hand (thought and mindset).

2 John begins, 'The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth.'

3 John begins, 'The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.'

Notice other similarities:

- ✓ 2 John 4, "I was overjoyed to find some of your children walking in the truth.'
- ✓ 3 John 4, "I have no greater joy than this, to hear that my children are walking in the truth."

- ✓ 2 John closes with, “Although I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink; instead I hope to come to you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete” (verse 12)
- ✓ 3 John closes with, “I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink; instead I hope to see you soon, and we will talk together face to face (verses 13-14)

2 and 3 John are clearly connected to 1 John in that they are dealing with the same situation, the same dangers and the same people. Read 1 John 4:3 and 2 John 7.

The “elect lady” was the church...not an individual. Referring to the Bride of Christ. (I would hope that all brides are female gender.....God sure thinks so and so should be our thinking).

The main problem with the church and the problem John is addressing has to do with teachers of the truth and false teachers (who are trying to persuade with words that Jesus did not come in the flesh....and did not really die like we would die).....denying the incarnation of Jesus.

In the earliest day of the Church, there were three different kinds of ministries:

1. **Apostles**—those who had been in the company of Jesus and who had been witnesses of the resurrection. They were the undisputed leaders of the Church. Their commission ran throughout the whole Church; in any country and in any congregation, their ministry was supreme.
2. **Prophets**—they were not attached to any one congregation. Wandering preachers, going where the Spirit moved them and giving to others the message which the Spirit of God gave to them. They had given up their home and occupation....and the comfort and the security of a settled life to be the wandering messengers of God. They, too, had a special place in the Church. The prophets were not to be brought under the same rules and regulations which governed ordinary people. Their authority was not confined to any one congregation and who had right of entry to every congregation.
3. **Elders**—during their first missionary journey, part of the work of Paul and Barnabas was to ordain elders in all the local churches which they founded (Acts 14:23). The elders were the officials of the settled community; their work was within their congregation, and they did not move outside it. It is clear that they were the backbone of the organization of the early Church. They taught and preached to the congregations week after week...ministered to people on a daily basis....

The problem was not with the apostles ...or the elders.

Some of the prophets were the problem.

There were false prophets and false teachers that were making their way through the congregations.....giving the impression that they had revelations from the Spirit....where it truly was from another spirit (their own).

Do you think we have some “so called” prophets making their way around the congregations and teaching some false doctrines.....?
Or maybe even speaking the Word but having selfish or ungodly motives behind it all?

In the letters, John warns his people that the wrong kind of wandering prophets might come claiming knowledge and wisdom of God....seeking money and hospitality. ***John was entirely justified in warning his people and saying that they must on no account receive these imposters and vultures.***

There is no doubt that, in the early Church, these wandering prophets became a problem. Some of them were heretical teachers, even if they were sincerely convinced of their own teaching. Some were simply plausible rogues who had found an easy way to make a comfortable living. That is the picture which lies behind 2 John.

2 John 1-3, “¹ *The elder, to the lady chosen by God and to her children, whom I love in the truth—and not I only, but also all who know the truth—* ² *because of the truth, which lives in us and will be with us forever:* ³ *Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father’s Son, will be with us in truth and love.*”

In this passage, love and truth are inseparably connected.

It is in the truth that the elder loves the elect lady. It is because of the truth that he loves and writes to the church.

It is the agape love...

Agape love:

- ✓ ***Is not passion with its ebb and flow, its flicker and flame. It is not an easy going sentimentalism...***
- ✓ ***It is an undefeatable goodwill...it is the attitude towards others which, no matter what they do, will seek their highest good and will accept all the difficulties, all the problems and all the toil which that search involves.***
- ✓ ***It is not easy to acquire or a light thing to put into practice.***

It is of great significance that John writes in love to warn.

Note:

John begins his warning with grace....mercy....and peace.

He wants them to receive the letter with grace....show mercy as Jesus would show mercy...and heed the warning seeking peace with the brothers. He was blunt, but caring. Warned with gentleness....but direct.....And,

He was specific in getting them to understand that God is the Father...and Jesus is the Son.

2 John 4-6, “*It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us.* ⁵ *And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another.* ⁶ *And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.*”

This passage implies that there are some divisions in the church.

Why do we know that?

The statement...”joy in knowing that SOME of your children are walking in truth.”

One remedy to any division in the Church.....love.

It is no new remedy and no new commandment...It is the word of Jesus Himself, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:4-5)

As we go on, we shall see that there is another side to this and that there is no soft sentimentality in John's attitude towards those who were leading people away from the truth.

The Closing of a Love Letter to the Church from a Concerned and Compassionate Leader of Christian Ideals

2 John 7-9, "I say this because many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist.

⁸ Watch out that you do not lose what we^[u] have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully.

⁹ Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son."

The problem....same problem cropping up in every congregation...someone preaching against the incarnation of Jesus...coming actually (truly) in the flesh.

John believed and knew from experience that:

- ✓ Jesus was truly born;
- ✓ Jesus truly became man;
- ✓ Jesus truly suffered and
- ✓ Jesus truly died.

Martin Luther made the statement about Jesus....

"He ate, drank, slept, waked; was weary, sorrowful, rejoicing; He wept and he laughed; he knew hunger and thirst and sweat; he talked, he worked, he prayed....so that there was no difference between him and other men....save only this, that He was God, and had no sin."

Read Hebrews 1:5-8.

John, in verse 8-9, state that these false teachers claim to be DEVELOPING Christianity, discovering more truly what it means to advance the Kingdom of God (in their own way of thinking).

Advance....running ahead, go on ahead,
Translated...."everyone who goes too far."

John insists that they are destroying Christianity and wrecking the foundation which has been laid and on which everything must be built.

Who are they? They were claiming to be the progressives, the advanced thinkers, and the people with open and adventurous minds.

John was an adventurous thinker of the New Testament.

John is not condemning progressive thinking; but he is saying that Jesus Christ must be the measure of all thinking and that whatever is out of touch with Him can never be right.

Jesus himself stated, "I came not to abolish the law, but to fulfill it."

Christianity is not a vague, uncontrolled philosophy on the nature of God....it is anchored to the historical figure of Jesus Christ...who is the same yesterday, today and forever. God says, "I change not."

Note: Change is inevitable in our society. However, we...as Progressive Christians must choose what is to be changed wisely and constructively. All of the changes must be based on holding up the “long-held theme” of keeping Christ in the forefront....and making sure that going against “the establishment” is not always right. Remember.....holding up traditions is not wrong. It is when we worship traditions that it is wrong.

2 John 10-13, “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them. ¹¹ Anyone who welcomes them shares in their wicked work. ¹² I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete. ¹³ The children of your sister, who is chosen by God, send their greetings.”

John saw a clear danger in these false teachers.

They are to be given no hospitality; and the refusal of hospitality would be the most effective way of stopping their work.

John goes on to say that they are not even to be given a greeting on the street.

It should be quite clear to the world that the Church has no tolerance for those whose teaching destroys the faith.

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| This passage may seem on the face of it to imply an attitude which is the exact opposite of Christian love; but those times dealt with imposters of the truth like we should deal with them...no compromise. |
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Remember, we can never compromise with mistaken or false teachers....but we are never free from the obligation of seeking to lead them into the truth.

As we close the 2nd Epistle of John, we see that John knew that it was best for him to stop writing or the receiver on the other end could misunderstand or misconstrue the meaning of the letter.

In many churches and in many personal relationships, letters have merely succeeded in making a situation worse; for the most carefully written letter can be misinterpreted, when a conversation might have put matters right.