

## Notes on the Greek New Testament Day 340 – December 6<sup>th</sup> – 2 John

### Introduction to John's Second and Third Epistles

For introduction to 2 and 3 John see also the introductory notes on 1 John which address some issues common to all three letters.

### The Place of 2 and 3 John in the NT Canon

Eusebius reckoned the second and third epistles of John among 'the controverted books' in the same rank as the epistles of James, Jude and 2 Peter. He says that they are 'well known and recognised by most'. However, they were not contained in the Peshitto Syriac Version nor are they accepted by the Syriac church.

Westcott considers that these letters probably had a limited circulation.

### The form of 2 and 3 John

Smalley writes, "2 and 3 John are the shortest letters in the NT, shorter even than Philemon and Jude, which also consist of one chapter. Both Johannine letters are of roughly equal length, containing 245 and 219 words respectively."

Marshall comments, "Unlike 1 John, 2 and 3 John fall into the category of personal letters. Each of them is the length of an ordinary private letter of the time which could be written on a standard-sized piece of papyrus (about 25 cm. by 20 cm.), and each of them has the typical 'form' of a letter with a more or less stereotyped introduction and conclusion."

### Relationship with 1 John

Smalley writes, "In terms of subject matter 2 John is closer than 3 John to 1 John. The theological ideas of 2 John resemble those of 1 John very closely; so that, for example, the four conditions set out in 1 John for walking in the light and living as God's children are echoed in 2 John (renunciation of sin, cf. vv 10–11; obedience to the love command, cf. vv 5–6; rejection of worldliness, cf. v 7; maintenance of the faith, cf. vv 1–2, 4, 9). Only in vv 10–11 is a new theme introduced."

Marshall comments, "2 John appears to have been written to the same Christian community as 1 John but at an earlier date (since the false teachers evidently still had access to the church in 2 John, but had seceded from it in 1 John 2:19), or else it was written to a different church." On the other hand, Dodd points out, the ideas set out briefly in 2 John need the prior and fuller exposition which they receive in 1 John if they are to be properly understood. Smalley concludes, "A theory which thus understands 2 John as part of a community history, beginning in the Fourth Gospel and ending in 3 John, is not only logical. It also accords with the early history of the Johannine letters, in which the order 1–2–3 never seems to have been in any real doubt."

### Situation Addressed in these Letters

Marshall writes, "Although 2 John is apparently written to an individual, the 'chosen lady' (2 Jn. 1), it is probable that it is in fact a way of personifying a community. By contrast 3 John is written to a specific person, Gaius, and it deals with ecclesiastical rather than theological problems. Its background appears to lie in the growth of a new type of church organisation. At first the various churches were to a considerable extent under the guidance and leadership of apostles and evangelists (like Paul, Timothy, and Titus) who travelled from place to place and maintained a general supervision over the churches placed under their care. In this type of situation the role and authority of the local leaders whom they appointed was correspondingly restricted. But as time passed and the churches increased in number, a new situation began to

arise. The apostles and their colleagues were growing old, or had actually died. There was no universal system of succession, and it was natural that local churches should begin to develop a more powerful leadership of their own. At the same time there was a tendency toward the concentration of leadership. In the early days church leaders constituted a group of elders or of bishops and deacons. Now this 'team ministry' was giving way to the idea of one man as the bishop who occupied a position of leadership over the other church officials. It looks as though Diotrephes was trying to encourage this process in his own church – naturally with himself as the appointed leader. He was seeking autonomy for his own church by trying to get rid of the influence of John and John's emissaries, and he was claiming authority for himself within the church. It does not necessarily follow that Diotrephes had already become the authorised leader in his own church, but simply that he was desirous of this position. We have not yet reached the stage of development reflected in the Epistles of Ignatius, where each local church has its own bishop, elders and deacons."

## Authorship

Westcott writes that "there is nothing in the use of the title ὁ πρεσβύτερος, 'the elder' by the writer of the Epistles inconsistent with belief that he was the Apostle John." Furthermore, "Internal evidence amply confirms the general tenor of external authority. The second Epistle bears the closest resemblance in language and thought to the first. The third epistle has the closest affinity to the second, though from its subject it is less like the first in general form. Nevertheless it offers many striking parallels to constructions and language of St John: v.3 ἐν ἀληθείᾳ; 4 μείζοτεραν τούτων... ἵνα...; 6, 12 μαρτυρεῖν τινι; 11 ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν... οὐχ ἔωρακεν τὸν θεόν; 12 οἶδας ὅτι ἡ μαρτ. ἡ ἀληθῆς ἐστίν."

Marshall, however, writes, "More probably we should think of the elder as holding a position analogous to that of Timothy or Titus, as portrayed in the Pastoral Epistles, men charged to maintain oversight over a group of churches." Marshall follows von Campenhausen in suggesting that 'the elder,' in opposing Diotrephes, was relying on the force and authority of 'the truth' (i.e. the Gospel proclaimed by the apostles and handed on to the church) rather than relying on any formal or institutional authority he possessed over the churches.

## Works frequently referenced in these notes on John's Epistles

Marshall, I Howard	<i>The Epistles of John</i> , The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1978
Smalley, Stephen S	<i>1, 2, 3 John</i> , Word Biblical Commentary, Vol 51, Word Books, Dallas, 1984
Stott, John R.W.	<i>Epistles of John</i> , Tyndale Commentary, IVF, London, 1964
Westcott, B.F	<i>The Epistles of St John</i> , MacMillan & Co, Cambridge & London, 1886

### Verse 1

Ὁ πρεσβύτερος ἐκλεκτῆ κυρία καὶ τοῖς τέκνοις αὐτῆς, οὓς ἐγὼ ἀγαπῶ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ, καὶ οὐκ ἐγὼ μόνος ἀλλὰ καὶ πάντες οἱ ἐγνωκότες τὴν ἀλήθειαν,

πρεσβυτερος, α, ον elder, old man/woman

A title which "while it describes official position, suggested also a fatherly relation." Westcott.

Smalley comments, "When he calls himself 'the presbyter' ... the writer could be indicating that he was a venerated old man in the community, or (more likely) that he was an 'elder' in a local church. But the authority which he assumes over his readers (in both 2 and 3 John, as in 1 John), and the intimate knowledge of the addressees which he presupposes, suggests that he was 'more than a local pastor' (G. W. Barker...). The influence which he seems to have exercised implies that his position was similar to that of a modern 'bishop' or 'superintendent' ... and that he had responsibility for the (Johannine) churches in his area (of Ephesus)."

ἐκλεκτος, η, ον chosen  
κυρία, ας f lady

Various suggestions have been made concerning the phrase ἐκλεκτῇ κυρία

- i) The letter is addressed to a lady named Electa;
- ii) The letter is addressed to a Christian woman named Kyria;
- iii) Both are proper names, the letter is addressed to Electa Kyria;
- iv) It is addressed to a particular church, the church being referred to as a chosen lady, a bride of Christ, and the church members being referred to as her children. No other example is known of such a form of address.

Westcott says that the problem is insoluble, "But the general tenor of the letter favours the opinion that it was sent to a community and not to one believer." Cf. v.13.

Marshall suggests that it is "a metaphorical way of saying 'the church and its members'." Smalley concludes, "The Johannine community as a whole seems to have included several house churches (in Ephesus). The recipients of 2 John belonged to the same group as that for which 1 John was written (cf. v 7; and 1 John 2:18–19). But they formed a distinct unit on their own; and evidently the addressee of 3 John was the leader of another such unit."

τεκνον, ου n child  
ἀγαπω love  
ἀληθεια, ας f truth

"The writer, at the very outset, places himself over against the heretics, who have no love for the truth (cf. vv 10–11; also 3 John 4)... The presbyter is saying that he loves his readers in a way that accords with the truth of the Christian gospel." Smalley.

μονος, η, ον adj only, alone  
ἐγνωκότας Verb, perf act ptc, m nom pl  
γνωσκω

Marshall adds, "The fact that the elder is writing to a church rather than an individual family is confirmed by his further assertion that his love is shared by all who know the truth."

### Verse 2

διὰ τὴν ἀλήθειαν τὴν μένουσαν ἐν ἡμῖν, καὶ μεθ' ἡμῶν ἔσται εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα·

μενω remain, stay, abide

Marshall comments, "The truth is something which has come to stay in members of the church, and it exercises an inner dynamic on them to love."

ἔσται Verb, fut indic, 2 s εἶμι

αἰων, αἰωνος m age, world order, eternity

Cf. 1 Jn 2:17.

### Verse 3

ἔσται μεθ' ἡμῶν χάρις ἔλεος εἰρήνη παρὰ θεοῦ πατρὸς, καὶ παρὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ πατρὸς, ἐν ἀληθείᾳ καὶ ἀγάπῃ.

Marshall comments, "After naming the writer and recipients, the customary opening of a Greek letter included some form of greeting. Just as the former element was often developed to indicate the Christian status of the persons involved, so too the greeting took on a Christian form. We can trace this new type of greeting especially in the letters of Paul, and it may be that he was largely responsible for developing it."

ἔσται the blessing is also a promise – a word of assurance.

χαρις, ιτος f grace  
ἐλεος, ους n mercy, compassion  
εἰρηνη, ης f peace

Cf. 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2. "The succession 'grace, mercy, peace' marks the order from the first motion of God to the final satisfaction of man... In regard to the divine action 'grace' points to the absolute freedom of God's love in relation to man's helplessness to win it; and 'mercy' to His tenderness towards man's misery." Westcott.

παρα preposition with gen from

Before Ἰησοῦ, supported by good representatives of the Alexandrian and Western text-types (including A B 81 1739 Vg cop<sup>sa</sup>), a number of witnesses (such as κ L P most minuscules syr<sup>hcl</sup> cop<sup>bo</sup> arm) have κυρίου. Since copyists are likely to have added rather than deleted a title of Jesus, the shorter text is to be preferred. So Metzger.

The expression Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ πατρὸς is unique. "The present title emphasizes the special relationship of Jesus to the Father (and not only to the believer), which is characteristic of the theology of the Johannine letters as a whole." Smalley.

ἐν ἀληθείᾳ καὶ ἀγάπῃ prepare the way for the central theme of the letter in vv. 4-11, which is concerned with living in truth and love.

**Verse 4**

Ἐχάρην λίαν ὅτι εὗρηκα ἐκ τῶν τέκνων σου περιπατοῦντας ἐν ἀληθείᾳ, καθὼς ἐντολήν ἐλάβομεν παρὰ τοῦ πατρός.

"Ancient letters, like their modern counterparts, often began with an expression of joy on the part of the writer for good news concerning his readers." Marshall.

ἐχάρην Verb, 2nd aor pass dep indic, 1 s  
χαίρω rejoice, be glad

λίαν adv exceedingly, greatly

εὗρηκα Verb, perf act indic, 1 s εὕρισκω  
find, discover

"The words appear to refer to an experience of the writer in some other place than that to which the 'Lady' belonged." Westcott.  
ἐκ τῶν τέκνων "may carry the implication that other members of the church were not living as they should [so Smalley]... But ... it is more likely that the elder is thinking of the personal contact which he has had with some members of the church. Presumably they had visited him, and were now returning home with this letter of greeting." Marshall.

περιπατέω walk, walk about, live

Cf. 1 John 1:6; also 2:6, 11; 3 John 3-4. The present participle stresses habitual commitment.

ἐντολή, ης f command, order, instruction  
ἐλάβομεν Verb, aor act indic, 1 pl λαμβάνω

Smalley comments, "The presbyter ascribes the 'command' (to live in truth and love) to the Father, rather than directly to Jesus (cf. John 13:34; 15:12, 17), because he is the ultimate source of the message declared by Jesus (John 7:16-17) and his disciples (1 John 1:5)."

**Verse 5**

καὶ νῦν ἐρωτῶ σε, κυρία, οὐχ ὡς ἐντολήν καινὴν γράφων σοι ἀλλὰ ἦν εἶχομεν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, ἵνα ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους.

ἐρωτάω ask, request

The force is 'I plead with you...'

σε Pronoun, acc s συ

σε, κυρία John addresses the church as a whole.

καινος, η, ον new

γράφω write

εἶχομεν Verb, imperf act indic, 1 pl ἔχω

ἀρχη, ης f beginning

Cf. 1 Jn 2:7-8; Jn 13:34.

ἀλληλων, οις, ους one another

"His request is personal and urgent, especially since the schismatic heretics in his own congregation, who lacked both truth and love, are no doubt still in view... The elder asks his readers to practice something with which all three persons of the Trinity are concerned. For love comes from the Father (1 John 4:7), it is manifested by the Son (3:16), and it is made available by the life-giving Spirit (4:13-16)." Smalley.

**Verse 6**

καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἀγάπη, ἵνα περιπατῶμεν κατὰ τὰς ἐντολάς αὐτοῦ· αὕτη ἡ ἐντολή ἐστίν, καθὼς ἠκούσατε ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, ἵνα ἐν αὐτῇ περιπατήτε.

"The complete identification of the life of love with the fulfilment of all the commandments of God is characteristic of St John: 1 John 5:2,3." Westcott. Cf. also Romans 13:8-10 of which Marshall writes, "If Paul's point is to show that all the commands issue out of love and can be regarded as expressions of love, the elder's point is to show that love must issue in various detailed types of action in accordance with God's commandments.... The relevance of the elder's point is obvious in the modern situation where we are sometimes told: 'All you need is love.' Such advice is meaningless if the nature of love is not defined and unfolded. Love expresses itself in following the divine guidelines. At the same time, merely to keep the commands out of a sense of duty or constraint or fear of punishment is not true love. Love means obedience from the heart and true concern for the good of others."

Smalley comments, "The injunction to live in obedience to the demand for love (and truth), as a basic spiritual requirement from the Christian believer, would have been entirely appropriate to a community like John's which was disintegrating in the face of heresies within and secessionist attacks from outside." So v. 7.

**Verse 7**

ὅτι πολλοὶ πλάνοι ἐξῆλθον εἰς τὸν κόσμον, οἱ μὴ ὁμολογοῦντες Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐρχόμενον ἐν σαρκί· οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ πλάνος καὶ ὁ ἀντίχριστος.

πλανος, ον deceitful; ὁ π. deceiver

One who leads astray

ἐξηλθον Westcott suggests that this indicates a particular crisis when a number of people left the church to take up their own anti-Christian mission. Smalley comments, "This announcement marks a decisive stage in the break-up of John's community, and indicates that a particular brand of heresy was gaining the upper hand."

Marshall comments, "There were no doubt various small groups of people calling themselves Christians at the time, and there were no denominational organisations gathering them all together. It would be quite possible for 'Christians' who held different views of the faith from their colleagues to set up their own groups. Consequently, when travelling preachers came around it may have been difficult to know whether they shared the same understanding of the faith... Here the elder proposes a clear test by which the church to which he is writing may test the orthodoxy of any suspect preachers."

ὁμολογεω confess, declare  
σαρξ, σαρκος f flesh, physical body,  
human nature

"The thought centres upon the present perfection of the Lord's Manhood which is still, and is to be manifested, and not upon the past fact of His coming. 1 John 4:2 (ἐληλυθοντα): 1 John 5:6 (ὁ ἔλθων)." Westcott.

Marshall comments, "The present continuous tense used is surprising when compared with 1 John 4:2: 'Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.' We might have expected a simple past tense, 'Jesus Christ came in the flesh' (cf. 1 Jn 5:6), as a confession of the historical reality of the incarnation in a point of past time. It seems unlikely, therefore, that the false teachers simply denied the reality of the incarnation. The use of the present and perfect tenses becomes significant if the point is that Jesus Christ has come *and still existed* 'in the flesh.' We know that some Gnostic thinkers taught that a heavenly power (the Christ) came upon Jesus at his baptism in the form of the Spirit, but that it departed from him again before the crucifixion, so that there was no lasting union of the divine Christ with the human Jesus, and hence no real, lasting incarnation. The elder's formulation of the orthodox faith in Jesus Christ seems to be designed to exclude such interpretations of the person of Jesus. For him it was axiomatic that there had been a true incarnation, that the Word had become flesh and remained flesh. It is a point that receives much stress in 1 John (2:18-27; 4:1-6; 5:5-8)."

ἀντιχριστος, ου m Antichrist (of one who claims to be Christ or is opposed to Christ)

Cf. 1 Jn 2:18. "He means that such a person is the deceiver *par excellence*, since his denial cuts at the very root of Christian belief. Indeed, he has made himself the opponent of Jesus." Marshall.

"On the basis of the situation described in this verse, the presbyter proceeds to a double exhortation: do not be deceived, he says (vv 8, 9); and do not encourage deceivers (vv 10, 11)." Smalley.

### Verse 8

βλέπετε ἑαυτοὺς, ἵνα μὴ ἀπολέσητε ἃ εἰργασάμεθα, ἀλλὰ μισθὸν πλήρη ἀπολάβητε.

βλεπω see, look, beware of

ἑαυτος, ἑαυτη, ἑαυτον him/herself, itself

ἀπολέσητε Verb, aor act subj, 2 pl ἀπολλυμι  
destroy, kill, lose

εἰργασάμεθα Verb, aor midd dep indic, 1 pl

ἐργαζομαι work

There are number of variants that seek to harmonise ἀπολέσητε ... εἰργασάμεθα either by making both first person plural or both second person plural. The reading given above is well supported.

εἰργασάμεθα refers to the preaching and pastoral ministry of the elder and others.

μισθος, ου m pay, wages, reward

πληρης, ες full, complete

ἀπολάβητε Verb, aor act subj, 2 pl

ἀπολαμβανω receive back

"The Christian life leads in the end to a reward, and failure to persevere in the truth (and in right conduct) can lead to loss of what God has promised to his people." Marshall.

Smalley adds, "It is quite possible that the heretical 'deceivers' were using the presbyter's very phrases for their own purposes... They too might have urged their disciples not to 'lose' what had been accomplished; and those with gnostic inclinations may well have encouraged their followers to aim at the perfection (the 'reward in full') which was reserved for the elect. Against such deception the elder exhorts his readers to maintain the gospel faith of Jesus, and to live the complete life of truth and love (v 4)."

### Verse 9

πᾶς ὁ προάγων καὶ μὴ μένων ἐν τῇ διδαχῇ τοῦ Χριστοῦ θεὸν οὐκ ἔχει· ὁ μένων ἐν τῇ διδαχῇ, οὗτος καὶ τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὸν υἱὸν ἔχει.

προαγω go before or ahead of

Marshall comments on προάγων, "Perhaps this is a sarcastic reference to the way in which these false teachers themselves proudly claimed to be offering 'advanced' teaching; the elder claims that they have 'advanced' beyond the boundaries of true Christian belief." He continues by warning against any contemporary teaching which goes beyond the definitive Scriptural revelation. The demand is to 'remain' in the received teaching.

διδάχη, ης f teaching

The Textus Receptus, following K L P cop<sup>bo</sup> eth, et al., adds τοῦ χριστοῦ after τῆ διδασχῆ, while some versions and patristic witnesses (including syr<sup>ph</sup> Lucifer) have διδασχῆ αὐτοῦ. These are secondary attempts to relate this clause to the preceding one, which has ἐν τῆ διδασχῆ τοῦ χριστοῦ. The shorter reading (so Ⲙ A B Ψ Vg syrhcl cop<sup>sa</sup>, et al.) is well supported and to be preferred.

Westcott thinks that the sense is 'the doctrine which Christ brought in his own person' rather than 'the doctrine concerning Christ.' Marshall, however, comments, "The 'teaching of Christ' is the tradition about Christ taught by the elder himself and handed down by authoritative tradition in the church."

θεὸν οὐκ ἔχει Smalley comments, "The so-called 'advanced' person not only loses his 'reward' (v 8); he also loses God himself. See 1 John 2:23 ('no one who disowns the Son possesses the Father'). To 'have' (ἔχει), or 'possess,' God denotes the experience of an intimate relationship and fellowship with him."

οὗτος καὶ τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὸν υἱὸν ἔχει. Marshall writes, "It is impossible to separate the Father from the Son in Christian experience: you cannot have fellowship with the one without having it with the other. But, if so, it also follows positively that those who accept the teaching have spiritual fellowship with both the Father and the Son."

### Verse 10

εἴ τις ἔρχεται πρὸς ὑμᾶς καὶ ταύτην τὴν διδασχὴν οὐ φέρει, μὴ λαμβάνετε αὐτὸν εἰς οἰκίαν καὶ χαίρειν αὐτῷ μὴ λέγετε·

John is speaking not of the casual visit of a stranger but a visit by "self-appointed, itinerant teachers and preachers of heresy. These people, presumably, had seceded from the Johannine community; and they were now seeking to win over further adherents to their false views." Smalley.

φέρω bring, carry, bear  
οἰκία, ας f house, home

Smalley comments, "The 'house' (οἰκίαν) to which access by the heretics is to be denied may refer to the dwelling of an individual member of the Johannine church. But more probably it denotes the 'house' in which one section of that community met for worship (a 'house church'). So Stott, 214. For such 'house' meetings in the NT see Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phlm 2. John is not therefore forbidding private hospitality, but rather an official welcome into the congregation, with the widespread opportunities which would then be available for the heretics to promote their cause."

χαίρω rejoice, be glad; imperat (and infin)  
used as a greeting

### Verse 11

ὁ λέγων γὰρ αὐτῷ χαίρειν κοινωνεῖ τοῖς ἔργοις αὐτοῦ τοῖς πονηροῖς.

Smalley comments, "This v belongs with v 10, and must be interpreted in the light of what the elder has just said. In v 10 he has spoken of the need to resist the peddlers of doctrinal error who, in their travels, seek a platform from which to spread their false ideas about the person of Jesus."

κοινωνεω share, take part  
πονηρος, α, ον evil, bad, wicked

Marshall comments, "To welcome them was to express solidarity with them; even if one professed to reject their views, hospitality was a way of sharing in their work, and those who helped them in this way were in danger of coming under the same condemnation as the false teachers themselves."

### Verse 12

Πολλὰ ἔχων ὑμῖν γράφειν οὐκ ἐβουλήθη διὰ χάρτου καὶ μέλανος, ἀλλὰ ἐλπίζω γενέσθαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς καὶ στόμα πρὸς στόμα λαλῆσαι, ἵνα ἡ χαρὰ ὑμῶν πεπληρωμένη ᾗ.

Cf. 3 Jn 13-15.

ἐβουλήθη Verb, aor pass dep indic, 1 s  
βουλομαι want, desire, wish

"The aorist regards the letter as complete: the decision is made." Westcott. An 'epistolatory' aorist.

χαρτης, ου m paper, papyrus  
μελας, αινα, αν gen ανος, αινης, ανος black;  
το μ. ink  
ἐλπίζω hope  
στομα, τος n mouth

I.e. 'face to face'

λαλεω speak, talk  
χαρα, ας f joy

πεπληρωμένη Verb, perf pass ptc, f nom s  
 πληρωω fill, make full

The reading ἡμῶν ( ⓃK L P Ψ syr<sup>ph</sup> hcl, et al.) is well supported, and accords with John's habit of identifying himself with his readers, especially when speaking of the gospel blessings which they share (as in 1 John 1:4). The variant ὑμῶν is also well attested (A B 33 81 1739 Vg cop<sup>bo</sup>); but it probably results from scribal assimilation to the second persons earlier in the sentence.

ἦ Verb, pres subj, 3s εἰμι

### Verse 13

Ἀσπάζεται σε τὰ τέκνα τῆς ἀδελφῆς σου τῆς ἐκλεκτῆς.

ἀσπάζομαι greet

σε Pronoun, acc s συ

τέκνον, ου n child

ἀδελφῆ, ης f sister

ἐκλεκτος, η, ον chosen

Tends to support the corporate view adopted in v.1. "Finally, the elder conveys greetings to the church from its sister church with which he himself was associated." Marshall. Contrast the greetings in 3 John. Smalley adds, "The fact that the writer of 2 John speaks with an air of authority to a congregation other than his own possibly suggests that he had general responsibility for all the Johannine churches in his area."

As with the ending of 1 John, so here, many MSS add ἀμήν. There are also a number of other secondary expansions.