

The Second Epistle of John

...And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. (2 John 1:6)

2 John Conclusion

Someone read 2John 1:1-7

Someone read vv 8-13

Canonicity

Due to the brevity and casual nature of 2&3 John, it is not surprising that they were among the last to be accepted as canonical (define "canon"). Eusebius in his Church History (ca 290ad) lists them as "disputed, although well known and accepted by many." Irenaeus quotes twice from 2John in his famous *Against Heresies* (ca 195ad), attributing both to S. John.

He attributed the second quote to 1John, making it even more convincing that these had the same author.

References exist in no less than half a dozen other ECFs, including the Muratorian Canon, which was known in Rome about 200ad.

The commentator Plummer remarks: "It is apparent that precisely those witnesses who are nearest to S. John in time are favorable to the Apostolic authorship, and they seem to know no other view."

The contents of 2John reflect that it is the product of the same author as 1John. More than half of 2John is a virtual repetition of 1John.

D. Edmond Hiebert writes: "For the common reader, the most natural explanation is the view that all 3 writings are the work of the same author. This view goes back to the early church and was held almost unanimously until the rise of modern critical scholarship."

Authorship

Following the traditional format of a letter written in Biblical times, the author refers to himself at the very beginning. But he does not use his name, instead he refers to himself as what?

The Elder (Greek=*ho presbuteros*), from which we get the name of what mainline denomination?

This has occasioned much speculation on the author's identity. How exactly does he identify himself?

The Elder. What does this fact imply?

1. He was known to his readers
2. They would recognize his authority
3. His authority would be such that it could settle disputes among the brothers

So, if the author was the beloved Disciple – as I believe it is – the why do you think he doesn't give his name?

Similar to GJohn, 1John, and 3John.

Out of humility – remember, he is one of the Sons of Thunder reborn to the Disciple of Love.

But, see Rev 1:1. Why do you think John identifies himself by name here?

See Isa 1:1, Jer 1:1, Eze 1:3, Dan 7:1, etc.

Consciously writing a prophetic vision, like the OT prophets

So, to sum up, the author, in my view, is the Apostle John. He was probably writing from Ephesus (although there is no direct evidence of this), and was writing either in the first half of the 80's or perhaps 10-15 years later. Marshall thinks the chronological relationship to 1John is that 1John was either written after 2John (because the heretics were still able to pass themselves off as true believers), or was written to a Christian lady (or community) in an area where the heretics had not yet visited, but John knew they were planning to visit in the near future.

The Form

It is short enough to fit on one piece of papyrus, and contains a more or less standard greeting and conclusion.

The Audience

This brings us to the matter of the "Elect Lady." Is it a literal lady, or a metaphor for a local church.

1. A literal lady
2. A metaphor for a local church

I lean towards the first view, but am not dogmatic – it could very easily be the second.

Purpose

John was aware of certain false teachers who posing as true Christians, and were seeking converts to their heresy. They planned to infiltrate the church and to lead as many astray as they could. At the time, inns were filthy, flea-infested hovels, and private homes were often opened to travelers. John was concerned that these heretics would abuse the hospitality of his friends and fellow Christians. Or worse that the Chosen Lady would be seen as giving her approval to their false teaching. He writes this letter as a warning to them, and says he plans of visiting them in the future.

V1: The Elder tells the Lady he "loves" her, and not only that, he is joined by all who know the truth.

This contrasts with the heretics who don't love the Lady and her children with a pure *agape* love. Indeed, John might have written that they – in reality – hated her (e.g., 1Jn 4:20).

V2: for (6) the sake of the truth which abides (7) in us and will be (8) with us forever: (2 John 1:2)

The truth is the common bond between fellow believers. We are commanded to love our neighbors and even our enemies. But as Christians, we have a special tie to the truth; it is the basis of reciprocal Christian love. Heretics may leave us (1Jn 2:19) and go out into the world;

but in Christian society, truth shall remain secure. So long as the truth endures, in us and within us, so long our love for one another will also endure.

If this is so, and Christian love is founded on Christian truth, we shall never increase the love which exists between us by diminishing the truth we hold in common. In the desire for unity, we must beware of compromising the very truth on which true love and unity depend.

V3: (9) Grace, mercy and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love. (2 John 1:3)

Notice how skillfully John makes the traditional salutation into a ringing declaration of assurance. Literally in the Greek it reads: "There will be with us grace, mercy, peace." What grammatical tense is the verb "will be?"

Future

What does that signify?

It underlines that these blessings will continue with us - for how long?

Forever – "Into the Age" (literal translation of *eis ton aionion*), the eternal age to come.

This is the only time a salutation in the entire NT is constructed as an assurance.

V4: I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth, just as we have received commandment to do from the Father. (2 John 1:4)

What impact do you think this report had on the Chosen Lady?

God the Father is the true origin of the revelation brought by the Son. The daily lives of the children revealed their love-inspired obedience to the commandment they had received. And what is this Commandment?

Clearly, "love and truth" were reflected in their conduct.

John joyfully commends their "walk" as consistent with this command, which they willingly obeyed as believers in Jesus Christ.

V5: Now I ask you, lady, (11) not as though I were writing to you a new commandment, but the one which we have had (12) from the beginning, that we (13) love one another. (2 John 1:5)

As one commentator writes: the practice this love among believers offers the clearest test of the truthfulness of the confession and the sincerity of the obedience given to God's commands.

In such soil, false teaching cannot grow.

It is interesting to note that God never gives a command that we cannot keep. But over and over again, John says God commands us to love. What is the implication of this?

V6: And (14) this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, (15) just as you have heard (16) from the beginning, that you should walk in it. (2 John 1:6)

One commentator says it this way: “Love divorced from obedience will run riot; obedience divorced from love will starve.” Where there is no obedience to God, there is no love for Him. On the other hand, Christian love is revealed when we walk according His commands. Only then – with these two actions in perfect balance – can we be genuinely free.

Ps 119:45

V7: For (17) many deceivers have (18) gone out into the world, those who (19) do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is (20) the deceiver and the (21) antichrist. (2 John 1:7)

This may echo 1 Jn 2:19, but I think it means more than that. The heretics may very well consider themselves to be on a special mission – one of deception – designed to parody the mission of Jesus and the Apostles. “Christ was being aped by antichrist.” (Stott). And who is behind their mission of falsehood?

The apostate nature of their mission is made clear by what they deny. And what is that?

do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh.

That is, they deny the very nature of the God-Man. Notice how precisely John puts their denial: “in the flesh.” John never speaks of Jesus coming “into” the flesh – which would leave the door open the heretics. Specifically, the Docetic Gnostics taught what?

And what is the result when you have a Christ that only “seemed” human?

The Incarnation goes out the window, and the atonement with it!

V8: Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. (2 John 1:8)

He wants to stress the danger so that they will be vigilant against the deadly heresy he writes about in the previous verse. While not unmindful of God’s care for them, John reminds his readers that it is their personal duty to always be on guard against the anti-Christ, those who desire to replace Christ with a counterfeit messiah of their own devising.

John moves on to make an appeal to the future reward they will receive in full – literally “Filled up, in full measure, nothing lacking.” Is John teaching that we can earn salvation?

Of course not. What is he referring to?

2 Cor 5:10; Rev 3:11

John is referring to the final judgment of Christ of believers, when we (we hope) will receive our crowns from the King.

V9: Anyone who goes too far and (24) 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. (2 John 1:9 NASB)

John says that anyone who progresses beyond the Christ's revealed message is truly dead, separated from God for eternity.

In spite of his professed advanced knowledge of God, he does not possess the true God as his own God. As John Stott writes:

Does not possess Him in his heart as a Being to adore, and trust, and to love.

His brilliant, sophisticated speculation about God fails to bring him in a personal relationship with God.

To quote Stott again:

To deny the Son is to forfeit the Father. This is as true today of all non-Christian religions as it was of Cerinthian Gnosticism in the first century.

One's adherence to the authentic message of Christianity assures that one "has both the Father and the Son." It is impossible to separate the Father from the Son in Christian experience. Notice how John changes from the abstract "God" to the personal term "Father," pointing to the intimate family relationship we can experience through His Son. See 1 Jn 1:3.

V10: 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; (2 John 1:10 NASB)

Notice that these false missionaries bring their lies with them. What lies do they bring?

That Christ did not come in the flesh (v 7).

These are not merely believers in this false doctrine, they are teachers of it. And how will God judge them?

Jam 3:1

What does it mean to 'receive them into your house'?

So, should we let Mormon Missionaries or JW's into our homes?

Meet at a neutral location, but only if you feel confident in what you believe and why you believe it.

What does the last half of the verse mean?

It would be inconsistent to wish a Godly blessing on one who sought to destroy the beliefs you hold dear.

V11: for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds. (2 John 1:11 NASB)

In what ways do we “participate” in the evil deeds committed by the heretics?

1. By implying we condone the heretical teachers and what they are teaching
2. By condoning the one who accepts the heretical teaching
3. By the offense given to those who don't accept that teaching

These actions would contradict John's express lessons in 1Jn 1:3, 7

V12: 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. (2 John 1:12 NASB)

Compare to 3Jn vv13-14

We don't know precisely what these things were, but they were likely involving the false teachers that would soon come their way.

He was coming as a true teacher, not as the heretics.

V13: The children of your chosen sister greet you. (2 John 1:13 NASB)

Was the Lady's sister saved? She was 'chosen' (Greek *ekletēs*).

Why do you think the greeting comes from the children and not the lady's sister herself?

This concludes our study of 2John.

It's such a blessing to have this little gem of a letter, as well as 3John, as a gift to the church. Just consider, for a moment, the providential care God took to preserve His Word against the ravages of time, weather, and decay. I am blessed myself to have you teach me so much by studying this letter, and the motivation you gave me to prepare each week to present it to you.