

Second John

Authorship

Ancient tradition attributes 2 John to John, the son of Zebedee, one of Christ's twelve apostles. The author refers to himself simply as "the Elder." A quotation by Papias has been misconstrued to posit a different John known as "the Elder." There is no good reason to deny Johannine authorship of this epistle.¹

Date

It is most likely that the Johannine Epistles were written after the Gospel and before Revelation.² The Gospel of John may have been written as early as A.D. 48-52. Revelation was probably written in A.D. 68-69. A date of A.D. 64-65 fits the internal and external evidence.³

Original Readers

Ephesus seems to have been the locus of John's ministry. Hodges contends that John had been responsible for the early Jewish-Christian congregations in that area and that he had returned to Jerusalem (or somewhere else) from which the three epistles were written.

Occasion

Robinson contends that ". . . the epistles were . . . written to reassure Jewish Christian congregations in Asia Minor, who were the product of the Johannine mission and in danger of being shaken from their faith and morals by false teachers of a gnosticizing tendency. In other words, the situation is remarkably parallel to that which we postulated for Jude and 2 Peter."⁴

¹ Hodges remarks: "It would be hard to find four books anywhere in Greek literature that exhibit a style more likely to stem from one mind than does the style of the Gospel and the epistles. Even the English reader can detect this, but in Greek the impression of a single writer is overwhelming. This being the case, the strong support given by ancient tradition to authorship by John the son of Zebedee for both the Gospel and the epistles should be seen, not as two sets of evidence but as a single voice" in Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistles of John* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 21.

² This is the conclusion of Hodges, *ibid.*, 23, and John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1976), 289.

³ *Ibid.*, 307 and Hodges, *Epistles of John*, 26.

⁴ Robinson, *Redating*, 285. Hodges basically concurs with this (Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistles of John* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 21): "I believe that First, Second, and Third John were all written from Jerusalem and sent out for delivery by someone headed for the province of Asia, probably Demetrius (3 John 12). First John was a circular letter . . . and was intended to be passed around the circuit of churches for which John felt special responsibility, perhaps the seven churches of Asia . . .

Second John is a cover letter intended for one of these churches, probably Ephesus, with which John was well acquainted . . . Third John is a personal letter to Demetrius' hoped-for host, Gaius, who stands at the end of his journey."

Theme Statement

By maintaining a walk in and confession of the truth of the incarnation believers will receive a full reward.

Outline

- I. Salutation: John greets a church.1-3
 - A. He affectionately greets the church corporately and individually.....1-2
 - 1. He loves them in the truth.1
 - 2. They mutually abide in the truth.2
 - B. He assures the church of God’s blessing in truth and love.3
- II. Body: John exhorts the church to continue in the truth.4-11
 - A. They must walk in the truth by practicing love.....4-6
 - 1. Some of them were walking in the truth.....4
 - 2. All of them should keep the commandment of love.....5-6
 - B. They must abide in the truth by confessing the incarnation.7-11
 - 1. Deceivers had denied Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh.....7
 - 2. Believers were to guard against loss of reward.8-11
 - a. They are to abide in the doctrine of Christ.8-9
 - b. They are to reject those who deny the doctrine of Christ.10-11
- III. Farewell Greeting: John sends intentions and greetings.....12-13
 - A. He indicates his intention to visit them.12
 - B. He sends greetings from a sister church.13

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Theme Development

As in almost all letters of the New Testament, some doctrinal consideration comes into play. By far the most important doctrine is the person and work of Jesus Christ. Although the writer is pleased to find faithful believers, he is anxious to warn them about the ever present temptation to deny, in practice and concept, the truth of the incarnation. This short letter contains an admonition that in many ways sums up the whole New Testament.

I. Salutation: John greets a church (1-3).

Using “elder” as a term of affection rather than authority, John greets a church known to him. He expresses his love for the individual believers, born and sustained by the truth that is responsible for their mutual faith and life. He desires for them the continued blessing of grace, mercy, and peace from the Father who has loved them truly in the person of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

II. Body: John exhorts the church to continue in the truth (4-11).

As John's relationship with the church is on the basis of the truth, so his exhortation is to maintain their walk and confession of the truth. The practical living of the Christian life can never be divorced from doctrinal affirmation. These two aspects of Christianity are wonderfully fused in this short letter.

A. They must walk in the truth by practicing love (4-6).

John praises those whom he has found to be living the truth by practicing the commandment of love, a theme that is prominent in both the Gospel and the First Epistle. Love observes the commandments given by the Lord Jesus. Love, thus conceived, serves to prove and experience God's presence, as well as to demonstrate to the world that the believer rightfully belongs to Christ as His disciple (cf. John 13:35; 14:21; 1 John 4:7-11).

B. They must abide in the truth by confessing the incarnation (7-11).

The love of which John speaks is not something that can be performed apart from adherence to the doctrine of Christ. He is the definition of love itself, as well as its source and supernatural enablement. Deceivers have gone about rejecting the truth of the incarnation, thereby invalidating the true demonstration of the Father's love in sending His Son into the world for its redemption (cf. John 3:16). Believers must not be swayed by this if they want to come into the full possession of their proffered reward (8). They must maintain clarity about this in their own thinking (9) and separation from those who promote its denial (10-11).

III. Farewell Greeting: The elder sends intentions and greetings (12-13).

John has many things to write to them, but intends to tell them in person. He sends greetings from a sister church.

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