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B0431 -- August 1, 2004 -- 2 John 1-3 -- Salutation

INTRODUCTORY MATERIAL

Importance and Purpose

This epistle is often overlooked by Christians because of its brevity. Such a short book must not contain much useful information for the Christian life. But a closer look results in a different point of view. 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John have been called, “one-eyed John,” “two-eyed John,” and “three-eyed John” by some, because each book looks at a related theme from a different eye (i.e., perspective). 1 John is about “Walking in the Light of God’s Love.” 2 John is about “Protecting the Truth by Rejecting Error.” And 3 John is about “Upholding the Truth by Supporting its Representatives.” The relationship between 1 John and 2 John is similar to that of a physically ill patient, whom the doctor prescribes the taking of two pills, one large and one small, to cure his illness. Oftentimes, it is assumed that the large pill must be the more important of the two. Certainly, if we were limited to taking just one pill, we would take the larger pill (any woman who has been prescribed prenatal vitamins knows what I’m talking about). But oftentimes we find out that the really potent pill is the small one and we should rather take the small pill over the large if one or the other is the issue (which is often the case with pregnant women experiencing morning sickness). Such is the case with 1 John and 2 John. Both are important, but 2 John is “essential for getting a proper perspective for the first epistle and avoiding a perverted viewpoint” (McGee). A major theme of 1 John is “love” but the boundaries of “love” are laid out in 2 John where the theme is “truth”. Thus, a balanced view of 1st and 2nd John posits that we are to love other believers *within* the sphere of truth. We are not to “love” (*agapao*) those who carry heretical teachings, because they are outside the sphere of “truth”. Regardless of what 21st century ecumenism says, truth is always, without exception, a higher priority than unity or love. Nothing supersedes “truth”!

Author

The authorship has traditionally been assigned to John the Apostle, but the author never mentions his name in the epistle. He only calls himself *the elder* (v. 1). The word translated *elder* is *presbuteros* and originally meant an older man in the community. It later came to

be an office, first in Judaism and later in Christianity. In this case the author is addressing his recipients as a grandfather would address his grandchildren. Three things are clear: *first*, the recipients must have known the author well enough that they would know who *the elder* referred to, *second*, the author was mature in the Christian faith, and *three*, the author was acting in an official capacity as an elder. In light of the similar writing style of 1st and 2nd John there is no firm reason to quarrel with the traditional view that John the Apostle authored, in his own hand (cf. v. 12), this small, but potent epistle.

Recipients

The letter is written to *the elect lady and her children*. This phrase has been taken in three ways. *First*, some say that the Greek words *eklekte kuria* are a metaphor for the Christian church. Since the Church is elsewhere called “the bride of Christ” (Rev. 19, 21) and is referenced in the feminine (Eph. 5) they argue that “the elect lady” is a reference to the “universal church”. *Second*, others say the phrase is actually the name of a specific woman; 1) *eklekte*, 2) *kuria*, or 3) *eklekte kuria*. *Third*, some say it is simply a reference to a specific unnamed lady who is elect of God. This last choice seems to be the most obvious one and most consistent with the grammar. The fact that she goes unnamed is explained by the fact that John was keeping her identity protected if the letter was intercepted by Roman authorities. Notice that the author himself did not reveal his name either. He wanted to protect his recipients and himself, all the while using terminology clear enough to reveal who he was (i.e., the elder) and who his recipients were to those who were the initiated. The fact that the lady and her children are mentioned but not a husband probably implies that she was a widow. However, this controversial phrase is understood there is no doubt that the principles of this letter are applicable to the “universal church” but the facts of the immediate context seem to indicate that John is referring to a specific unnamed “elect lady” that he knows. Nevertheless, it is clear from the letter that this lady is elect and that it is her home where the church met.

The other question about the recipients is where are they located? Because John wrote the letters to the 7 churches of Asia Minor those churches immediately spring to mind. However, because John was the pastor of the Church in Ephesus for many years it is possible that this letter is written to the church in Ephesus. This cannot be proven though. It is probable that the letter was sent at the same time 1 John was sent and dropped off at a specific church on the way.

Date

It is very difficult to determine the date of this epistle from the internal evidence and there is not any external evidence for a particular date. I have seen dates proposed in the range from 62AD to 96AD. Those who claim a late date, suppose that John was on the island of

Patmos, having been banished by Emperor Domitian, and wrote it about the same time he wrote Revelation. Those who claim an early 60's date claim that the situation presupposed in 2nd John is similar to the situation that lies behind 1 John and therefore should be dated near each other. Since 1 John is dated in the early 60's then so is 2nd John (Hodges, BKC). Taking the internal evidence, especially 1 John 2:18-19 and the recipients and situation at face value, it seems that either solution is plausible. If the book is late then it may have been written while John was on the isle of Patmos after having been visited by the children of the "elect lady". If the book is early, which a comparison of the 1st and 2nd John suggests, then the book may have been written while John was acting as an itinerant minister and came into contact with the children of the "elect lady" sometime before he was imprisoned on the island of Patmos. The weight of the evidence favors an early 60's date just like 1st John.

Background

The situation is that John the Apostle met some of the children of the "elect lady" (v. 1). He apparently spent some time with these youngsters as they filled John in on what was happening back at their home where a local church gathered. In light of John's frustration with seeing many children from that Christian community walking like the world he was pleasantly surprised to find these children walking in truth (v. 4). This pleasant surprise stimulated John to write this letter to their mother, the "elect lady" of vs. 1. Apparently, this home was a very hospitable home, entertaining any who claimed to be "Christian". The children must have related some basic problems due to people coming into their home, namely, some were coming into their home claiming to be "Christian" yet teaching that "Jesus Christ did not come in the flesh" (v. 7). These seem to be the same group who we looked at in 1 John, a group of false teachers who we are calling "Revisionists" (1 John 2:18-19). So, the question the children are posing to John is this: "Which is more important John, love or truth?" Should we love those who teach that Jesus Christ did not come in the flesh? Should we let them in our homes? Should we send them off with a farewell? These are not new questions as many Christians might think. It is true that the ecumenical tide of main stream Christianity today is compromising and diluting doctrinal boundaries, therefore bringing to the fore the importance of John's 2nd epistle. But it is equally true that these questions have plagued the church in every generation. Too often it is assumed that the early church was without problems and that we need to get back to the NT church. No doubt we need to get back to the doctrinal guidelines taught in the NT, but as 2nd John illustrates there was a major problem with heretical teachings coming into the church. What should be our response? Should we put aside truth in favor of loving others, even if they are false teachers? Which is more important, love or truth? John writes this letter with the purpose of answering these important questions. For those of you here who are younger

folk I ask for your particular attentiveness to this letter due to the fact that it was young people who relayed the problems to John. Apparently, these young people were attentive enough and discerning enough to distinguish between true and false doctrine. Further, they were bold enough to say something about it and you should be too. The letter has three major parts; a salutation (vv. 1-3), two exhortations (vv. 4-11), and a farewell (vv. 12-13).

Outline

- I. Salutation (1-3)
- II. Exhortation (4-11)
 - A. Loving in the Sphere of Truth (4-6)
 - B. Abiding in the Teaching of Christ (7-11)
- III. Farewell (12-13)

COMMENTARY

I. Salutation (1-3)

1 *The elder to the elect lady and her children, who I love in truth, and not I only but also all who know the truth,*

1 ~O presbu,teroj evklekth/| kuri,a| kai. toi/j te,knoj auvth/j(ou]j evgw. avgapw/ evn avlhqei,a|(kai. ouvkw evgw. mo,noj avlla. kai. pa,ntej oi` evgnwko,tej th.n avlh,qeian(

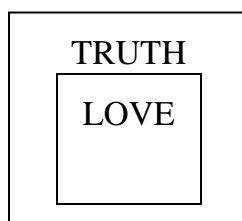
The author of the letter calls himself *the elder*. It comes from the Greek word *presbuteros*, from which we get the English word “Presbytery” (e.g. Presbyterian Church). *Elder* has two basic meanings. First, it can refer to an older man in the community. Second, it was an office in Judaism (Matt. 16:21). Members of the Sanhedrin were called *elders*. It was not a new office introduced with Christianity but an old office carried over from Judaism into Christianity (1 Tim. 5:17, 19). The Greek has at least two words for *elder*; *presbuteros* (elder), and *episkopos* (overseer). The words certainly refer to the same office (Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7) but there are slight nuances in their meaning. *Presbuteros* emphasizes the dignity and respect, *episkopos* emphasizes the function of watching over the flock (*epi* = over and *skopos* = to watch). What is clear is that the recipients of the letter knew the author very well, the author was mature in the Christian faith, and he was acting in an official capacity as an elder. It is accepted that “the elder” is John the Apostle.

The letter is written to *the elect lady and her children*. This phrase has been taken in three ways. *First*, some say that the Greek words *eklekte kuria* are a metaphor for the Christian church. Since the Church is elsewhere called “the bride of Christ” (Rev. 19, 21) and is

referenced in the feminine (Eph. 5) they argue that “the elect lady” is a reference to the “universal church”. *Second*, others say the phrase is actually the name of a specific woman; 1) *eklekte*, 2) *kuria*, or 3) *eklekte kuria*. *Third*, some say it is simply a reference to a specific unnamed lady who is elect of God. This last choice seems to be the most obvious one and most consistent with the grammar. The fact that she is called *elect* recalls the truth Paul set forth in Ephesians 1:4 where God chose believers before the foundation of the world. The fact that she goes unnamed is explained by the fact that John was keeping her identity protected if the letter was intercepted by Roman authorities. Notice that the author himself did not reveal his name either. He wanted to protect his recipients and himself, all the while using terminology clear enough to reveal who he was (i.e., the elder) and who his recipients were to those who were the initiated. The fact that the lady and her children are mentioned but not a husband probably implies that she was a widow. However, this controversial phrase is understood there is no doubt that the principles of this letter are applicable to the “universal church” but the facts of the immediate context seem to indicate that John is referring to a specific unnamed “elect lady” that he knows. Nevertheless, it is clear from the letter that this lady is elect and that it is her home where the church met, perhaps in Ephesus.

Since we understand *eklekte kuria* as a specific unnamed lady then the phrase *her children* refers to her natural children. If taken to refer to the Church at large then the phrase would refer to spiritual children. The fact that John mentions her children in the letter would be an encouragement to her children realizing that an apostle had enough humility to condescend and remember them in his address.

John’s attitude toward the “elect lady and her children” is expressed in the phrase, *who I love in truth*. The Greek used here is *agapao* and not *phileo*, *eros*, or *storge*. Remember, the Greek has four words for love. Only two are used in the NT (*agapao* and *phileo*). *Agapao* love is an affectionate love that desires the best for the other person. The best for another person is always whatever God’s will is for their lives; including both God’s general will (i.e., commandments for all believers) and God’s specific will (i.e., individual calling in life). In the NT it refers to an intelligent and discerning love unlike *phileo* love which can be understood as a sexual love. A man of John’s reputation would have been in big trouble if he had used the term *phileo*. However, no connotation of sexual love can be found in the term *agapao*. He loves them *in truth*, which is locative, emphasizing the sphere which this love is operating. The love with which John loves her is in the sphere of truth.



And not only I but also all who know the truth. Here John makes reference to other believers who know about this local church. All believers who really know the truth love them because they love to hear about their advancement in the Christian life and the trials that they will overcome in dealing with the false teachers. This love transcends all barriers because all believers have this love being wrought within them by the same Holy Spirit. This may explain the immediate connection a believer supernaturally has with other believers whom he has never met before. It's not so much the natural personality of the individual(s) which forms the connection, but the supernatural indwelling Spirit which makes the connection. The translation of the word *know* is in the present tense but the Greek word is in the perfect tense and the perfect tense indicates a past completed action that is having present results. This refers to those who we looked at in 1 John 2:3-11, the believers who have advanced beyond fellowship and have moved into discipleship. These Christians have heard the commandments, guarded the commandments and have therefore come to know God in a deeper way. They are advanced Christians. Advanced Christians enjoy hearing about other Christians who are advancing in the *truth* and all who *know the truth* make fresh each day the commandment to "love one another" as Jesus loved His apostles (John 13:34). Because they are advanced and know the truth, they love the elect lady and her children. So, the idea is that those who love her became believers sometime in the past and that they are now increasing their knowledge of the truth through discipleship and we know this because of their display of love (cf. 1 John 2:3-6).

2 because of the truth which is abiding in us, and with us shall be into the age.

2 dia. th.n avlh,qeian th.n me,nousan evn h`mi/n kai. meqV h`mw/n e;stai eivj to.n aivw/na

John and fellow believers in Christ love her *because of the truth*. This is a purpose clause giving the reason behind their love toward this lady and the believers there. The reason is simply *because of the truth which is abiding in us*. Christian love is more than mere sentimentality. It is much more than a humanistic love where we love mankind. Christian love is never separated from a love for truth. You can never love another believer apart from truth. Remember, *agapao* love is wanting God's general and specific will for another's life. God's general will is found in the commandments of God. God's specific will is His calling for your individual life. I may not know God's specific will for your life but I always know that if I instruct you in the general will of God for your life, that is, the

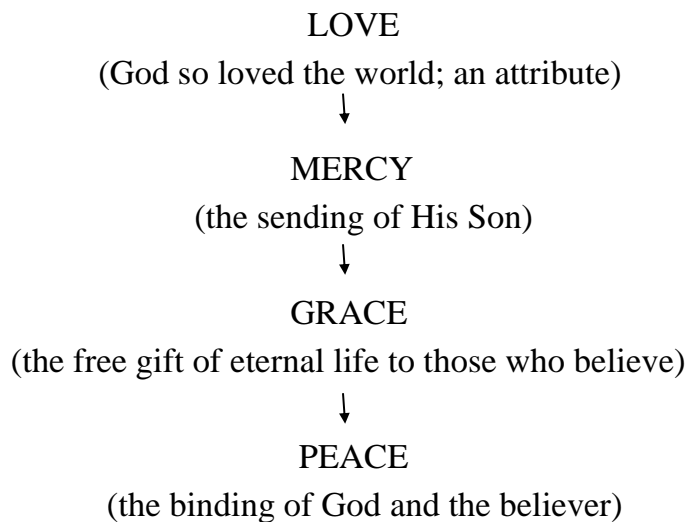
commandments of God for all believers, that if you follow them you will be in God's general will. I will be loving you with a true Christian love (*agapao*). John says this truth is *abiding in us*. The Greek word for *abiding* is John's favorite word *meno*. *Meno* carries the picture of one living as a guest in the home of another. Therefore, what John means is that the truth is living as a guest within these Christians. The truth is richly dwelling within them. This of course presupposes a steady doctrinal intake of the word of God so that believers are able to guard the commandments of God and "love" in the sphere of "truth". Knowledge of the word of God always precedes application of the word of God. How long will the truth remain? This is a stunning statement when you think of the fact that this was written over 1,900 years ago! Doubtless the cult that came against John's readers in the 1st century has passed away along with many others and yet the truth of Christianity remains. Voltaire and Thomas Paine are just a few who claimed that Christianity was a dying religion and that it would soon disappear. Nevertheless, it is still prevalent today on all 7 continents. The *truth will be with us forever*. Literally, the *truth will be with us into the age*. The truth of the word of God will remain through all of human history and into eternity. The Bible is not an ordinary book that just sits alongside other books. It is a living and active book. The author of Hebrews says it this way, "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." There is something about the Bible that is absolutely unique. When you read it, you are hearing the very words of God. In the Book of Hebrews, we have the continual present tense of God says. What this ultimately means is that when you read the words off the page God is speaking them. That is a very high view of the Bible, a very high view of the inspiration of Scripture, the inerrancy of Scripture, the infallibility of Scripture, and the authority of Scripture. We take the Bible as the sole authority for all areas of life, both scientific and spiritual. The Bible is an absolute authority that does not have to pass the judgment of autonomous man. It is true whether one agrees with its teachings or not. One's response to the Bible's claims of inerrancy are more of a commentary on the man than the God or the Bible.

3 Grace, mercy, peace shall be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son, in truth and love.

3 e;stai meqV h`mw/n ca,rij e;leoj eivrh,nh para. qeou/ patro.j kai. para. VIhsou/ Cristou/ tou/ ui`ou/ tou/ patro.j evn avlhqei,a| kai. avga,ph|

While the author, recipients, and destination are not totally clear in this epistle the greeting certainly is. Here in v. 3 John uses a common ancient greeting. *Grace* (*charis*) refers to God's unmerited favor. Wuest says grace is "a favor conferred freely, with no expectation of return, and finding its only motive in the bounty and free-heartedness of the giver". It points to that which God is free to express toward fallen creatures because justice was met

in the pouring out of His wrath on His own Son at the Cross. *Mercy* (*eleos*) is God's "kindness and good-will toward the miserable and afflicted, joined with a desire to relieve them" (Vincent). The relationship between Grace and Mercy is this: Mercy must precede Grace, but Love must precede them all. Salvation finds its source in God's love. Love is an attribute of God, while mercy and grace are not formally attributes, but rather expressions of God's attribute of love. Thus, if we were to see the relationship between these words, we might look to John 3:16. *For God so loved the world* points to God's attribute of love toward all that He created, that he *gave His only Son* is God's love expressing itself in the form of mercy; a kindness toward fallen creatures coupled with a desire to relieve them through His only Son. *that whoever believes* is God's love expressing itself in the form of grace because salvation is free. The end product for those who believe is *peace*. Peace is the Greek word *eirene*. The root of this word means "to bind together". Its opposite is *polemos* which means "armed conflict". We were once in armed conflict against God. However, now we are bound together with God. Wuest says, "Thus, our Lord made peace through the blood of His Cross when He made it possible for a holy God in perfect justice and holiness to bind them together a believing sinner and Himself in an indissoluble living union".



There is no doubt that John includes our external circumstances in the word *peace*. However, we know that not every circumstance of our lives will be peaceful. Nevertheless, peace is always available internally. Jesus said in John 16:33 "*These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.*" What may not be ours outwardly in the world can be ours internally as we abide in Him. This grace, mercy, and peace *shall be with us*, a future tense indicating that it will remain with us even in the future. This is a prophetic utterance regarding the extent of the grace, mercy, and peace. They do not stop at the cross. The effects extend beyond the moment of salvation and our temporal lives, stretching into the ages to come. This grace, mercy, and peace come *from God the Father and from Jesus*

Christ the Father's Son. John chose a construction unique to the NT in describing the source of the grace, mercy, and peace. The Revisionists were denying that Jesus Christ came in the flesh, thus, they were denying that God could materialize. The Revisionists thought that material was inherently evil. John here affirms that the Father and the Son were of the same substance. They were equal in substance but Christ subordinated Himself to the Father. John makes this clear by choosing to use the preposition *para* with both the Father and Jesus Christ rather than *apo*. The emphasis is therefore on the personal source. The idea is that grace, mercy, and peace *proceed* from both the Father and the Son. In John's writings the Father and the Son are so closely intertwined it is often difficult to determine who he is referring to (e.g., 1 John 1:4). From John's perspective to know the Son is to know the Father, to have the Son is to have the Father. There is no doubt that John is drawing out the fact of the deity of Christ; and not only that but also the humanity of Christ. Because Jesus Christ is true humanity he can identify with man and man's weaknesses (Heb. 4:15); because Jesus Christ is equally God he can identify with God (John 10:30). He is God's own Son, making Him equal with the Father for He is the Father's heir. Because Jesus Christ is God His sacrifice has infinite value, value enough to pay for the sins of all mankind and infinitely more (Eph. 1:7). The sphere of this grace, mercy, and peace which originates in the personal source of God the Father and Jesus Christ is ***in truth and love***. Notice the sequence is ***truth*** preceding ***love*** (also see 1 John 3:23; 4:21). "Those who think in our day that **truth** can be comfortably downplayed in the interests of mutual **love**, do not share the New Testament point of view." When love is divorced from truth then we are left with little more than selfish desires, sentimentalism, and humanism. If I truly love others then I will want them to know God's truth and to live according to it. Only in the boundaries of truth will they ever know God's grace, mercy, and peace.

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