

New Testament Epistles: 2nd & 3rd John

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

2nd John 3

1. **Historical Context/Occasion:** The three Epistles together – 1-3 John – form a triad or trio of letters; and although each letter is different they also share a common purpose and similar language. 1 John is a general letter. 2 John is somewhat like a cover letter for 3 John, which is in the form of a personal letter. All three were meant to be read aloud and written for a common purpose. John's common purpose in writing these three epistles is for his hearers to continue alongside John with his life-long work, the truth of the proclamation of Christ. John continues to lead his hearers (then and now) back to the firm foundation of the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ over and against all heresies, sects, or false teachers who would lead Christians astray from the truth of God's promises.

For summary purposes, 2nd and 3rd John are outlined apart from 1st John. However, after the three epistles were completed, they were intended to be read and heard as a whole in circular fashion among the churches of Asia Minor. Like a rolling snowball John's epistles build on one another. 2nd John builds on and refers to 1st John. 3rd John, in turn, builds on and refers to 1st and 2nd John.

2nd John: John "The Elder" or presbyter, writes to an unnamed congregation, in Asia Minor. John compares or likens the congregation to a lady and her children or to the woman in whose house the congregation met (1,4). The Scriptures repeatedly use the image or symbolism of the Bride for the Church/God's people. They are the Bride of Christ. Within this particular congregation many members had been led astray by the heretics (4,7). The heretics' chief error was their denial of the humanity of Jesus (7). 2nd John is also framed by the reference to "the elect lady" and her children,

3rd John: The elder John had written a letter to a certain unnamed church, but its leader Diotrephes had refused to allow it to be read (9). John sent a deputation but this man refused to welcome the deputation, going so far as to excommunicate those who did (10). Gaius did offer them hospitality (3-6) and so, John writes to commend him for this.

2. Key Words in 2nd and 3rd John:

- a. **The Elder** – a title only found in 2nd and 3rd John, which John uses to designate the letters as ecclesiastical. It is a title that reflects his apostolic authority from Jesus as well as the office he inhabits as an apostle.
- b. **The Elect Lady and her children** – John's way of speaking of the Church, the elect lady, and her children, that is, believers in Christ in the various congregations he was writing these letters to in a circular fashion.
- c. **Elect Sisters** – John's way of referring to the sister congregations where the believers, or her children, gather.
- d. **Truth and Love** – John uses these words as key theological realities in all of his writings. Where the truth and love of Christ abides, so too, does his peace, grace, and blessing. Truth and love also go together; you cannot have one without the other. And where one is lacking, the other will be lacking as well.

- e. **The World** – in Greek, the *kosmos*; John’s word for the sinful fallen world that sets itself against God; the realm of darkness that is in rebellion and warfare against God.
 - f. **Antichrist** – John uses this title for the one in John’s day who refuses Christ
 - g. **Beloved** – John addresses fellow Christians with this title/name which reflects that they are beloved, loved by Christ. Same root word as the Greek word for unconditional love: *agape*.
3. **Date:** Similar to 1 John, sometime between A.D. 70-100 broadly speaking, A.D. 85-95 more narrowly.
 4. **Author:** John the apostle, evangelist, “The Elder”
 5. **Primary Theme:** The truth and love that abides in God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – now abides in the lives of His baptized believers who walk in truth and love by His grace.
 6. **Purpose(s):**
 - a. **2nd John:**
 - i. To urge those who remained faithful to love each other (5-6)
 - ii. To warn against receiving the heretics (10-11)
 - iii. To announce his impending visit (12)
 - b. **3rd John:**
 - i. To recommend Demetrius as a man of integrity in the congregation (12)
 - ii. To announce his impending visit (13-14)
 7. **Theological Themes:**
 - a. **2nd John:** Walking in truth and in love (4-6); Remaining in the teaching of Christ (9-11)
 - b. **3rd John:** Walking in the truth (3-4)
 8. **Outline/Structure:**
 - a. **2nd John:**
 - i. Greeting (1-3)
 - ii. The commandment to love (4-6)
 - iii. The avoidance of heretics (7-11)
 - iv. John’s announcement of his visit (12-13)
 - b. **3rd John:**
 - i. Greeting (1-2)
 - ii. Praise for Gaius for his hospitality (3-8)
 - iii. Explanation about Diotrephes (9-10)
 - iv. Commendation of Demetrius as a leader (11-12)
 - v. Announcement of visit (13-15)
 9. **Key Passages:**
 - a. 2 John 1-3
 - b. 2 John 4-9
 - c. 3 John 4
 - d. 3 John 5-7
 10. **Liturgical Use:** 2nd and 3rd John are not used in the Sunday lectionaries.