

An Attempt To Listen To God

A Survey of The Second Epistle of John

By

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The Author

The writer to the second and third epistles describes himself as “the elder”. Paul gave his name at the beginning of his epistles (Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1 etc.). Peter does the same (1 Pet. 1:1; 2 Pet. 1:1) as does Jude (Jude 1:1) and James (Jam. 1:1). However, with the exception of the Revelation where he clearly names himself (Rev. 1:1, 4, 9; 22:8), John always is in obscurity, referring to himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (Jn. 21:20); “the elder” (2 Jn. 1:1; 3 Jn. 1:1) something which Peter also does (1 Pet. 5:1); “This is the disciple which testified of these things” (Jn. 21:24). Thus, it is not to be wondered at if in his epistles anonymity is a characteristic. As far as higher criticism goes, I am quite happy to ignore it and accept the fact that my God is bigger than man, and He would not have allowed books which defend the truth to have a false writer. Among the early church fathers the following attributed this epistle to John, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Cyprian.

Why The Book Was Written

In the consideration of any book, whether secular or sacred, there is a fundamental question which connects all. It is: “Why was it written?” Was it to record a sacred history as Chronicles were? or to develop the doctrine of salvation as Romans was? Exactly why was 2nd John written?

In reading it there are several reasons:

- 1) As an encouragement (v.1-2) on two levels:
 - a) To know that the elect lady is loved in the truth. (v.1)
 - b) That the truth shall be with us forever, in other words, there is no new truth. (v.2)
- 2) As an exhortation, again on two levels:
 - a) That we love one another (v.5)
 - b) That in love, we keep the divine commandments (v.6)
- 3) As a warning, again on two levels:
 - a) Against deceivers who have entered into the world (v.7)
 - b) To be on guard lest the reward is lost (v.8)
- 4) Concerning false teachers on two levels:
 - a) As the way to recognize false teachers (v.9)
 - b) Avoid them (v.10-11)

Of these reasons, the major focus is the spiritual development of the saints through staying in the truth. It is not the whole body of truth, but the particular truth which was being attacked was “the doctrine that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh” (v.7). The denial of the incarnation and permanent humanity of the Lord had been clearly established in earlier years, therefore, this was not backsliding but apostasy. To deny the Man Jesus was God incarnate the Christ, is to deny His sinless life, His vicarious death, His bodily resurrection, His ascension and glorification, and His coming again. Furthermore, this was not just an academic piece of theology, but it meant having or not having eternal life.

The tense of the word “come” is different from 1 Jn. 4:2 & 3, and 1 Jn. 5:20. Those references indicate there was a point of time when He came. This points to the fact He not only became flesh but that “flesh” is permanent. He will forever be the man Christ Jesus. Secondly, there is the denial that the Christ is a real man. These are truths which are being rejected today, for instance:

- 1) Divine life Society: “Remember that Christ is not a person, its an experience.” (Satchinananda speaks p. 47-48; June 17 1975)
- 2) Jehovah’s witnesses: “There is scriptural evidence for concluding that Michael was the name of Jesus before he left heaven and after his return.” (WT 15th Dec. 1984 p. 29)
- 3) Christadelphians: “Jesus Christ did not exist as a person before eternity as one of the true Godhead” (Christadelphians Messenger No. 46, p.3)
- 4) Oneness Pentecostals: “The son of God existed from all eternity only as a plan in the mind of God” (The oneness of God. D. Bernard p. 295)
- 5) Christian science: Christ is a Divine Idea and his blood doesn't cleanse us.
- 6) Mormons: Jesus was born in heaven as the spirit child of Elohim (Heavenly Father) by one of his wives, and Jesus' brother was Lucifer, who became Satan. Jesus is one of many gods.

The other major reason for the writing of the book is because, since woman is the “weaker vessel” (1 Pet. 3:7), and like Eve, having the possibility of being deceived (1 Tim. 2:14) (this is not to say the man cannot be deceived, for it is men who are called deceivers in this book [v. 10-11], note the masculine pronouns), the apostle writes to not only tell her who not to receive into her home but also why (v.10-11).

We all can be naive. Satan is the master in subtlety, consequently can be taken in by profession and works. Let us not lose sight that Judas preached and did miracles (Lk. 10:19-20), he was entrusted with the bag (Jn. 12:6), and to all outward appearances was a genuine disciple. John is put in the position of guiding her in this regard. Therein lies a delicate situation, for the response could have been:

- 1) “Who is he to tell me what I can do in my own home?”
- 2) “Does he not think I have enough spiritual discernment to know what to ask a visitor?”

One could easily go in the huffs, so John will envelop his warning in expressions of love (vv. 1, 3, 5, 6). John must warn her that the reward is not lost (v.8). There is a diversity of opinion as to whether verse eight should read “we lose not” or “ye lose not”, “ye receive a full reward” or “we receive a full reward”. I understand the “we” to be the apostles. The reason for this is every translation I am aware of, has “those things which we have wrought”. John had the same thought when he wrote: “When He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him” (1 Jn. 2:28). If the lady fell spiritually, would it have been because John did not teach the truth clearly enough? Was it not presented with enough solemnity? If so, then he would indeed lose his reward. Sadly, it is obvious some of her children were not walking in the truth. Had they been deceived by the false teachers she had entertained?

To Whom The Book Was Written

Herein lies an exceedingly controversial question:

- 1) “Was this a real lady or was it the church portrayed as a lady?”
- 2) “Was it a pseudonym (fictitious name) for a “secret” servant of the Lord?”

The question of who this lady was is not disclosed, and very possibly it was because of persecution. There are missionaries today in some “special areas” where there could be severe opposition, therefore, we are not told exactly where they are. I can see no reason why it cannot be accepted that it was written to a married lady who had children (v.4) and a sister who also had children (v.13). Interestingly, there is no mention of a husband, and therefore it must be concluded that either he was dead, or being an unsaved man, had no interest in the things of God.

This lady was like Lydia or like Gaius who had homes that were big enough to accommodate visitors (2 Jn. 1:10 & 3 Jn. 1:6).

Some have suggested this was Martha who seemed to be the owner of the house at Bethany (Lk. 10:38), and Bengel says “Cyria” answers to Martha in Hebrew. If such were the case, then the sister (v.13) would be Mary. However, the scriptures say nothing about such an idea.

Keys

- 1) Key words:
 - a) “Love” occurs four times “agapao” in vv. 1 and 5; and “agape” in verses 3 and 6.
 - b) “Truth” occurs five times in four verses, vv.1, 2, 3, 4.
- 2) Key concepts:
 - a) Those who deny the truth must be rejected.
 - b) There is the repetition of words and phrases between John’s three epistles.

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The two main reoccurring thoughts of “truth” and “love” create a beautiful balance, for love without truth is emotionalism, and truth without love is coldness. Love does not always give but assesses the situation by truth. Thus, Paul will write: “Let love be without dissimulation (sincere, without hypocrisy). Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another” (Rom. 12:9-10). The problem with Ephesus was they were all truth but no love (Rev. 2:2-4), and Thyatira was all love but no truth (Rev. 2:19-20). The teaching is there must be love regarding principles and persons. Consequently, love of divine truth will cause us to hate error, and while we can love the individual who is teaching error, there can be no love for his teachings. Such a person must not be allowed into the home as being accepted as a genuine believer. Fellowship with those who do not hold the truth is a lack of love for the truth.

Word	1 John	2nd John	3rd John
Love	32	4	1
Truth	10	5	5
Commandment	7	3	0
Deceiver	0	2	0
Antichrist	3	1	0
Abideth	8	1	0

What is the truth?

To my understanding “truth” has three contexts in this book:

- 1) It indicates the body of Christian teaching, especially relative to Christ as in vv. 1 and 4
- 2) For possibly Christ Himself or the Holy Spirit (v.2)
- 3) And for fidelity of assurance (v.4)

Peculiarities

- 1) The word “mercy” only occurs here in John’s writings (v. 3).
- 2) Neither 2nd or 3rd John have any Old Testament allusions or references.

Relationship With Other New Testament Books

In the notes on 3rd John there will be further data on the relationships between John’s writings and other New Testament books. There are a few other relationships I want to observe:

- 1) A contrast between John’s epistles and Jude
 - a) 1 John Authentication (ch. 4:1)
 - b) 2 John Investigation (v. 8)
 - c) 3 John Continuation (6)
 - d) Jude Determination (v. 20)

2) A contrast between 2nd John and Jude

Book	Characteristic
Jude	There are evil teachers, and one way they get into the assembly is by stealth (Jude 1:4) "crept in unawares"
2nd John	Shows one of the ways they get into the assembly, by the homes. (v.10-11)

**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.
John 16:13**

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