

2 John

John's first epistle was written to a group of believers in danger of following false teachers. His second letter is addressed to a lady and her children who are undergoing similar temptations. John goes straight to the point: "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house, nor greet him" (verse 10). Though John commends love as a necessary ingredient of the Christian life, it must not sentimentally embrace those who willfully seek to destroy the truth. To do so is to diminish the proper love which Christians must have for one another. John's warning is stern, but he knows a letter is not the best place to elaborate. He promises to deal more fully with the problem when he makes a personal visit.

INTRODUCTION

"Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12). These words of the apostle Paul could be a subtitle for John's second epistle. The recipients, an "elect lady and her children," were obviously "standing." They were walking in truth, remaining faithful to the commandments they had received. John is deeply pleased to be able to commend them. But he takes nothing for granted. Realizing that standing is just one bad step removed from falling, he issues a reminder to love one another. The apostle admits that this is not new revelation, but he views it as important enough to repeat. Loving one another, he stresses, is equivalent to walking according to God's commandments.

John indicates, however, that this love must be discerning. It is not a naive, unthinking, "open to anything and anyone" kind of love. Biblical love is a matter of choice; it is dangerous and foolish to float through life with undiscerning love. False teachers abound who do not acknowledge Christ as having come in the flesh. The "elect lady" is to guard herself against this teaching, since those who believe it have a "God-void" in their lives; they do not belong to Him. John even warns her not to receive into her house anyone who rejects the teaching of Christ, which she had previously learned. It is false charity to open the door to false teaching. We must have fellowship with God. We must have fellowship with Christians. But we must not have fellowship with false teachers.

AUTHOR

The similarity of style, vocabulary, structure, and mood between 2 and 3 John makes it clear that these letters were written by the same author. In addition, both (especially 2 John) bear strong resemblances to 1 John and to the fourth Gospel. Thus, the external and internal evidence lends clear support to the traditional view that these epistles were written by the apostle John.

The "elder" of verse 1 has been traditionally identified with the apostle John, resulting in the Greek title *Ioannou B.* "Second of John."

DATE & SETTING

The identification of the original readers of this epistle is difficult because of disagreement regarding the interpretation of "the elect lady and her children" (verse 1). Some scholars believe the address should be taken literally to refer to a specific woman and her children, while others prefer to take it as a figurative description of a local church.

The evidence is insufficient for a decisive conclusion, but in either case, the readers were well known to John and probably lived in the province of Asia, not far from Ephesus. If the

figurative view is taken, “the children of your elect sister,” (verse 13) refers to the members of a sister church.

In his first epistle, John wrote that several false teachers had split away from the church (“They went out from us, but they were not of us,” 1 John 2:19). Some of these became traveling teachers who depended on the hospitality of individuals while they sought to infiltrate churches with their teachings.

Judging by the content and circumstances of 2 John, it was evidently contemporaneous with 1 John or was written slightly later. It was probably written about A.D. 90. All three of John’s epistles were most likely written in Ephesus.