

An In-Depth Study of the Second and Third Letters of Apostle John

2 John 1-3 [NIV] *“The elder, To the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in the truth, and not I only, but also all who know the truth, because of the truth, which lives in us and will be with us for ever: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father’s Son, will be with us in truth and love.”*

The Greek word translated **“elder”** is *“prēsbūtērōs”* literally means **elderly or seniority of age**.

In the Jewish culture age was treated with great respect because of years of personal experience. This letter was written around AD90 making the apostle John an old man and perhaps the only surviving apostle at the time. As an eyewitness of the life of Jesus Christ, John wrote authoritatively to give this new generation of believers assurance and confidence in the Creator God and in their faith.

All three letters written by the apostle John are written in a gracious and loving manner to correct people whom this aged saint loved dearly.

Written by a man whom all who met or knew of him loved and had great respect.

We need to approach these letters with the same respect and love.

“The chosen lady and her children” the Greek words translated are *“ēklēktōs”* *“kuria.”* This is sometimes singular but also plural.

[Singular verses **4, 5** and **13** – plural verses **6, 8, 10** and **12**] This makes it almost impossible that an individual is being addressed.

The logical conclusion is that it is the church that is being referred to.

1 Peter 5:13 [King James] *“The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Marcus my son.”*

The expression is used here but notice that the words *“church that is”* are in italics, which means they are **not** in the Greek but have been supplied in translation to fill out the sense.

The Greek literally reads *“the Elect One at Babylon”* and the elect one is feminine.

There is no doubt the phrase is referring to the Church so we need to apply the same meaning in the letters of the apostle John.

The idea goes back to the Church being the bride of Jesus Christ. [Revelation 19:7-9]

The greeting is for the Church and all who are being *“born again”* through accepting the gospel message, the *“truth”* that was revealed through Jesus Christ.

The second and third letters of the apostle John are important because they illuminate the problem that had arisen in the early Church.

2 John 4 [NIV] *“It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us.”*

John mentions some who are doing well in the church and by implication infers that there were others who were not so satisfactory.

2 John 5-6 [NIV] *“And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.”*

John reminds the Church of the original teaching of Jesus Christ that was essential for the Church to give a clear message to all who came in contact with them.

John 13:35 [NIV] *“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

Loving one another was proof of their discipleship.

1 John 4:19-21 [NIV] *“We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, “I love God,” yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.”*

This is what John was also reminding the members of the Church.

2 John 7-10 [NIV] *“Many deceivers, who do **not** acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does **not** have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does **not** bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him.”*

This is the problem that the apostle John was addressing. There was many itinerant teachers who were preaching a false and dangerous doctrine.

The apostle John is here exercising what is to him an unquestioned right, as “*elder*”, to issue orders to all the churches that would receive this letter.

John was seeking to guard against a situation in which false teachers could arrive in their fellowship at any moment.

2 John 11 [NIV] *“Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work.”*

John tells each Church to not give such false teachers the usual Christian hospitality.

2 John 12 [NIV] *“I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete.”*

The danger was so great that the apostle John in spite of his great age, desired to visit each church and warn them in person.

False teaching is very serious and dangerous to any Church fellowship and must not be overlooked.

Even today there are many false teachers trying to invade the true Christian church, this must **not** be taken lightly.

Instead the dangers of division and destruction of faith and fellowship should be actively opposed so that they may not get a foothold in any fellowship.

3 John 1-6 [King James] *“The elder unto the wellbeloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth. Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth. For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers; Which have borne witness of thy*

charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well:”

The letter was addressed to Gaius who was a fine example of a dedicated Christian serving the Church, and one who was looked up to as a leader.

Gaius had given Christian hospitality to travelling Christians, some of them were preachers who were unknown to Gaius. These people had mentioned in other churches what Gaius had done so he was widely known.

3 John 7-8 [NIV] *“It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth.”*

The hospitality that Gaius had offered such travellers had allowed them to avoid staying at inns that had a bad reputation.

These true travelling preachers must have meant a great deal to the spread of the Christian faith.

In the early Christian Church there was a threefold ministry.

1) The apostles – these were those who had accompanied with Jesus Christ and who had witnessed the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The apostles were undisputed leaders of the Church, and their ministry and authority was **not** confined to any one place.

The Greek word for “*apostle*” is “*apōstōlōs*” meaning a delegate or one who was sent.

Matthew 28:16-20 [NIV] *“Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

Jesus Christ sent the original apostles delegating to them a certain job to do on His behalf.

Acts 9:10-15 [NIV] *“In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!” “Yes, Lord,” he answered. The Lord told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.” “Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.” But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.”*

Paul was also an apostle with Jesus Christ gave a certain task with the authority to fulfil it.

Galatians 1:15-18 [NIV] *“But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus. Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days.”*

It was during these three years that Paul had with Jesus Christ, Jesus revealed to Saul [who was also named Paul, **Acts 13:9**] the specific job of taking the gospel message to the Gentiles [all non-Jews].

The word eventually embraced a wider meaning of all who were sent out from established Churches to spread the gospel message.

Acts 14:4, 14 [NIV] *“The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles.” ... “But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting:”*

Barnabas was also called an apostle.

1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2:6 [NIV] *“Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you.” ... “We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else. As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you,”*

Silas and Timothy listed as apostles.

Philippians 2:25 [NIV] *“But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow-worker and fellow-soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs.”*

Epaphroditus is referred to as their “messenger” but the Greek word is “*apōstōlōs*” for he had been sent by the Church at Philippi to assist Paul and Timothy.

2) Prophets – the Greek word is “*prōphētēs*” meaning a preacher inspired by the Holy Spirit with a message for all the congregations of Christians.

These inspired teachers were not attached to any one congregation. They were wandering preachers, going where the Holy Spirit led them, giving to congregations that which the Holy Spirit inspired them to give.

To fulfil this commission they had given up home, occupation, and the comfort and security of a settled life, to be wandering messengers of their Saviour Jesus Christ.

3) Elders –

Acts 14:23 [NIV] *“Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.”*

Elders were spiritual mature men and women who were assisting the spiritual growth of the people within a local Christian fellowship.

Elders work was confined to their congregation and were essential to the solidity and spiritual growth of their fellowship.

The problem that the apostles faced was the wandering prophets and preachers, their position was one that was open to abuse.

These preaches as a whole had enormous prestige due to their charismatic gifts, but such people, even undesirable characters, could enter into the local congregation and greatly influence it, with heretical teaching.

3 John 9-10 [NIV] *“I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church.”*

The apostle John reveals an even more serious problem was the misuse of leadership in a local congregation.

The person mentioned is Diotrephes who would have nothing to do with all wandering preachers and ejected from the fellowship anyone who gave them hospitality.

Diotrephes also rejected the authority of the apostle John, all this was causing cleavage in the Church as a whole.

The very existence of the Church is dependent on a strong and settled ministry, anything that upsets this is detrimental to individual maturity and the unity of any fellowship.

How the situation was resolved in this case is not recorded.

Today in the universal Christian Church we do **not** find wandering preachers nor do we have apostles as were in the early Church.

What we do see in these letters of the apostle John is that the organisation of the Church was already in a transition stage, ending as we see it today.

3 John 11-12 [NIV] *“Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God. Demetrius is well spoken of by everyone — and even by the truth itself. We also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true.”*

The apostle John goes out of his way in the letter to give Demetrius a testimonial as to his character and ability.

Demetrius is most likely a leader in the wandering preachers and could be the actual bearer of this letter to the Church.

3 John 13-14 [NIV] *“I have much to write to you, but I do not want to do so with pen and ink. I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. Peace to you. The friends here send their greetings. Greet the friends there by name.”*

It may be that the apostle John sent Demetrius to the Church to prepare the way for his own visit.

In John’s eyes Diotrephes was **not** a true Christian leader, for he lacked the compassion and gentleness that must be included in true strong Christian leadership, and **personal ambition must have no place in true Christian leadership.**

Diotrephes was so like many leaders in the Church and the Church congregations today.

He may have been right in his demands as leader but he took the wrong way to accomplish that right end. For no amount of strength of mind can take the place of genuine Christian love for those who you lead towards spiritual maturity.

I hope that the eventual presence of the apostle John brought peace to the troubled Church, as he personally expressed and acted out the love he had for God’s people.

This love that the apostle John expressed in all his writings needs to be taught and experienced in all Christian fellowships today.

Only through such love, “*agapé*” love, can peace come to this world so full of hate, envy and violence.