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Barnes' Notes on the Bible
Volume 17 -
2 John
By A. Barnes

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2 JOHN

INTRODUCTION

SECTION 1. THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE SECOND AND THIRD EPISTLES OF JOHN.

The authenticity of these two Epistles was doubted by many in the early Christian church, and it was not before a considerable time had elapsed that their canonical authority was fully admitted. The first of the three Epistles was always received as the undoubted production of the apostle John; but, though not positively and absolutely rejected, there were many doubts entertained in regard to the authorship of the Second Epistle and the Third Epistle. Their exceeding brevity, and the fact that they were addressed to individuals, and seemed not designed for general circulation, made them less frequently referred to by the early Christian writers, and renders it more difficult to establish their genuineness. The evidence of their genuineness is of two kinds — external and internal. Though, from their brevity, the proof on these points must be less full and clear than it is in regard to the First Epistle; yet it is such as to satisfy the mind, on the whole, that they are the production of the apostle John, and are entitled to a place in the canon of Scripture.

(1) EXTERNAL EVIDENCE. The evidence of this kind, either for or against the authenticity of these Epistles, is found in the following testimonies respecting them in the writings of the Fathers, and the following facts in regard to their admission into the canon.

(a) In the church and school at Alexandria they were both well known, and were received as a part of the sacred writings. Clement of Alexandria, and Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria, quote them, or refer to them, as the writings of the apostle John. — Lardner's works, vi. 275; Lucke, p. 329. Origen, the successor of Clement, says: "John left behind him an epistle of very few "stichoi;" perhaps also a Second and Third, though some do not consider these genuine. Both these together, however, contain only 100 `stichoi.'" Dionysius of Alexandria shows that he was acquainted with all of them, but calls the two last **φερομενα** ⁵³⁴² — writings alleged to be

genuine. For the import of this word, as used by Dionysius, see Lucke's Com., pp. 33, 331.

(b) These Epistles were known and received in the western churches in the second and third centuries. Of this fact, an important witness is found in Irenaeus, who, on account of the place where he resided during his youth, and the school in which he was educated, deserves special regard as a witness respecting the works of John — Hug. He was born at Smyrna, and lived not long after the times of the apostles. He was a disciple of Polycarp, who was acquainted with the apostle John; and having passed his early years in Asia Minor, must, in the circumstances in which he was placed, have been familiar with the writings of John, and have known well what writings were attributed to him. He quotes the Second Epistle (~~2~~ John 1:11), and with express reference to John as the author, under the name of “John, the disciple of our Lord.” In another place, also, he refers to this Epistle. After quoting from the First Epistle, he continues. “And John, the disciple of Jesus, in the Epistle before mentioned, commanded that they (the heretics) should be shunned, saying,” etc. He then quotes, word for word, the seventh and eighth verses of the Epistle.

(c) The African church, in the third century, regarded the Second Epistle, at least, as the production of John. At a synod in Carthage, under Cyprian, Aurelius, the Bishop of Chullabi, in giving his vote on the question of baptizing heretics, quotes the tenth verse of the Second Epistle as authority, saying, “John, in his Epistle, declares,” etc.

(d) There is some doubt in regard to the Syrian church, whether these Epistles were at first received as genuine or not. The manuscripts of the Peshitto, or Old Syriac version, at least since the sixth century, do not contain the Epistle of Jude, the Second Epistle of Peter, or the Second Epistle and the Third Epistle of John. Yet Ephrem the Syrian, in the fourth century, quotes the Epistle of Jude, the Second Epistle of Peter, and the Second of John, as genuine and canonical. Since this father in the Syrian church was not acquainted with the Greek language, (Lucke), it is clear that he must have read these Epistles in a translation, and as would seem most probable in some Syriac version. The probability would seem to be, since these Epistles are not in the oldest Syriac version, that there was some doubt about their authenticity when that version was made, but that before the time of Ephrem they had come to be regarded as genuine, and were translated by some other persons. Their use in the time of Ephrem

would at least show that they were then regarded as genuine. They may have been, indeed, at some period attached to the ancient version, but at a later period, as they did not originally belong to that version, they may have been separated from it — Lucke, in loc. At all events, it is clear that at an early period in the Syrian church they were regarded as genuine.

(e) Though there were doubts among many of the Fathers respecting the genuineness of these Epistles, yet they were admitted in several councils of the church to be genuine. In the 85th of the apostolic canons, (so called); in the 60th canon of the Synod of Laodicea; the Council at Hippo, (A.D. 393), and the third Council of Carthage (397 A.D.), they were reckoned as undoubtedly pertaining to the inspired canon of Scripture.

(f) All doubts on the subject of the genuineness of these Epistles were, however, subsequently removed in the view of Christian writers, and in the middle ages they were universally received as the writings of the apostle John. Some of the Reformers again had doubts of their genuineness. Erasmus quoted the sentiment of Jerome, that it was not the “apostle” John who wrote these Epistles, but a “presbyter” of the same name; and Calvin seems to have entertained some doubt of their genuineness, for he has omitted them in his commentaries; but these doubts have also disappeared, and the conviction has again become general, and indeed almost universal, that they are to be ranked among the genuine writings of the apostle John.

It may be added here, that the doubts which have been entertained on the subject, and the investigations to which they have given rise, show the care which has been evinced in forming the canon of the New Testament, and demonstrate that the Christian world has not been disposed to receive books as of sacred authority without evidence of their genuineness.

(2) There is strong INTERNAL evidence that they are genuine. This is found in their style, sentiment, and manner. It is true that one who was familiar with the writings of the apostle John MIGHT compose two short epistles like these, that should be mistaken for the real productions of the apostle. There are, even in these brief epistles, not a few passages which seem to be a mere repetition of what John has elsewhere said. But there are some things in regard to the internal evidence that they are the writings of the apostle John, and were not designedly forged, which deserve a more particular notice. They are such as these:

(a) As already said, the style, sentiment, and manner are such as are appropriate to John. There is nothing in the Epistles which we might not suppose he would write; there is much that accords with what he has written; there is much in the style which would not be likely to be found in the writings of another man; and there is nothing in the sentiments which would lead us to suppose that the manner of the apostle John had been ASSUMED, for the purpose of palming upon the world productions which were not his. Resemblances between these Epistles will strike every reader, and it is unnecessary to specify them. The following passages, however, are so decidedly in the manner of John, that it may be presumed that they were either written by him, or by one who designed to copy from him: ⁶⁰⁰⁶2 John 1:5-7,9; ⁶⁰¹¹3 John 1:11,12.

(b) The fact that the NAME of the writer is not affixed to the Epistles is much in the manner of John. Paul, in every case except in the Epistle to the Hebrews, affixed his name to his Epistles; Peter, James, and Jude did the same thing. John, however, has never done it in any of his writings, except the Apocalypse. He seems to have supposed that there was something about his style and manner which would commend his writings as genuine; or that in some other way they would be so well understood to be his, that it was not necessary to specify it. Yet the omission of his name, or of something that would lay claim to his authority as an apostle, would not be likely to occur if these Epistles were fabricated with a design of palming them upon the world as his. The artifice would be too refined, and would be too likely to defeat itself, to be adopted by one who should form such a plan.

(c) The apparently severe and harsh remarks made in the Epistle in regard to heretics, may be adverted to as an evidence that these Epistles are the genuine writings of John the apostle. Thus, in ⁶⁰¹¹2 John 1:10, he says,

“If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed.”

So in ⁶⁰¹¹3 John 1:10:

“If I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words,” etc.

It has been made an objection to the genuineness of these Epistles, that this is not in the spirit of the mild and amiable “disciple whom Jesus loved;” that it breathes a temper of uncharitableness and severity which could not

have existed in him at any time, and especially when, as an old man, he is said to have preached nothing but “love one another.” But two circumstances will show that this, so far from being an objection, is rather a proof of their genuineness. One is, that in fact these expressions accord with what we know to have been the character of John. They are NOT inappropriate to one who was named by the Master himself, Boanerges — a son of thunder, (^{<4087>}Mark 3:17); or to one who was disposed to call down fire from heaven on the Samaritan who would not receive the Lord Jesus, (^{<4054>}Luke 9:54); or to one who, when he saw another casting out devils in the name of Jesus, took upon himself the authority to forbid him, (^{<4088>}Mark 9:38). The truth is, that there was a remarkable mixture of “gentleness” and “severity” in the character of John; and though the former was the most prominent, and may be supposed to have increased as he grew old, yet the other also often manifested itself. There was that in the character of John, which, under some circumstances, and under other teaching than that of the Lord Jesus, MIGHT have been developed in the form of great exclusiveness, bigotry, and sternness — perhaps in the form of open persecution. Under the teaching of the Saviour, and through his example, his milder and better nature prevailed, and so decidedly acquired the ascendancy, that we almost never think of the harsher traits of his character. The other circumstance is, that it would never have occurred to one who should have attempted to forge an Epistle in the name of John, to have INTRODUCED a passage of this kind. The artifice would have been too little likely to have accomplished the end, to have occurred to the mind, or to have been adopted. The public character of John was so amiable; he was so uniformly spoken of as the “disciple whom Jesus loved;” gentleness and kindness seemed to be such pervading traits in his nature, that no one would have thought of introducing sentiments which seemed to be at variance with these traits, even though, on a close analysis, it could be made out that they were not contrary to his natural character.

(d) Perhaps, also, the appellation which the writer gives himself in these two Epistles, (ὁ ^{<3588>}πρεσβυτερος ^{<4245>} — the elder), may be regarded as some evidence that they are the writings of the apostle John; that is, it is more probable that he would use this appellation than that any other writer would. It has, indeed, been made a ground of objection that the use of this term proves that they are NOT the productions of John. See Lucke, p. 340. But, as we have seen, John was not accustomed to prefix his own name to his writings; and if these Epistles were written by him when he was at

Ephesus, nothing is more probable than that he should use this term. It can hardly be regarded as an appellation pertaining to “office,” for as there were many “elders” or “presbyters” in the church, (~~4017~~Acts 20:17), the use of the term “THE elder” would not be sufficiently distinctive to designate the writer. It may be presumed, therefore, to have a particular respect to age; and, under the circumstances supposed, it would apply to no one with so much propriety as to the apostle John — one who would be well known as the aged and venerable disciple of the Saviour. Compare, however, Lucke (pp. 340-343) on the use of this word.

SECTION 2. OF THE PERSON TO WHOM JOHN ADDRESSED HIS SECOND EPISTLE.

This Epistle purports to be addressed, as it is in our translation, to “the elect lady” — **εκλεκτη** ^{<1588>} **κυρια** ^{<2959>}. There has been great diversity of opinion in regard to the person here referred to, and there are questions respecting it which it is impossible to determine with absolute certainty. The different opinions which have been entertained are the following:

(a) Some have supposed that a Christian matron is referred to, a friend of John, whose name was either **Εκλεκτη** ^{<1588>} (Eclecte), or **Κυρια** ^{<2959>}, (Kyria). Oecumenius and Theophylact supposed that the proper name of the female referred to was “Eclecte;” others have adopted the other opinion, that the name was “Cyria.”

(b) Others among the ancients, and particularly Clement, supposed that the church was denoted by this name, under the delicate image of an elect lady; either some particular church to whom the Epistle was sent, or to the church at large. This opinion has been held by some of the modern writers also.

(c) Others have supposed, as is implied in our common version, that it was addressed to some Christian matron, whose name is not mentioned, but who was well known to John, and perhaps to many others, for her piety, and her acts of kindness to Christians. The reason why her name was suppressed, it has been supposed, was that if it had been mentioned it might have exposed her to trouble in some way, perhaps to persecution.

(d) Recently, Knauer (Studien und Kritik., 1833, Heft 2. s. 452, ff.) has endeavored to show that it was addressed to the Virgin Mary, who is

supposed then to have resided in Galilee. The improbability of this opinion is shown by Lucke, pp. 352,353.

These questions are not very important to be determined, even if they could be with accuracy; and at this period of time, and with the few data which we have for forming a correct judgment on the subject, it is not possible to settle them with entire certainty. The probable truth in regard to this point, and all which it seems now possible to ascertain with any degree of certainty, may be expressed in the following specifications:

(1) The letter was addressed to an individual, and not to a church. If it had been to a particular church, it would have been specified, for this is the uniform mode in the New Testament. If it were addressed to the church at large, it is in the highest degree improbable that John should have departed from the style of address in his First Epistle; improbable in every way that he should have adopted another style so mystical and unusual in a plain prose composition. It is only in poetry, in prophecy, in compositions where figurative language abounds, that the church is represented as a female at all; and it is wholly improbable that John, at the outset of a brief Epistle, should have adopted this appellation. The fact that it was addressed to an individual female is further apparent from the mention of her children: ^{<600>}2 John 1:1,4, “Unto the elect lady and her children;” “I found of thy children walking in truth.” This is not such language as one would use in addressing a church.

(2) It is probable that the “name” of this lady was designed to be specified, and that it was “Kyria,” (*Κυρια*) ^{<2959>}. This, indeed, is not absolutely certain; but the Greek will readily bear this, and it accords best with apostolic usage to suppose that the name of the person to whom the letter was addressed would be designated. This occurs in the Third Epistle of John, the Epistles of Paul to Philemon, to Timothy, and to Titus, and, so far as appears, there is no reason why it should not have been done in the case before us. The Syriac and Arabic translators so understand it, for both have retained the name Cyria. It may do something to confirm this view, to remark that the name Cyria was not uncommon, in subsequent times, at least, among Christian females. See Corp. Inscript. Gruter, p. 1127, Numbers 11 *Φενίππος και* ^{<2532>} *ἡ* ^{<3588>} *γυνή* ^{<1135>} *αυτου* ^{<846>} *Κυρια* ^{<2959>}. Compare Lex. Hagiologic. Lips. 1719, p. 448, where two female martyrs of that name are mentioned. See also other instances referred to by Lucke,

Com. p. 351. If these views are correct, then the true rendering of the passage would be, “The presbyter unto the elect Kyria.”

(3) Of this pious female, however, nothing more is known than what is mentioned in this Epistle. From that we learn that John was warmly attached to her, (2 John 1:5); that she was a mother, and that her children were pious, (2 John 1:1,4); and that she was of a hospitable character, and would be likely to entertain those who came professedly as religious teachers, (2 John 1:10,11. Where or when she lived, or when she died, we have no information whatever. At the time of writing this Epistle, John had strong hopes that he would be permitted to come soon and see her, but whether he ever did so, we are not informed, (2 John 1:12.

SECTION 3. THE CANONICAL AUTHORITY OF THE SECOND AND THIRD EPISTLES OF JOHN.

The canonical authority of these Epistles depends on the following things:

(1) On the evidence that they are the writings of the apostle John. In proportion as that evidence is clear, their canonical authority is of course established.

(2) Though brief, and though addressed to individuals, they are admitted into the canon of Scripture with the same propriety as the Epistles to Timothy, to Titus, and to Philemon, for those were addressed also to individuals.

(3) Like those Epistles, also, these contain things of general interest to the church. There is nothing in either that is inconsistent with what John has elsewhere written, or that conflicts with any other part of the New Testament; there is much in them that is in the manner of John, and that breathes his spirit; there is enough in them to tell us of the way of salvation.

Of the time when these Epistles were written, and the place where, nothing is known, and conjecture would be useless, as there are no marks of time or place in either, and there is no historical statement that gives the information. It has been the common opinion that they were written at Ephesus, and when John was old. The appellation which he gives of himself, “the elder,” accords with this supposition, though it does not make it absolutely certain.

THE SECOND EPISTLE OF JOHN

NOTES ON 2 JOHN 1

The points embraced in this Epistle are these: A salutation to the female to whom it is addressed, and an expression of warm attachment to her family, ^{<600>}2 John 1:1-3. An expression of joy and gratitude that he had been permitted to learn that her children had embraced the truth, and were walking in it, ^{<600>}2 John 1:4. An exhortation to live in the exercise of mutual love, in obedience to the great commandment of the Saviour, ^{<600>}2 John 1:5,6. The fact that many deceivers had gone out into the world, and an exhortation to be on their guard against their arts, ^{<600>}2 John 1:7,8. A test by which they might be known, and their true character ascertained, ^{<600>}2 John 1:9. An exhortation to show them no countenance whatever; not to treat them in any such way, even in the rites of hospitality, as to give occasion to the charge that she was friendly to their doctrines, ^{<600>}2 John 1:10,11. A statement that, as he hoped to see her soon, he would not write more to her, ^{<600>}2 John 1:12. And the salutation of the children of someone who is spoken of as her elect sister, ^{<600>}2 John 1:13.

^{<600>}2 John 1:1. *The elder* See the introduction, Section 1, (2,d).

Unto the elect lady The elect or chosen Kyria. See the introduction, Section 2. He addresses her as one chosen of God to salvation, in the use of a term often applied to Christians in the New Testament.

And her children The word here rendered “children” (τεκνοῖς^{<5043>}) would include in itself both sons and daughters, but since the apostle immediately uses a masculine pronoun, τοῖς^{<3588>} it would seem more probable that sons only were intended. At all events, the use of such a pronoun proves that some at least of her children were sons. Of their number and character we have no information, except that (the notes at ^{<600>}2 John 1:4) a part of them were Christians.

Whom I love in the truth See the notes, ^{<600>}John 3:18. The meaning here is, that he “truly” or “sincerely” loved them. The introduction of the article THE here, which is not in the original, (ἐν^{<1722>} ἀληθείᾳ^{<225>}) somewhat

obscures the sense, as if the meaning were that he loved them so far as they embraced the truth. The meaning however is, that he was sincerely attached to them. The word “whom” here, (ὅυς ^{<3739>}), embraces both the mother and her children, though the pronoun is in the masculine gender, in accordance with the usage of the Greek language. No mention is made of her husband, and it may thence be inferred that she was a widow. Had he been living, though he might not have been a Christian, it is to be presumed that some allusion would have been made to him as well as to the children, especially since there is reason to believe that only SOME of her children were pious. See the notes, ^{<600>}2 John 1:4.

And not I only, but also all they that have known the truth That is, all those Christians who had had an opportunity of knowing them, were sincerely attached to them. It would seem, from a subsequent part of the Epistle (^{<600>}2 John 1:10), that this female was of a hospitable character, and was accustomed to entertain at her house the professed friends of religion, especially religious teachers, and it is probable that she was the more extensively known from this fact. The commendation of the apostle here shows that it is POSSIBLE that a family shall be extensively known as one of order, peace, and religion, so that all who know it or hear of it shall regard it with interest, respect, and love.

^{<600>}**2 John 1:2.** *For the truth's sake* They love this family BECAUSE they love the truth, and see it so cordially embraced and so happily exemplified. Those who love the gospel itself will rejoice in all the effects which it produces in society, on individuals, families, neighborhoods, and their hearts will be drawn with warm affection to the places where its influence is most fully seen.

Which dwelleth in us In us who are Christians; that is, the truths of the gospel which we have embraced. Truth may be said to have taken up a permanent abode in the hearts of all who love religion.

And shall be with us for ever Its abode with us is not for a night or a day; not for a month or a year; not for the few years that make up mortal life; it is not a passing stranger that finds a lodging like the weary traveler for a night, and in the morning is gone to be seen no more; it has come to us to make our hearts its PERMANENT HOME, and it is to be with us in all worlds, and while ceaseless ages shall roll away.

2 John 1:3. *Grace be unto you ...* See the notes at **Romans 1:7**. This salutation does not differ from those commonly employed by the sacred writers, except in the emphasis which is placed on the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is “the Son of the Father.” This is much in the style of John, in all of whose writings he dwells much on the fact that the Lord Jesus is the Son of God, and on the importance of recognizing that fact in order to the possession of true religion. Compare **1 John 2:22,23; 4:15; 5:1,2,10-12,20**.

In truth and love This phrase is not to be connected with the expression “the Son of the Father,” as if it meant that he was his Son “in truth and love,” but is rather to be connected with the “grace, mercy, and peace” referred to, as a prayer that they might be manifested to this family in promoting truth and love.

2 John 1:4. *I rejoiced greatly that I found ...* That I learned this fact respecting some of thy children. The apostle does not say how he had learned this. It may have been that he had become personally acquainted with them when they were away from their home, or that he had learned it from others. The word used (ἔβρηκα ^{<2147>}) would apply to either method. Grotius supposed that some of the sons had come to Ephesus on business, and that John had become acquainted with them there.

Of thy children walking in truth That is, true Christians; living in accordance with the truth, for this constitutes the essence of religion. The expression used here, “of thy children,” (ἐκ ^{<1537>} τῶν ^{<3588>} τέκνων ^{<5043>}), means some of thy children; implying that he knew of a part of them who were true Christians. This is clear from the Greek construction, because:

(a) if he had meant to say that he had found them all to be of this description, the sentiment would have been directly expressed, “thy children;” but as it is, some word is necessary to be understood to complete the sense; and

(b) the same thing is demanded by the fact that the participle used (“walking” — περιπατοῦντας ^{<4043>}) is in the accusative case.

If he had referred to them all, the participle would have been in the genitive, agreeing with the word “children,” (τῶν ^{<3588>} περιπατοῦντων ^{<4043>}) — Lucke. Whether the apostle means to say that only a part of them had in fact embraced the gospel, or that he had only known that a part of

them had done it, though the others might have done it without his knowledge, is not quite clear, though the former supposition appears to be the correct one, for if they had all become Christians it is to be presumed that he would have been informed of it. The probability seems to be that a part of her children only were truly pious, though there is no evidence that the others were otherwise than correct in their moral conduct. If there had been improper conduct in any of her other children, John was too courteous, and too delicate in his feelings, to allude to so disagreeable a circumstance. But “if that pious lady,” to use the language of Benson, “had some wicked children, her lot was not unique. Her consolation was that she had some who were truly good. John commended those who were good, in order to excite them in the most agreeable manner to persevere.”

As we have received a commandment from the Father That is, as he has commanded us to live; in accordance with the truth which he has revealed. The “Father,” in the Scripture, is everywhere represented as the Source of law.

2 John 1:5. *And now I beseech thee, lady* Dr, “And now I entreat thee, Kyria,” (κυρια ^{<2959>}). See the introduction, Section 2. If this was her proper name, there is no impropriety in supposing that he would address her in this familiar style. John was probably then a very old man; the female to whom the Epistle was addressed was doubtless much younger.

Not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee John presumed that the command to love one another was understood as far as the gospel was known; and he might well presume it, for true Christianity never prevails anywhere without prompting to the observance of this law. See the notes at ^{<3149>}1 Thessalonians 4:9.

But that which we had from the beginning From the time when the gospel was first made known to us. See the notes at ^{<3117>}1 John 2:7; 3:11.

That we love one another That is, that there be among the disciples of Christ mutual love; or that in all circumstances and relations they should love one another, ^{<4151>}John 15:12,17. This general command, addressed to all the disciples of the Saviour, John doubtless means to say was as applicable to him and to the pious female to whom he wrote as to any others, and ought to be exercised by them toward all true Christians; and he exhorts her, as he did all Christians, to exercise it. It was a command

upon which, in his old age, he loved to dwell; and he had little more to say to her than this, to exhort her to obey this injunction of the Saviour.

2 John 1:6. *And this is love, that we walk after his commandments*

This is the proper expression or evidence of love to God. See the notes at **John 14:15,21**.

This is the commandment That is, this is his great and special commandment; the one by which his disciples are to be especially characterized, and by which they are to be distinguished in the world. See the notes at **John 13:34**.

2 John 1:7. *For* **ὅτι**. This word “for” is not here to be regarded as connected with the previous verse, and as giving a reason why there should be the exercise of mutual love, but is rather to be understood as connected with the following verse, (**2 John 1:8**), and as giving a reason for the caution there expressed: “Because it is a truth that many deceivers have appeared, or since it has occurred that many such are abroad, look to yourselves lest you be betrayed and ruined.” The fact that there were many such deceivers was a good reason for being constantly on their guard, lest they should be so far drawn away as not to receive a full reward.

Many deceivers are entered into the world Are abroad in the world, or have appeared among men. Several manuscripts read here, “have gone out into the world,” (**εξηλθον**), instead of “have entered into,” (**εισηλθον**). The common reading is the correct one, and the other was originated, probably, from the unusual form of the expression, “have come into the world,” as if they had come from another abode. That, however, is not necessarily implied, the language being such as would be properly used to denote the idea that there were such deceivers in the world.

Who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh Who maintain that he assumed only the APPEARANCE of a man, and was not really incarnate. See the notes at **1 John 4:2,3**.

This is a deceiver Everyone who maintains this is to be regarded as a deceiver.

And an antichrist See the notes at **1 John 2:18; 4:3**.

2 John 1:8. *Look to yourselves* This seems to be addressed to the lady to whom he wrote, and to her children. The idea is, that they should

be particularly on their guard, and that their first care should be to secure their own hearts, so that they should not be exposed to the dangerous attacks of error. When error abounds in the world, our first duty is not to attack it and make war upon it; it is to look to the citadel of our own souls, and see that all is well guarded there. When an enemy invades a land, the first thing will not be to go out against him, regardless of our own strength, or of the security of our own fortresses, but it will be to see that our forts are well manned, and that we are secure there from his assaults. If that is so, we may then go forth with confidence to meet him on the open field. In relation to an error that is in the world, the first thing for a Christian to do is to take care of his own heart.

That we lose not those things which we have wrought Margin: “Or, gained.” Some copies read: “which ye have gained, but that ye.” The reading here referred to in the margin is found in several manuscripts and also in the Vulgate, the Syriac, and the Aethiopic versions. It is not, however, adopted in the late critical editions of the New Testament, and the common reading is probably genuine. The sense is not materially varied, and the common reading is not unnatural. John was exhorting the family to whom this Epistle was written to take good heed to themselves while so many artful errorists were around them, lest they should be drawn away from the truth, and lose a part of the full reward which they might hope to receive in heaven. In doing this, nothing was more natural than that he, as a Christian friend, should group himself with them, and speak of himself as having the same need of caution, and express the feeling that he ought to strive also to obtain the full reward, thus showing that he was not disposed to address an exhortation to them which he was not willing to regard as applicable to himself. The truth which is taught here is one of interest to all Christians — that it is possible for even genuine Christians, by suffering themselves to be led into error, or by failure in duty, to lose a part of the reward which they might have obtained. The crown which they will wear in heaven will be less bright than that which they might have worn, and the throne which they will occupy will be less elevated. The rewards of heaven will be in accordance with the services rendered to the Redeemer; and it would not be right that they who turn aside, or falter in their course, should have the same exalted honours which they might have received if they had devoted themselves to God with ever-increasing fidelity. It is painful to think how many there are who begin the Christian career with burnings zeal, as if they would strike for the highest rewards in

heaven, but who soon waver in their course, and fall into some paralyzing error, until at last they receive, perhaps, not half the reward which they might have obtained.

But that we receive a full reward Such as will be granted to a life uniformly consistent and faithful; all that God has to bestow on his people when most faithful and true. But who can estimate the “full reward” of heaven, the unspeakable glory of those who make it the grand business of their lives to obtain all they can of its bliss. And who is there that does not feel that he OUGHT to strive for a crown in which not one gem shall be missing that might have sparkled there forever?

2 John 1:9. *Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God* In the doctrine which Christ taught, or the true doctrine respecting him. The language is somewhat ambiguous, like the phrase “the love of Christ,” which may mean either his love to us, or our love to him. Compare ^{<415D>}John 15:9. It is difficult to determine here which is the true sense — whether it means the doctrine or precepts which he taught, or the true doctrine respecting him. Macknight understands by it the doctrine TAUGHT by Christ and his apostles. It would seem most probable that this is the sense of the passage, but then it would include, of course, all that Christ taught respecting himself, as well as his other instructions. The essential idea is, that the truth must be held respecting the precepts, the character, and the work of the Saviour. Probably the immediate allusion here is to those to whom John so frequently referred as “antichrist,” who denied that Jesus had come in the flesh, ^{<410F>}2 John 1:7. At the same time, however, he makes the remark general, that if anyone did not hold the true doctrine respecting the Saviour, he had no real knowledge of God. See ^{<4018>}John 1:18; 5:23; 15:23; 17:3; ^{<4123>}1 John 2:23.

Hath not God Has no true knowledge of God. The truth taught here is, that it is essential for piety to hold the true doctrine respecting Christ.

He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ In the true doctrine respecting Christ, or in the doctrine which he taught.

He hath both the Father and the Son There is such an intimate union between the Father and the Son, that he who has just views of the one has also of the other. Compare the notes at ^{<4147>}John 14:7,9,10,11; ^{<4123>}1 John 2:23.

2 John 1:10. *If there come any unto you* Any professed teacher of religion. There can be no doubt that she to whom this Epistle was written was accustomed to entertain such teachers.

And bring not this doctrine This doctrine which Christ taught, or the true doctrine respecting him and his religion.

Receive him not into your house This cannot mean that no acts of kindness, in any circumstances, were to be shown to such persons; but that there was to be nothing done which could be fairly construed as encouraging or countenancing them as “religious teachers.” The true rule would seem to be, in regard to such persons, that, so far as we have contact with them as neighbors, or strangers, we are to be honest, true, kind, and just, but we are to do NOTHING that will countenance them as religious teachers, We are NOT to aid their instruction, (³¹⁶²⁷Proverbs 19:27); we are NOT to receive them into our houses, or to entertain them as religious teachers; we are NOT to commend them to others, or to give them any reason to use our names or influence in propagating error. It would NOT be difficult to practice this rule, and yet to show to others all the kindness, and all the attention in circumstances of need, which religion demands. A person who is truly consistent is never suspected of countenancing error, even when he is distinguished for liberality, and is ready, like the good Samaritan, to pour in oil and wine in the wounds of any waylaid traveler. The command not to “receive such an one into the house,” in such circumstances as those referred to by John, would be probably understood literally, as he doubtless designed that it should be. To do that, to meet such persons with a friendly greeting, would be construed as countenancing their doctrine, and as commending them to others; and hence it was forbidden that they should be entertained as such. This treatment would not be demanded where no such interpretation could be put on receiving a friend or relative who held different and even erroneous views, or in showing kindness to a stranger who differed from us, but it WOULD apply to the receiving and entertaining “a professed teacher of religion, as such;” and the rule is as applicable now as it was then.

Neither bid him God speed Καὶ ²⁵³²χαίρειν ⁵⁴⁶³αὐτῷ ⁸⁴⁶μη ³³⁶¹λεγετε ³⁰⁰⁴ — “and do not say to him, hail, or joy.” Do not wish him joy; do not hail, or salute him. The word used expresses the common form of salutation, as when we wish one health, success, prosperity, (⁴¹⁵⁹Matthew

26:49; ^{<4152>}Acts 15:23; 23:26; ^{<5000>}James 1:1. It would be understood as expressing a wish for success in the enterprise in which they were embarked; and, though we should love all people, and desire their welfare, and sincerely seek their happiness, yet we can properly wish no one success in career of sin and error.

^{<6012>}**2 John 1:11.** *For he that biddeth him God speed, is partaker of his evil deeds* Shows that he countenances and approves of the doctrine which is taught. Compare the notes at ^{<5472>}1 Timothy 5:22.

^{<6012>}**2 John 1:12.** *Having many things to write unto you* That I would wish to say. This language is such as would be used by one who was hurried, or who was in feeble health, or who hoped soon to see the person written to. In such a case only the points would be selected which were of most immediate and pressing importance, and the remainder would be reserved for a more free personal interview.

I would not write with paper The word “paper” here conveys an idea which is not strictly correct. “Paper,” as that term is now understood, was not invented until long after this period. The material designated by the word used by John (χαρτης ^{<5489>}) was the Egyptian papyrus, and the particular thing denoted was a leaf made out of that plant. The sheets were made from membranes of the plant closely pressed together. This plant was found also in Syria and Babylon, but it was produced in greater abundance in Egypt, and that was the plant which was commonly used. It was so comparatively cheap, that it in a great measure superseded the earlier materials for writing — plates of lead, or stone, or the skins of animals. It is probable that the books of the New Testament were written on this species of paper. Compare Hug, Introduction, chapter iii., Section 11.

And ink The ink which was commonly employed in writing was made of soot and water, with a mixture of some species of gum to give it consistency and durability — Lucke. The instrument (pen) was made of a reed.

But I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face Margin, as in Greek, “mouth to mouth.” The phrase is a common one, to denote conversation with any one, especially free and confidential conversation. Compare ^{<6128>}Numbers 12:8; ^{<2306>}Jeremiah 32:4.

That our joy may be full Margin, “your.” The marginal reading has arisen from a variation in the Greek copies. The word “our” is best sustained, and accords best with the connection. John would be likely to express the hope that HE would find pleasure from such an interview. See the notes at ~~GR01B~~1 John 1:4. Compare ~~GR01B~~Romans 1:11,12.

~~GR01B~~**2 John 1:13.** *The children of thy elect sister greet thee* Of this “elect sister” nothing more is known. It would seem probable, from the fact that she is not mentioned as sending her salutations, that she was either dead, or that she was absent. John mentions her, however, as a Christian — as one of the elect or chosen of God.

REMARKS ON 2 JOHN

In view of the exposition of this Epistle we may make the following remarks:

- (1) It is desirable for a family to have a character for piety so consistent and well understood that all who know it shall perceive it and love it, ~~GR01B~~2 John 1:1. In the case of this lady and her household, it would seem that, as far as they were known, they were known as a well-ordered Christian household. John said he loved such a family; and he said that it was loved by all who had any knowledge of them. What is more lovely to the view than such a household? What is better fitted to make an impression on the world favorable to religion?
- (2) It is a matter of great rejoicing when any part of a family becomes truly religious, ~~GR01B~~2 John 1:4. We should rejoice with our friends, and should render unfeigned thanks to God, if any of their children are converted, and walk in the truth. No greater blessing can descend on a family than the early conversion of children; and, just as angels rejoice over one sinner that is converted, we should rejoice when the children of our friends are brought to a knowledge of the truth, and devote themselves to God in early life.
- (3) It is our duty to be on our guard against the arts of the teachers of error, ~~GR01B~~2 John 1:7. They abound in every age. They are often learned, eloquent, and profound. They study and understand the arts of persuasion. They adapt their instructions to the capacity of those whom they would lead astray. They flatter their vanity; accommodate themselves to their peculiar views and tastes; court their society, and seek to share their

friendship. They often appear to be eminently meek, and serious, and devout, and prayerful, for they know that no others can succeed who profess to inculcate the principles of religion. There are few arts more profound than that of leading people into error; few that are studied more, or with greater success. Every Christian, therefore, should be on his or her guard against such arts; and while he should (upon all subjects) be open to conviction, and be ready to yield his own opinions when convinced that they are wrong, yet he should yield to TRUTH, not to people; to ARGUMENT, not to the influence of the PERSONAL CHARACTER of the professed religious teacher.

(4) We may see that it is POSSIBLE for us to lose a portion of the reward which we MIGHT enjoy in heaven, ^{GRUB}2 John 1:8. The rewards of heaven will be apportioned to our character, and for our services in the cause of religion in this life, and those who “sow sparingly shall reap also sparingly.” Christians often begin their course with great zeal, and as if they were determined to reap the highest rewards of the heavenly world. If they should persevere in the course which they have commenced, they would indeed shine as the stars in the firmament. But, alas, their zeal soon dies away. They relax their efforts, and lose their watchfulness. They engage in some pursuit that absorbs their time, and interferes with their habits of devotion. They connive at error and sin; begin to love the comforts of this life; seek the honors or the riches of this world; and though they may be saved at last, yet they lose half their reward. It should be a fixed purpose with all Christians, and especially with such as are just entering upon the Christian life, to wear in heaven a crown as bright and studded with as many jewels as “can possibly be obtained.”

(5) We may learn from this Epistle how to regard and treat the teachers of error, ^{GRUB}2 John 1:10. We “are not to do anything that can be fairly construed as contending their doctrines.” This simple rule would guide us to a course that is right. We are to have minds open to conviction. We are to love the truth, and always be ready to follow it. We are not to be prejudiced against anything. We are to treat all people with kindness; to be true, and just, and faithful in our contact with everyone; to be hospitable, and always ready to do good to any who are needy, whatever their name, color, rank, or opinions. We are not to cut the ties which bind us to our friends and kindred, though they embrace opinions which we deem erroneous or dangerous; but we are in no way to become the patrons of error, or to leave the impression that we are indifferent as to what is

believed. The friends of truth and piety we should receive cordially to our dwellings, and should account ourselves honored by their presence, (~~Psalm~~ Psalm 101:6,7); strangers we should not forget to entertain, for thereby we may entertain angels unawares, (~~Hebrews~~ Hebrews 13:2); but the open advocate of what we regard as dangerous error, we are not to receive in any such sense or way as to have our treatment of him fairly construed as patronising his errors, or commending him as a teacher to the favorable regards of our fellowmen. Neither by our influence, our names, our money, our personal friendship, are we to give him increased facilities for spreading pernicious error through the world. As people, as fellow-sufferers, as citizens, as neighbors, as the friends of temperance, of the prisoner, of the widow, the orphan, and the slave, and as the patrons of learning, we may be united in promoting objects dear to our hearts, but as “religious teachers” we are to show them no countenance, not so much as would be implied in the common form of salutation wishing them success. In all this there is no breach of charity, and no want of true love, for we are to love the truth more than we are the persons of men. To the person himself we should be ever ready to do good. We should never injure that individual in any way — in his person, property, or feelings. We should never attempt to deprive him of the right of cherishing his own opinions, and of spreading them in his own way, answerable, not to us, but to God. We should impose no pains or penalties upon him for the opinions which he holds. But we should do nothing to give him increased power to propagate them, and should never place ourselves by any alliance of friendship, family, or business, in such a position that we shall not be perfectly free to maintain our own sentiments, and to oppose what we deem to be error, whoever may advocate it.