

## THE SECOND AND THIRD EPISTLES GENERAL

# OF JOHN

Commentary by **A. R. FAUSSETT**

## INTRODUCTION

AUTHENTICITY. — That these two Epistles were written by the same author appears from their similarity of tone, style, and sentiments. That John, the beloved disciple, was the author of the Second and Third Epistles, as of the First Epistle, appears from IRENAEUS [*Against Heresies*, 1.16.3], who quotes <sup>61102</sup>2 John 1:10,11; and in [3.16.8], he quotes 2 John 1:7, mistaking it, however, as if occurring in First John. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA (A.D. 192) [*Miscellanies*, 2.66], implies his knowledge of other Epistles of John besides the First Epistle; and in fragments of his *Adumbrations* [p. 1011], he says, “John’s Second Epistle which was written to the virgins (*Greek*, “*parthenous*”; perhaps *Parthos* is what was meant) is the simplest; but it was written to a certain Babylonian named *the Elect lady*.” DIONYSIUS OF ALEXANDRIA (in EUSEBIUS [*Ecclesiastical History*, 7.25]) observes that John never names himself in his Epistles, “not even in the Second and Third Epistles, although they are short Epistles, but simply calls himself the presbyter, a confutation of those who think John *the apostle* distinct from John *the PRESBYTER*. ALEXANDER OF ALEXANDRIA cites <sup>61102</sup>2 John 1:10:11, as John’s [SOCRATES, *Ecclesiastical History*, 1.6]. CYPRIAN [*Concerning the BAPTISM of Heretics*], in referring to the bishops at the Council of Carthage, says, “John the apostle, in His Epistle, has said, if any come to you” (<sup>61102</sup>2 John 1:10); so that this Epistle, and therefore its twin sister, Third John, was recognized as apostolic in the North African Church. The MURATORI fragment is ambiguous. The Second and Third Epistles were not in the *Peschito* or old *Syriac* version; and COSMAS INDICOPLEUSTES in the sixth century says that in his time the *Syriac* Church only acknowledged three

of the Catholic Epistles, First Peter, First John, and James. But EPHREM THE SYRIAN quotes the Second Epistle of John. EUSEBIUS [*Ecclesiastical History*,] reckons both Epistles among the *Antilegomena* or *controverted* Scriptures, as distinguished from the *Homologoumena* or *universally acknowledged* from the first. Still his own opinion was that the two minor Epistles were genuine, remarking, as he does in *Demonstration of the Gospel* [3.5], that in John's "*Epistles*" he does not mention his own name, nor call himself an apostle or evangelist, but an "elder" (2 John 1:1 3 John 1:1). ORIGEN (in EUSEBIUS [*Ecclesiastical History*, 6.25]) mentions the Second and Third Epistles, but adds, "*not all* admit (implying that *most* authorities do) their genuineness." JEROME [*On Illustrious Men*, 9] mentions the two latter Epistles as attributed to John the presbyter, whose sepulcher was shown among the Ephesians in his day. But the designation "elder" was used of the apostles by others (for example, PAPIAS, in EUSEBIUS [*Ecclesiastical History*, 3.39]), and is used by Peter, an apostle, of himself (1 Peter 5:1). Why, then, should not John also use this designation of himself, in consonance with the humility which leads him not to name himself or his apostleship even in the First Epistle? The *Antilegomena* were generally recognized as canonical soon after the Council of Nicea (A.D. 325). Thus CYRIL OF JERUSALEM, A.D. 349, enumerates fourteen Epistles of Paul, and seven Catholic Epistles. So GREGORY NAZIANZEN, in A.D. 389. The Councils of Hippo, 393, and Carthage, 397, adopted a catalogue of New Testament books exactly agreeing with our canon. So our oldest extant *Greek* manuscripts. The Second and Third Epistles of John, from their brevity (which ORIGEN notices), and the private nature of their contents, were less generally read in the earliest Christian assemblies and were also less quoted by the Fathers; hence arose their non-universal recognition at the first. Their private nature makes them the less likely to be spurious, for there seems no purpose in their forgery. The style and coloring too accord with the style of the First Epistle.

TO WHOM ADDRESSED. — The Third Epistle is directed to Gaius or Caius; whether Gaius of Macedonia (~~Acts~~ Acts 19:20), or Gaius of Corinth (~~Romans~~ Romans 16:23 ~~1 Corinthians~~ 1 Corinthians 1:14), or Gaius of Derbe (Acts 20:4), it is hard to decide. MILL believes Gaius, bishop of Pergamos [*Apostolic Constitutions*, 7.40], to be the person addressed in 3 John 1:1.

The address of the Second Epistle is more disputed. It opens, “The elder unto the *Elect lady*” (2 John 1:1). And it closes, “The children of thy *elect* sister greet thee” (2 John 1:13). Now, 1 Peter 1:1,2, addresses the *elect* in Asia, etc., and closes (1 Peter 5:13), “The Church that is *at Babylon*, *elected* together with you, saluteth you.” Putting together these facts, with the quotations (above) from CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, and the fact that the word “Church” comes from a *Greek* word (*kyriake*) cognate to the *Greek* for “lady” (*kyria*; “belonging to the *Lord*,” *kyrios*); WORDSWORTH’S view is probable. As Peter in Babylon had sent the salutations of *the elect Church* in the then *Parthian* (see above on CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA) *Babylon* to her *elect sister* in Asia, so John, the metropolitan president of the *elect Church* in Asia, writes to *the elect lady*, that is, Church, in Babylon. NEANDER, ALFORD, and others, think the *Greek* “*kyria*” not to mean “lady,” but to be her *proper name*; and that she had a “sister, a Christian matron,” then with John.

DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING. — EUSEBIUS [*Ecclesiastical History*, 3.25] relates that John, after the death of Domitian, returned from his exile in Patmos to Ephesus, and went on missionary tours into the heathen regions around, and also made visitations of the churches around, and ordained bishops and clergy. Such journeys are mentioned, 2 John 1:12 3 John 1:10,14. If EUSEBIUS be right, both Epistles must have been written after the Apocalypse, in his old age, which harmonizes with the tone of the Epistles, and in or near Ephesus. It was on one of his visitation tours that he designed to rebuke Diotrephes (3 John 1:9,10).

## 2 JOHN 1:1-13.

**ADDRESS: GREETING: THANKSGIVING FOR THE ELECT  
LADY’S FAITHFULNESS IN THE TRUTH: ENJOINS LOVE:  
WARNS AGAINST DECEIVERS, LEST WE LOSE OUR REWARD:  
CONCLUSION.**

**1. The elder** — In a familiar letter John gives himself a less authoritative designation than “apostle”; so 1 Peter 5:1.

**lady** — BENDEL takes the *Greek* as a proper name *Kyria*, answering to the *Hebrew* “Martha.” Being a person of influence, “deceivers” (2 John 1:7) were insinuating themselves into her family to seduce her and her children from the faith [TIRINUS], whence John felt it necessary to write a warning to her. (But see my *Introduction* and <sup>4163</sup>1 Peter 5:13). A particular *Church*, probably that at Babylon, was intended. “Church” is derived from *Greek* “*Kuriake*,” akin to *Kuria*, or *Kyria* here; the latter word among the Romans and Athenians means the same as *ecclesia*, the term appropriated to designate the *Church assembly*.

**love in the truth** — Christian *love* rests on the Christian *truth* (2 John 1:3, end). Not merely “I love *in truth*,” but “I love in THE truth.”

**all** — All Christians form one fellowship, rejoicing in the spiritual prosperity of one another. “The communion of love is as wide as the communion of faith” [ALFORD].

**2. For the truth’s sake** — joined with “I love,” 2 John 1:1. “They who love *in the truth*, also love *on account of the truth*.”

**dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever** — in consonance with Christ’s promise.

**3. Grace be with you** — One of the oldest manuscripts and several versions have “us” for *you*. The *Greek* is literally, “Grace *shall be* with us,” that is, with both *you and me*. A prayer, however, is implied besides a confident affirmation.

**grace ... mercy ... peace** — “*Grace*” covers the sins of men; “*mercy*,” their miseries. *Grace* must first do away with man’s guilt before his misery can be relieved by *mercy*. Therefore *grace* stands before *mercy*. *Peace* is the result of both, and therefore stands third in order. Casting all our care on the Lord, with thanksgiving, maintains this peace.

**the Lord** — The oldest manuscripts and most of the oldest versions omit “the Lord.” John never elsewhere uses this title in his Epistles, but “the Son of God.”

**in truth and love** — The element or sphere in which alone *grace*, *mercy*, and *peace*, have place. He mentions *truth* in 2 John 1:4; *love*, in 2 John 1:5. Paul uses FAITH and *love*; for *faith* and *truth* are close akin.

**4. I found** — probably in one of his missionary tours of superintendence. See *Introduction*, at the end, and <sup><612></sup>2 John 1:12 <sup><613></sup>3 John 1:10,14.

**of thy children** — some.

**in truth** — that is, in *the* Gospel truth.

**as** — even as. “The Father’s commandment” is the standard of “the truth.”

**5. I beseech** — rather (compare *Note*, see on <sup><616></sup>1 John 5:16), “I request thee,” implying some degree of *authority*.

**not ... new commandment** — It was *old* in that Christians heard it from the first in the Gospel preaching; *new*, in that the Gospel rested love on the new principle of filial imitation of God who first loved us, and gave Jesus to die for *us*; and also, in that *love* is now set forth with greater clearness than in the Old Testament dispensation. Love performs both tables of the law, and is the end of the law and the Gospel alike (compare *Notes*, see on 1 John 2:7,8).

**that we** — implying that he already had love, and urging her to join him in the same Christian grace. This verse seems to me to decide that a *Church*, not an *individual lady*, is meant. For a man to urge a woman (“THEE”; not *thee and thy children*) that he and she should *love one another*, is hardly like an apostolic precept, however pure may be the love enjoined; but all is clear if “the lady” represent a *Church*.

**6.** “Love is the fulfilling of the law” (<sup><610></sup>Romans 13:10), and the fulfilling of the law is the sure test of love.

**This is the commandment** — *Greek*, “The commandment is this,” namely, *love*, in which all God’s other commandments are summed up.

**7.** As *love* and *truth* go hand in hand (2 John 1:3,4), he feels it needful to give warning against teachers of untruth.

**For** — giving the reason why he dwelt on *truth* and on *love*, which manifests itself in keeping God’s commandments (2 John 1:6).

**many** — (<sup>4128</sup>1 John 2:18 4:1).

**are entered** — The oldest manuscripts read, “have *gone forth*,” namely, from us.

**confess not ... Jesus ... in the flesh** — the token of Antichrist.

**is come** — *Greek*, “coming.” He who denies Christ’s *coming* in the flesh, denies the *possibility* of the incarnation; he who denies that he *has come*, denies its *actuality*. They denied the possibility of a Messiah’s appearing, or *coming*, in the flesh [NEANDER]. I think the *Greek* present participle implies *both* the first and the second advent of Christ. He is often elsewhere called *the Coming One* (*Greek*), Matthew 11:3 <sup>3017</sup> Hebrews 10:37. The denial of the reality of His manifestation in the flesh, at His first coming, and of His personal advent again, constitutes Antichrist. “The world *turns away* from God and Christ, busily intent upon its own husks; but to OPPOSE God and Christ is of the leaven of Satan” [BENGEL].

**This is a**, etc. — *Greek*, “This (such a one as has been just described) is *the deceiver* and *the Antichrist*.” The *many* who in a degree fulfill the character, are forerunners of the final personal Antichrist, who shall concentrate in himself all the features of previous Antichristian systems.

**8. Look to yourselves** — amidst the widespread prevalence of deception so many being led astray. So Christ’s warning, Matthew 24:4,5,24.

**we lose not ... we receive** — The oldest manuscripts and versions read, “That YE lose not, but that YE receive.”

**which we have wrought** — So one oldest manuscript reads. Other very old manuscripts, versions, and Fathers, read, “which YE have wrought.” The *we* being seemingly the more difficult reading is less likely to have been a transcriber’s alteration. Look that ye lose not the believing state of “truth and love,” which WE (as God’s workmen, 2 Corinthians 6:1 <sup>3125</sup> 2 Timothy 2:15) were the instruments of working in you.

**a full reward** — of grace not of debt. *Fully* consummated glory. If “which YE have wrought” be read with very old authorities, the reward meant is that of their “work (of faith) and labor of love.” There are degrees of heavenly reward proportioned to the degrees of capability of receiving heavenly blessedness. Each vessel of glory hanging on Jesus shall be fully happy. But the larger the vessel, the greater will be its capacity for receiving heavenly bliss. He who with one pound made ten, received authority over ten cities. He who made five pounds received five cities; each according to his capacity of rule, and in proportion to his faithfulness. Compare <sup>465b</sup>1 Corinthians 15:41. “There is no half reward of the saints. It is either lost altogether, or received *in full*; *in full* communion with God” [BENGEL]. Still no service of minister or people shall fail to receive its reward.

**9.** The *loss* (2 John 1:8) meant is here explained: the *not having God*, which results from *abiding not in the doctrine of Christ*.

**transgresseth** — The oldest manuscripts and versions read, “Every one who *takes the lead*”; literally, “goes,” or “leads on before”; compare John 10:4, “He goeth before them” (not the same *Greek*). Compare 3 John 1:9, “Loveth to have the *pre-eminence*.”

**hath not God** — (<sup>462a</sup>1 John 2:23 5:15). The second “of Christ” is omitted in the oldest manuscripts, but is understood in the sense.

**He** — emphatical: *He and He alone*.

**10. If there come any** — as a teacher or brother. The *Greek* is indicative, not subjunctive; implying that such persons *do actually come*, and *are sure to come*; when any comes, as there will. True love is combined with hearty renunciation and separation from all that is false, whether persons or doctrines.

**receive him not ... neither bid him God speed** — This is not said of those who were always aliens from the Church, but of those who wish to be esteemed brethren, and subvert the true doctrine [GROTIUS]. The greeting salutation forbidden in the case of such a one is that *usual among Christian brethren* in those days, not a mere formality, but a token of *Christian brotherhood*.

**11.** By wishing a false brother or teacher “God (or ‘good’) speed,” you imply that he is capable as such of good speed and *joy* (the literal meaning of the *Greek*), and that you wish him it while opposing Christ; so you identify yourself with “his evil deeds.” The *Greek* of “partaker” is “having communion with.” We cannot have communion with saints and with Antichrist at the same time. Here we see John’s naturally fiery zeal directed to a right end. POLYCARP, the disciple of John, told contemporaries of IRENAEUS, who narrates the story on their authority, that on one occasion when John was about to bathe, and heard that Cerinthus, the heretic, was within, he retired with abhorrence, exclaiming, Surely the house will fall in ruins since the enemy of the truth is there.

**12. I would not write** — A heart full of love pours itself out more freely face to face, than by letter.

**paper** — made of Egyptian papyrus. Pens were then reeds spliterally

**ink** — made of soot and water, thickened with gum. Parchment was used for the permanent manuscripts in which the Epistles were preserved. Writing *tablets* were used merely for temporary purposes, as our slates.

**face to face** — literally, “mouth to mouth.”

**full** — *Greek*, “filled full.” Your joy will be complete in hearing from me in person the joyful Gospel truths which I now defer communicating till I see you. On other occasions his writing the glad truths was for the same purpose.

**13.** ALFORD confesses that the non-mention of the “lady” herself here seems rather to favor the hypothesis that a *Church* is meant.