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Introduction

Overview of 2 & 3 John

Dear Brethren and Sisters of the Lord Jesus.

Although the author doesn't give his name, it is accepted that the same hand that wrote 1 John wrote 2 John as well. This consensus follows from a study of the literary style, vocabulary and basic outlook of all three letters and the gospel according to John. The length of these two letters are very short, in fact second John is the shortest book in the Bible, so we can afford to just remark on one or two of these aspects. We do not normally concern ourselves or comment on so called literary styles and so on, because it is the domain church theologians love, skirting around the issue, whereas the substance gets demoted to less important. We focus on the substance and not the peripherals. But just for a matter of interest, it has been pointed out that John in his gospel and letters makes frequent use of what is known as *asyndeton*, where sentences are constructed and conjunctions such as and, then, so, yet etc, are missed out. One such example could be: "I came I saw I conquered" This has the effect apparently of speeding up the passage and creating an urgency. Apparently, this is not commonly used in other letters of the new Testament, but it is in John's.

Additionally, John writes in what is called a *parenetic* style marked by personal appeal, contrasts of right and wrong, true and false, and an occasional rhetorical question, which is supposed to be similar to the parallel structure of Hebrew poetry. Whether you can spot these aspects and think it is a signature as it were of the Apostle John, then good for you. Anyway, the early so-called church fathers regarded these letters as having been written by John. As we read these two

letters, we will note that many of the verses, ideas, and sayings are found in 1 John or the gospel of John. This again gives further evidence of the author. In both 2 John, and 3 John, the author describes himself as The Elder. This it is traditionally held, that John was a very old man living in Ephesus, before he was exiled to Patmos, when he wrote these letters. Referring to this second letter, now, John wrote to the elect lady and her children. This lady may have been a friend, a sister in the Ecclesia at Ephesus. It has been suggested that the elect lady was Mary the mother of Jesus, as Jesus when dying upon the cross tasked his disciple John to take his mother in as his own, meaning the children would be Jesus siblings, including James, Joses, Simon and Jude. However, this is hardly likely, as why would John be surprised that her children are walking in the truth as explained in verse 4 here, seeing that James became one of the elders of the ecclesia at Jerusalem, and Jude wrote an epistle as well? A further suggestion which is quite useful is that the term is metaphorical, the elect lady referring to his local ecclesia, and her children new converts.

Taking this idea forward, it immediately makes the letter a general letter, applicable effectively to all, in all generations. John describes his readers whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth; Here John immediately gets to the core of the underlying foundation of the relationships between him and the elect lady, the elect lady and her children, and all those who have known the truth, ie. In the past.. those who are asleep in Christ. This then suggests that he is indeed referring to the ecclesia here, for the underlying reason for all to be in the ecclesia is the truth. Truth is a favourite theme and subject unique to John. Matthew and Mark only refer to the word 'truth' 3 times in their gospels, Luke 5 times, but John 22 times, and in these three letters another 18 times. It is John

who records Pilate asking What is Truth? and is John who gives the answer in the words of Jesus himself, I am the Way the Truth and the Life, and Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. The unshakeable, unchanging word of God is absolute truth. We often refer to our community as the Truth. As in “when were you baptised in the Truth”? Or “he or she has left the truth”. The Truth can become synonymous with the ecclesia. But care must be taken - the ecclesia can include those who do not practice the truth, do not even believe the truth. People, sinners all cannot be true representatives of the Truth, in its absolute sense because we are all weak erring creatures.

It is not a special protective badge to be waved around. Only if you know the truth will it set you free, and knowing is in the sense of experimental, experiencing truth, that is doing the truth. This is only possible if the truth resides in us, the truth Jesus said is the Word – and John says here in verse 2: For the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever. Having the word in us, does not make us true either, it is only through the forgiveness of sins that we can be made perfect. Christ and Him alone is the Ambassador for Truth. Truth only becomes us, and can we be called ‘of the truth’, if Christ is in us. John writes: *3 Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.* No hint at the so- called trinitarian nature of God, and again in this greeting, it is a good a place as any to mention it! The reason why is obvious, and John deals with this in the letter. *I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father.* It seems here that John had either visited the ecclesia recently, meaning he was not able to be there regularly, maybe already incarcerated, or he had been visited, but either way had clearly been

able to observe the behaviour and not just the meetings or witnessing of his fellow believers and saints. Found walking in the truth. In this a phrase encompasses all aspects of practical Christian living, he underscores and emphasises, 5,6: *And now I beseech thee, lady, (not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning,) that we love one another. 6 (And this is love, that we walk after his commandments.) This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.* Here he is not begging as the word beseech can indicate in today's language, but he is asking, that is making it clear that as he has written before, that the spirit of love should dominate proceedings.

Two points here. One is that this is strong evidence that the author is indeed John, because he has most certainly been the one who over again has recorded this central aspect of Jesus teaching: In the gospel of John 13:34,35 *A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another,* again in 15:12 *This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you. 17 These things I command you, that ye love one another.* Again, in his first letter which we looked at recently: 3:11 *For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.* And again 4:11 *Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.* Seeing as here in this letter we are looking at, it is almost word for word what he wrote before, and he stating he wrote this before it follows that, yes, it is John writing this letter, but why start so strongly emphasising the need for love in such a short letter. So, we come to our second point.

Before reading on to find out, we look back again at verse 4, *I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth*, It is easy to miss, but John is not saying he is happy that he found everyone walking in the truth, but he was happy that he found of thy children people walking in the truth. In your margin you might see an annotation that shows that this should read SOME of them were walking in the truth. Now we can proceed, for this implies, that not all were walking in the truth. And thus, we can see as the letter pans out: *7 For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. 8 Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, or worked for but that we receive a full reward.* Here: Look to yourselves, echoes the warning words of the Apostle Paul: Acts 20:30 *Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.* Not all were walking in the truth, for John was now aware that of their own selves, amongst them were those who were deceitful, pretending to walk in the truth, but were espousing false teachings, and bring the influence of false teachings into the ecclesia.

What was this? But that the idea that Jesus Christ came not in the flesh. This belief had crept in. The doctrine is historically known as Docitism, a word which comes from the Greek *Dokesis*, meaning a phantom. This was a belief that Jesus only seemed to be human, and that his human form was an illusion. This idea came about that Christ was so divine that he could not have been human, since God lacked a material body, which therefore could not physically suffer. Clement of Alexandria was one it appears who adopted some of these notions. Ultimately this false doctrine died out indeed, was rejected at the Council of Nicea in 325, but we know why, because it had been largely replaced with the apostate teaching of the Trinity, again the

misunderstanding of the divinity of Christ. John has already dealt with this issue specifically in his previous letter: in 1 John 4: 2 *Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesses not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.*

Docitism was not the only false doctrine to involve these issues, but also one known as Gnosticism. In the Gnostic Christian tradition, Christ is seen as a divine being which has taken human form in order to lead humanity back to the Light. These ideas were very much swirling around in the first century, being thoughts and philosophies of the pagan Greeks for some time, and were incorporated into Christianity to make it more palatable. As the dust settled, the more sophisticated idea of the Trinity became mainstream. But John here emphasises just in this one little letter and in more than one place the separate entities of the Father and the Son, 9 *Whosoever transgresses, and abides not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abides in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.* The Apostle then makes the point: 10,11 *If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that bids him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.* What does this mean, bid him Godspeed? It is more than greeting in God's name, but it is aiding and abetting that person in their activities and teaching. It was an issue back then when there were often visiting and travelling brethren from different locations preaching the word and sustained by hospitality to augment their meagre income earned by doing odd jobs, or as Paul did, by making tents. Thus, it was common to host a visitor. But there were some who took advantage of this, and travelled to live off

hospitality, and worse preached a false doctrine as John has already described.

So great care had to be taken, as is the case still today, not to associate ourselves with those who blatantly disregard the Truth of the gospel in either word or deed. *Romans 16:17-18 Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple. And again Titus 3:10 A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject;* Perhaps one of the reasons that the letter was so short was that the Apostle John fully intended to visit the recipient of the letter *12 Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink: but I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face, that our joy may be full.*¹³ *The children of thy elect sister greet thee.* Showing of course that John was not alone where he resided.

The 3rd letter of John begins in a similar way as we have mentioned: Calling himself the elder. This time however he writes to an individual named Gaius of whom he is well acquainted and very fond of. It is difficult to be sure who this Gaius was. It is the Greek form of the Roman Caius. A Gaius is mentioned in Macedonia as a traveling companion of Paul, along with Aristarchus in Acts 19:29, in the very next chapter it may be the same Gaius or another, who is described as one of Paul's seven traveling companions who waited for him at Troas, who had a residence in Derbe. Additionally in 1 Corinthians 1:14, Gaius is mentioned as having a house in Corinth as being one of only a few people there who were baptised by Paul, who founded

the ecclesia in that city, it seems this Gaius is referred to as well in the last part of Romans 16 as Pauls' host. There could be 4 different Gaiuses, with this one in John being the fifth, or it could all be the same one! The love which John speaks so much about, and teaches is so necessary to show, is evident in his writing, his evident concern for the spiritual and physical health of his friend, and again as in the previous letter, he is so very pleased to hear good reports being brought back to him by other visiting brethren that this Gaius was not only teaching the truth but walking in the truth, and he says: *4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.* One can truly empathise with this statement! Thus, it appears possible that Gaius was one of John's own converts. Either that or he was referring to some in Gaius' ecclesia. To Gaius, he commends his consistency: *5 Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers;* However the Net Bible reads: Dear friend, you demonstrate faithfulness by whatever you do for the brothers (even though they are strangers). We can see the sense change here, that he is showing great kindness to the visiting brothers, who are not from those parts, but from other ecclesias, he was showing great generosity.

Continuing with the Net Bible and comparing to our text in the KJV for assistance we read: "6 They have testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. 7 For they have gone forth on behalf of "The Name," accepting nothing from the pagans. 8 Therefore we ought to support such people, so that we become co-workers in cooperation with the truth". Several small points here: Love/ charity, or agape has always featured highly as a theme in all of John's writings. He uses this as a measure of genuine faith, a walking or living in the Truth. If there is a practical demonstration of that faith it is in the form of giving, caring,

sacrificing self for the benefit of others – agape, this was evident in the life of Gaius. John is letting Gaius know that his full and ongoing support in financing, and hospitality to these visiting brothers was noted, and was a good thing, it is not something to be done grudgingly or to tire of. If it forwards the cause. Then it must happen. And the cause? The Name, as the Net Bible has it, His name in KJV. Whose name? The person whose name he belongs to is not mentioned. Thus His name is The Name, the Yahweh name. I will be manifest in a multitude of people, it is His Word. Christ Jesus was the Word made flesh. His name also is incorporated, The Anointed Saviour said Thy Word is Truth. He said I am the Way the Truth and the Life. The noble cause, the visiting brothers were working for and faithful Gaius was contributing to was The Truth, the same John wrote about in the previous letter of course, and even though Gaius was not a preacher in that sense or travelling teacher of the gospel, helping those who were was just as important.

One might assume that giving exhortations and lectures and so on, are the most important work of an ecclesia. But no. All of the roles are supportive, and assisting, are key. One body. One Head. None is more important than another. We recall what the apostle Paul had to say about that in I Corinthians 12. Further we notice that John was pleased that they were not being beholden to the pagans, the Gentiles, the unbelievers. This reminds us of Pauls advice in 1 Thessalonians 4:12 *That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing*, and again 1 Timothy 3:7 *Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil*. John continues his short missive, this brief correspondence in verse 9, changing the subject, but what appears to be the main reason for writing the letter: . 9 *I wrote unto the ecclesia: but Diotrephes, who loveth to*

have the pre-eminence among them, receives us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbids them that would, and casts them out of the ecclesia.

So what John wrote to the ecclesia where Gaius belonged, has not been recorded for us, as the previous letters do not seem to match this outcome, which shows that far more correspondence and communication of course took place which we do not have visibility of. It seems that John was asking to visit, but Diotrophes was not welcoming them, nor did he want to show hospitality to senior apostles like John, as, John himself explained, because it would mean that Diotrophes would be put in the shade. Unlike Gaius who clearly was a very welcoming and generous man, Diotrophes did not see the need for visits by men such as John, for he himself had everything under control, and as John saw immediately wanted to be perceived as top dog. He saw visits by the apostles as a threat to his leadership. He evidently felt that his weakness in teaching or beliefs would be exposed. He was indeed a false teacher, that John warned the elect lady about, in the previous letter, because this individual Diotrophes even went to the extent of evicting other believers from the ecclesia who desired the apostles to visit. He was frightened of something or had something to cover up. He obviously did not understand the doctrine of fellowship and was showing signs of lording it over others, of seeing the work of the ecclesia as an opportunity to gain power.

This characteristic of Diotrophes infected the ecclesia early on as we see, and quickly became a signature of the Roman Catholic Church, where the Church was the conduit of power over the people. Diotrophes means ‘nourished by Jove’ by the way. People still

occasionally use the words By Jove as an exclamation. Jove is another name for Jupiter the Roman king of the gods, the god of thunder and of the sky. This character then clearly a converted Roman Gentile *Prating about with malicious words*. Using spiteful gossip, talking about people behind their backs to spread discord between brethren. It is not a nice thing to be on the receiving end of, and it is a wicked thing. It is one of the seven things that God hates as seen in Proverbs 6: 19 A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren. Nor is loving the limelight a good thing. The words of Paul to the Philippians are appropriate: 2:3-5 *Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. ... this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus*: John the elder, asks Gaius to be mindful of this, and to be discerning. Not to be influenced or in thrall of such a persuasive and imposing man like Diotrophes, verse 11 but: *Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God*. So John advises Gaius: Look instead at the good example of verse 12: *Demetrius hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself: yea, and we also bear record; and ye know that our record is true*. We are not informed of what good deeds Demetrius did, and it seems certain that he wasn't the same as the Diana-worshipping silversmith who incited a riot against the Apostle Paul! Again the short letter was because John fully intended to visit: 13 *I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee: But I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face*. This is one of the few passages in the Bible where we learn how the letters and books were originally recorded, and it is historical evidence as to the technology of communication at the time. In 2 John, he speaks of paper and ink. Here pen and ink. The Greek word for paper is *chartes*, which is another word for papyrus. The Greek word for pen

kalamos which means a reed, and ink is *melan*, or black, made of a compound of charcoal, gum and water. All of which was expensive, but the chosen method of the time of permanent records of communications. For further background reading on this subject it is worth reading FF Bruce, the Books and the Parchments.

John concludes *Peace be to thee. Our friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name.*