

Study 7: Introduction to 2nd John

Introduction

Second John is one of the shortest letters in the New Testament. Both the second and third letter deal with the issue of fellowship from reverse sides. Second John provides a short summary of the first letter, and warns the Christians against fellowship with the false teachers.

Body of the Study

The Recipients of the Letter

The Author of the Letter

Date and Occasion of the Letter

The style of the letter

Outline of the letter

Find the Themes

Homework and preparation for next week:

Read the whole book in a single sitting, and a few days later read it again.

Read the notes as a review of the study

Find the key words and themes from the letter

Notes for study 7: Introduction to 2nd John

Second John is one of the shortest letters in the New Testament. It provides a short summary of the first letter, and warns the Christians against fellowship with the false teachers. The letter is regarded as a “general epistle” as John doesn’t let us in on just who the recipients of the letter are!

Both the second and third letter deal with the same issue from reverse sides. Whilst second John warns against fellowship with false teachers, the third letter is written to a specific Christian to instruct him to have fellowship with some travelling Christians.

Acceptance of the second and third letters as a part of the New Testament Canon appear to have been questioned, even at an early date.

The Recipients of the Letter

The second letter is addressed to “...*The elect lady and her children...*” (2:1:1) which may be a reference to a specific person, but more likely is a reference to one of the churches in Asia Minor. In this case, it would refer to those who are “...*elect according to the foreknowledge of God...*” (1 Pet 1:2), and the children as God’s children – the Christians. The last verse of the letter supports this idea “...*the children of your elect sister greet you...*” (2:1:13). In that case, the sister would be a sister congregation, with the brethren from that congregation greeting them.

The literal address of the letter is *Eklekte Kuria* (elect lady), and it is possible that the letter was addressed to a woman with one of these names. However, the former case would seem more likely, and the most likely group would be the churches in the region of Asia Minor. *Kuria* “...is the feminine form of the word “lord”; possibly there is a hint of the church being the bride of the Lord, so that her children are the spiritual offspring of the Lord and his church¹...”

John must have had a close association with the brethren, since he says “...*I do not wish to write with paper and ink, but I hope to come and speak face to face...*” (2:1:12), and he also describes how he has “...*found some of your children walking in truth...*” (2:1:4). He must have had some form of association to have known who the children were.

The Author of the Letter

The writer gives no claim as to who he is, but simply claims to be “the elder” (2:1:1). Whilst this could be a reference to a man who was an elder in the church (a bishop), this would seem unlikely, as he claims to be “the” elder (singular), and he comes from a different congregation than the one he is writing to. More likely, it refers to “an old man” who is well known to and respected by his readers.

Internal evidence cannot be separated from the authorship of the fourth gospel. There are great similarities between “John’s letters” and the fourth gospel, with many common terms shared by both. The authorship of the first letter is almost without dispute, and the style and content of the second letter is similar to the first, pointing to the apostle John as the author.

Some common terms from the second letter and John’s other writings include *new commandment, that which we have had from the beginning, that we love one another, walk according to His commandments.*

So, whilst he doesn’t mention his name in the letters, we can make a strong identity of the writer as one of Jesus’ disciples, and the one who wrote the fourth gospel.

External evidence for John’s epistles (especially 1st John) is exceptionally strong, although weaker for the second and third letters. Irenaeus attributed 1 John to John “the disciple of the

¹ Marshall, p.60

Lord” (*Against Heresies* III, 16, 5, and 8). Clement of Alexandria (died AD 211) regarded the apostle John as the author of “John’s letters”.

The Muratorian canon (AD 170) is one of the earliest lists of New Testament books, and includes John’s letters amongst the books which were generally accepted.

Origen created a catalogue of Canonical books around AD 220 (or only about 100 years after the death of John), and of John’s letters he says: “*What shall we say of him who reclined upon the breast of Jesus, I mean John? who has left one gospel, in which he confesses that he could write so many that the whole world could not contain them. He also wrote the Apocalypse, commanded as he was, to conceal, and not to write the voices of the seven thunders. He has also left an epistle consisting of very few lines; suppose, also, that a second and third is from him, for not all agree that they are genuine, but both together do not contain a hundred lines.*”²

So, we can see that by the early second century the authenticity and authorship of the first letter was strongly accepted, although there were some questions about the second and third letters.

Date and Occasion of the Letter

Occasion:

Gnosticism had arisen in some of the churches in the area, with the Gnostics teaching a different doctrine than the orthodox teaching that the disciples had previously learned. The false teachers had left the churches at the time of the first letter (1:2:19), and it appears that they might have gone to other places and tried to infiltrate the church(es) there.

John’s first letter was written to assure the brethren of the truth of the original teaching, and to encourage them to be faithful despite the fact that their teachings had been called into question. It is a letter of encouragement in the face of such false teachers who were denying the physical manifestation of Jesus. John exhorts the brethren to put these teachers to the test by asking for a confession that Jesus was the Christ come in the flesh (1:4:1).

The second letter was written as a warning against having fellowship with the false teachers, and the third letter provided the flip side to that situation – a letter of recommendation for Demetrius, that the church might show fellowship and hospitality to him.

Date:

Whilst the date is hard to ascertain, it is most likely towards the end of the first century. Whether it was written during the exile on Patmos (AD 82-96), or during his latter time in Ephesus (AD 96-101) is not clear. It does not have the tenor of a “prison epistle” like Paul’s prison epistles.

There is a period of at least a year or more between the second and third letters, as the situation had grown decidedly worse. Working back from John’s death (AD 100 – 101), the second letter must have been written around AD 98.

The style of the letter

Both the second and third letters are of a size that would have been written on a single sheet of papyrus. Both letters are truncated at the end, with the writer shortening them off and promising to come for a visit, which suggests that he might have run out of room on the page.

The third letter is personal in style, and written to Gaius, whilst the second is more general – either to a specific un-named church, or (in my opinion, more likely) to a group of churches. John’s letters do not carry the usual greetings that are associated with many of the other letters of the New Testament, probably because of the close relationship that he has with the brethren.

² Eusebius, p. 246 (Origen’s writings have been lost, but his catalogue has been preserved in Eusebius’ writings)

Outline of the letter

The following outline is adapted from Fee & Stuart³

- 1-3 *Address and greeting*
 - 4-6 *Urging for love and walking in truth*
 - 7-11 *Warning against the false teachers*
 - 12-13 *Conclusion and greetings*
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Find the Themes

From the letter, find the words that are repeated (for example “truth”) and note where the words appear in the letter (for example, “truth” appears 4 times in the first three verses, and then not again in the letter).

Highlight the key words and thoughts throughout the letter. What is John saying about his purpose in writing? (Quotation taken from NIV).

^{2JN 1:1} 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--² because of the truth, which lives in us and will be with us forever:

^{2JN 1:3} Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, will be with us in truth and love.

^{2JN 1:4} It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us.⁵ 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.⁶ 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.

^{2JN 1:7} 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.⁸ Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully.⁹ 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.¹⁰ If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him.¹¹ Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work.

^{2JN 1:12} 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.

^{2JN 1:13} The children of your chosen sister send their greetings.

³ Fee & Stuart, p. 418-419