

**An Introduction to John's First Letter:
The Epistle of Christian Certainty**

"These things have I written unto you who believe ... that you may know that you have eternal life (1 John 5:13)".

Review

Introduction 1 John 1:1-4

The Reality of Fellowship: Stated, 1 John 1:5-2:2

The Reality of Fellowship: Tested, 1 John 2:3-5:20

The Test of Obedience, 2:3-17

The Test of Fidelity to the Apostle's Teachings, 2:18-29

The Test of Moral Purity, 3:1-4:6

The Test of Love, 4:7-21

The Test of Faith, 5:1-17

Today's Lesson: Conclusion, 5:18-21

Three affirmations, vv. 18-20

The repetition of "we know" is stunning. Here we have three great sureties; together they summarize the book. The book begins with the three-fold repetition of "if we say (1:6, 8, 10); it ends with the triadic repetition of 'we know.'

Security in God's provision, v. 18

John makes his point in three phrases—three abiding truths. The devil cannot destroy the Christian because Christ preserves him/her from habitual sinning.

Stated, v. 18a

The saint of God does not habitually, wholeheartedly indulge in sin. The verb, "sins," suggests present, continuous action. The perfect passive tense ("has been born") tells us that the rebirth, an event in the past for the saint has continuing implications.

Reasoned, v. 18b.

It is introduced by an adversative ("but"). Note also that the verb is present tense ("keeps") suggesting ongoing, continual action.

Who is the “He” who keeps the believer? Is it the believer who keeps himself/herself as we have it in the Codex Sinaiticus, one of our most ancient complete Greek Bibles (fourth century)? This is seen in the KJV and the ASV. Or, is it Christ who keeps the believer as we have it in the Codex Vaticanus and Alexandrinus? The former made its way into the Latin Vulgate and into various English translations (RSV, NASV). It seems strange to me that the saint keeps him/herself; it strikes me as contrary to our being “in Christ.” The emphasis in the section is what we know as facts, not what we must do. It is about our sureties, not our endeavors and resolves.

In what sense was Christ “born of God?” The word is translated in John 3:16 as “only begotten.” It is the one sent from God who keeps those born of Him.

The cause, v. 18c

The last phrase cites the reason we need to be kept.

We are not immune to temptation because the world of values that surrounds us is evil.

Understanding of false values, v. 19

Here John shifts from the third person singular to the third person plural (“we”).

Though God is the source of our spiritual lives, the world of other values is in the lap of the evil one. There are only two “worlds” in this one; all are in one of those two worlds. There is no “third world” in this world.

Apprehension of the truth, v. 20

This affirmation is the most fundamental of the three; it contains three declarations.

Source of truth, v. 20a

God sent His Son so that we might know God.

The tense of the verbs (“has come,” “has given”) are perfects meaning continuing results from a past event.

Result, v. 20b

We have come to know God through His Son

We have been placed in God; we share in the divine nature of love, in the Son by the Spirit. The world lies in the evil one; we lie in the Son whose earthly name is Jesus (meaning “deliver,” the Joshua of the OT) and is the “anointed one”.

Consequence, v. 20c

To know God through His Son is eternal life, the actual possession of the life of God in us.

One final command, v. 21

The major issue in the verse is the meaning in John's mind of "idols?" It seems strange that the word should be taken literally, because of the universal Christian aversion to idolatry. The reference at best is only a guess. I take it to refer to the teachings of false teachers about Christ, Christian perfectionism, and false grounds for possessing eternal life. One scholar transliterated the phrase this way, "Do not abandon the real for the illusory." The Greek word for idol means "false appearances."

An Introduction to John's Second Letter

"TRUTH AND LOVE"

Unlike 1 John, which is in the form of a treatise, 2 John looks very much like a typical first century letter in structure. The writer is identified, as also the recipients; there is a greeting, an exhortation, and a final greeting. It is the smallest book in the Bible.

The major introductory problem with the book is the identity of the author ("the elder") and recipients of the book ("to [the] elect lady and her children"). How are these to be understood?

"The elder," does it refer to age and maturity or to a church officer since the earliest churches were led by a plurality of leaders called elders? Since the article ("the") appears before "elder" and we have no record of a single leader over a church in the New Testament, it seems best to take it as an age or maturity category. From the unspecific identity of the author, we can deduce that they knew him well.

"Elect lady," does it refer to a literal woman (translated "lady Electa") and her family or is the phrase to be taken as a personification.

If you take the phrase as a literal woman, then she has a sister ("Sister Electa") of the same name (v.13). That seems highly unlikely.

It does not seem likely that a personal command to love (that is, to love a particular family) was from “the beginning” (v. 5).

The personification of cities or countries in female form was an established literary convention in Bible times. The Corinthian Church is referred to as a “bride betrothed to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2)”. Peter speaks of the “church in Babylon (read Rome) as a “she (1Pet. 5:13)”. Israel is called the “daughter of Zion” in the Prophets. The church universal is called a bride (Rev. 20: 2, 9). English coins to this day have the Roman designation “Britannia”.

“Her children,” assuming that “Electa” is a figure of speech, refers to the members of the church and the letter ends with a greeting from members of another church (v.13).

In summary, it seems best to say that what we have here is a first century letter written by a well-recognized figure in the earliest churches that writes from the city where he is residing in a house-church to another house-church. According to tradition, the apostle John is writing from Asia Minor (Ephesus?) to a nearby church (an example of this would be his writing to the seven churches of the Revelation). Though the author is not specified, the commonality of themes and phrases with 1 John has caused our scholars to universally attribute it to the Apostle John.

2 John: The Letter

Salutation, vv. 1-3

The author, v. 1a

The recipients, vv.1b-2

Identified, v. 1b

The recipients of the letter are not specifically identified, though they are people who embrace the truth. “The truth” is the teaching embodied in Jesus. “The lady and her children” is a metaphorical way of saying the church and her members.

Reasoned, v. 2

The nature of truth, v. 2a

It is not uncommon that what is said in one place of the Spirit is said of Christ in another. It is by the Spirit who is truth (1 John 5:17) that Christ abides or indwells us.

The endurance of truth, v. 2b

Here the apostle states the believer's security. Christ by the Spirit will be the believer's possession forever!

The greeting, v. 3

The greeting is a typical of first century letters. Paul uses it in both letters to Timothy as does Jude. Some have seen in the trilogy (grace, mercy, and peace) the order of salvation. It begins in grace, unmerited favor, and mercy, the response to the human condition, leading to peace. It begins in God and ends in the benefit of mankind. It comes to us from God the Father through Jesus, His son.

The phrase, "Son of the Father," is unique to John; it is an affirmation of our Lord's deity.

Occasion, v. 4

The tense of the verb, "rejoiced," looks at the inception of an action. When John heard of the godliness of this group of people he was delighted. "Walking in truth" means conduct characterized by sincerity. The "some" likely does not imply that a group in the church was walking unfaithfully; it is more likely that John simply met some from the church. Since John was impressed with those he met, he wanted contact with all of them.

Exhortation, vv. 5-11

The command stated, v. 5

The command is to continue in what they have understood from the inception of the gospel message that God wants of us.

The command elaborated, v. 6

The essence of love is obedience (1 John 5:3). Obedience should characterize our lives. Love means living according to God's commands.

The command reasoned, vv. 7-9

The fact of false teachers, v. 7

"Antichrists" reject the deity of Christ. Bad theology always leads to poor morals.

The danger of false teachers, v. 8

Having warned them of the threat of false teachers, he here expresses the danger of them. What will a believer lose through entanglement in error? It

seems the answer is the reward of a life lived in obedience. The same idea is expressed by Paul in 1 Cor. 3:8, 14 and John in Rev. 22: 12. The reward appears to be the fullness of blessing accrued in this life by obedience.

The error of false teachers, v. 9

To deny Christ is to reject the Father, the two are inseparable (1 John 2:23).

The conduct enjoined, vv. 10-11

Stated, v. 10

False teachers are not to be given an audience before the assembled church (this is not about personal contact). Hospitality is not to be shown to them. In the ancient world, public inns were notorious places. Since the churches depended on itinerate teachers, hospitality was a necessity.

Reasoned, v. 11

“Greet” implies support for ministry. Ecclesiastical fellowship is not to be extended to those who deny the Christ.

A Personal Note, v.12

We do not know what else John wanted to say to this congregation. Perhaps a clue is the elaboration of many themes in 1 John.

A Final Greeting, v.13

Thoughts:

1. Truth and love are the two great virtues. Truth without love can lead to cruelty, love without truth to permissiveness. In God, there is truth and love (v. 3) in perfect congruity.
2. When people act commendably, it is good to commend them (v. 4).
3. As truth and love is an unbreakable unity so is obedience and love. Obedience is the manifestation of love (v. 6). Love, truth, and obedience are a unity
4. Love means a concern that emanates from the heart and expressed in concern for others. It is the summation of all the commandments.
5. Listening to false teachers can have a detrimental impact depriving one of the fullness and richness that comes through obedience to the truth (v. 8). Error causes unrest and dissension often bring out the worst side of all of us.
6. We are neither to officially sanction nor help those who are opposed to the doctrines of Christ (v. 10).
7. To deny the Son is not to have the Father. There is no sense of a true faith in God that does not embrace the truthfulness of Christ’s claims (v. 9).