

Notes & Outlines

2 JOHN

3 JOHN

J. Vernon McGee

2 JOHN

WRITER: John the Apostle

DATE: A.D. 90 — 100

PERSONAL LETTER:

This epistle is like Philemon in that it is a personal letter written by John to “the elect lady.” Is the Greek word *electa* a title, or does it refer to a Christian lady in the early church by the name of Electa? It would seem that it was addressed to some lady in the church or to a local church that was extending hospitality to all those who claimed to be Christian, though some were heretics. John warns against entertaining such.

THEME: For truth’s sake.

Truth is worth contending for, and it is wrong to receive false teachers.

OUTLINE:

- I. Love expressed in the boundary of truth**, vv. 1 — 6
“Love in truth”
- II. Life is an expression of the doctrine of Christ**, vv. 7 — 11
(False doctrine leads to evil deeds.)
- III. Personal greeting**, vv. 12, 13
(False teachers are not to be received by the Christian, but true teachers are to be received with joy.)

COMMENT:

- I. Love expressed in the boundary of truth**, vv. 1 — 6
v. 1 — “The elder” (*presbuteros*) is *presbyter*. It has a twofold meaning: (1) seniority (referring to age), a senior citizen; (2) title (referring to office), minister or teacher. This is an obvious reference to John the apostle. Perhaps John’s life was in jeopardy due to rising persecution so that he withheld his name. John was in his 90s.

“Elect lady” (*electa kyria*), to whom this letter is addressed,

could refer to a prominent lady in the church. However, I have come to the opinion that a local church was in view. One cannot be insistent upon either view.

“Truth” (“the” should be omitted) is the theme of this epistle. It means *truly* or *sincerely*. In these second and third epistles we see the teaching of 1 John in action.

“The truth” is the body of doctrine of the apostles.

v. 2 — “The truth’s sake” is defense of the truth.

“Dwelleth” is *abides*. “To know Him, to be in Him, to abide in Him means knowledge, fellowship, and constancy” (Bengel).

The Truth in v. 7 is Jesus Christ.

The truth in v. 9 is doctrine.

v. 3 — “Grace...mercy, and peace” — *mercy* has been added.

“In truth and love” — is the polarity of the Christian life. We oscillate back and forth between these two. It is difficult to maintain a balance. Extremes are fighting fundamentalists on one hand and the slobbering liberals on the other (see Ephesians 4:15).

v. 4 — Evidently this is an answer to a letter he had received.

“Walking in truth” refers to the manner of life, meaning walking in obedience to commandments from the Father.

v. 5 — See notes on 1 John 2:7.

v. 6 — John’s teaching in his first epistle walked in shoe leather in the first century of the Roman Empire.

II. Life is an expression of the doctrine of Christ,

vv. 7 — 11

v. 7 — Gnosticism denied that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh; it denied the humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Cerinthian Gnosticism taught that Jesus was a man on whom the Spirit came at His baptism and left at His crucifixion. Docetic

Gnosticism denied the reality of the manhood of Jesus. It taught that He was just a phantom, a figment of the imagination.

“An antichrist” should be *the* antichrist.

v. 8 — He warns against the danger of missing a reward, not against losing their salvation.

v. 9 — Here he has in mind those who are not real believers. To reject the doctrine of Christ means that they were not believers. Doctrine is also a proof of life.

v. 10 — A better translation would be: *If anyone cometh unto you and brings not His teaching (doctrine), receive him not into your house and give him no greeting.* There were no lovely motels in that day, so itinerant teachers were entertained in homes. Believers were not to support these teachers in any way.

v. 11 — One who supports a false teacher is a partner in his error. Should not you and I be more careful today?

III. Personal greeting, vv. 12, 13

v. 12 — John anticipated visiting this person or church to whom he had written.

v. 13 — The greetings are from another person or church. These simple verses are eloquent testimony from the early church.

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PERSONALITIES:

This is a letter similar to John's second epistle, in that it is personal in character, and it carries the same theme of *truth*. However, this letter deals with personalities, which will be noted in the outline. In his second epistle, John says that *truth* is worth standing for; in the third epistle that *truth* is worth working for.

OUTLINE:

- I. Gaius, beloved brother in the early church,** vv. 1 — 8
(*Gaius, the one to whom the letter is addressed, is urged to extend hospitality to true teachers of the Word.*)
- II. Diotrephes, “who loveth to have the pre-eminence,”**
vv. 9 — 11
(*Evil deeds are an expression of false doctrine.*)
- III. Demetrius “hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself,”** vv. 12 — 14
(*A good life is an expression of true doctrine.*)

COMMENT:

- I. Gaius, beloved brother in the early church,** vv. 1 — 8
 - v. 1** — “Elder” (see 2 John 1).
“Gaius the beloved” is a better form of address. John calls him “the beloved” four times (verses 1, 2, 5, 11).
“In truth” (omit the article) means *genuinely*.
 - v. 2** — John prayed for his physical and material welfare.
 - v. 3** — The first “the truth” is the *doctrine and teaching* of the apostles. Omit the article for the second “truth,” which

means *conduct*.

v. 4 — “My children” — perhaps Gaius was a convert of John’s.

“Walk in truth” — conduct conforms to doctrine.

vv. 5-8 — He commends Gaius for having received and entertained the true teachers of the Word. In 2 John, the apostle warns against receiving false teachers. In 3 John, he encourages the believers to receive the true brethren.

II. Diotrephes, “who loveth to have the pre-eminence,”

vv. 9 — 11

The missionaries of the early church were itinerants. They went from place to place. Since the local inn was a wretched and dirty place and there were no Holiday Inns or Howard Johnson Motels, these missionaries were entertained in the homes of believers. Gaius opened his home, for which John congratulates him. Diotrephes opposed this practice, and John censures him for it. Diotrephes’ “hang-up” was that he loved to have recognition, attention, and be the center of attraction. He had to rule or ruin. There is generally one like him in every church who wants to control the church and the preacher. He was guilty on five charges: (1) must occupy the leading place; (2) actually refused to receive John; (3) made malicious statements against the apostles; (4) refused to entertain the missionaries (apparently he wanted to do the teaching); (5) excommunicated those who did entertain the missionaries (he tried to be the first Pope). He was Diotrephes, the dictator.

III. Demetrius “hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself,” vv. 12 — 14

v. 12 — While there is only one verse about Demetrius, it gives us an insight into the Christian character of this noble saint of God. We cannot identify him with any other of the same name. His name means *belonging to Demeter* (Ceres, god of

agriculture), which identifies him as a convert from paganism. He adorned the doctrine of Christ. Others testified to his character. He was true to the doctrine.

Christianity was on trial in the first century. Three men pass before us in this little epistle. Two were genuine, one was a phony. The gospel walked in shoe leather in pagan Rome.

vv. 13, 14 — John would have written a longer letter, but he was coming to visit his friend, Gaius.

These notes, prepared by J. Vernon McGee, are for the purpose of giving assistance to the listeners of the THRU THE BIBLE RADIO program. They are to be used with the Bible and will be more meaningful as you look up all the Scripture references. Due to the necessary brevity of both notes and broadcasts, a list of recommended books is included for those wanting a more detailed study. These books may be obtained from a Christian library or bookstore or ordered from the publishers.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS:

Boice, James Montgomery. *The Epistles of John*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.

Burdick, Donald W. *The Epistles of John*. Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1970.

Ironside, H. A. *The Epistles of John*. Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1931.

Kelly, William. *An Exposition of the Epistles of John*. Addison, Illinois: Bible Truth Publishers, 1905.

McGee, J. Vernon. *2 & 3 John and Jude*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991.

Mitchell, John G. *Fellowship: Three Letters From John*. Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1974.

Robertson, A. T. *Epochs in the Life of the Apostle John*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1933.

Stott, J. R. W. *The Epistles of John*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964.

Strauss, Lehman. *The Epistles of John*. Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, n.d.

Thomas W. H. Griffith. *The Apostle John*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956.

Vaughan, Curtis. *1, 2, 3 John*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970.

Vine, W. E. *The Epistles of John*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.

Wuest, Kenneth S. *In These Last Days*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954.

(Deals with the epistles of 2 Peter, John, and Jude.)



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