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# SECOND JOHN

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In its introduction to II John, Halley's Handbook states: "This and III John were Personal Little Notes to friends John expected to visit. He wrote other letters, I Jn. 2:14; III Jn. 9, possibly many of them. Personal letters, such as these, on account of their brevity and private nature, would be less generally read in Christian Assemblies than Church Letters, and consequently would be less widely known. These Two Little Epistles, under the guidance of God's Spirit, were rescued from oblivion, and preserved for the Church, possibly by being attached to a copy of I John in the particular Church or Churches where they had been received."

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## Authorship:

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In The Tyndale Commentary on The Letters of John, Dr. John Stott writes about the authorship: "The natural place in which to look for information about the authorship of any ancient letter is in the letter itself. It was customary in antiquity for a correspondent to begin by announcing his identity. This was Paul's invariable rule, and the same holds good of the letters of Peter, James and Jude. The author of 2 and 3 John styles himself 'the elder' without disclosing his name. Only the Letter to the Hebrews and the first letter of John begin without any announcement of the author's name or title, and indeed without any introductory greeting. The anonymity of I John is not to be explained by the suggestion that the author is writing a theological treatise, or even a general or 'catholic' letter, as Origen first called it. Although it has a considerable theological content, it contains a genuinely personal message addressed to a particular congregation, or group of them, in a particular situation (cf. 2:19). The 'I – you – we' form of address is maintained throughout; the recipients of the letter are the author's 'dear children' or 'dear friends', whose spiritual history and present circumstances he knows. Moreover, 'the wiring is ... instinct from first to last with intense personal feeling' .... It is a truly pastoral letter, sent by a pastor to his flock, or a part of it, as are also (and even more clearly) the two shorter letters.

Who, then, was the author of these letters? Since they are anonymous, there is no a priori need to ascribe them to the apostle John or to any other John. Nevertheless, the external evidence is strongly in favor of this ascription, particularly in the case of the first letter."

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## Introduction:

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The Tyndale Commentary states: "The second and third letters of John are the shortest documents in the New Testament – shorter even than the letter to Philemon and the letter of Jude, which are the only other New Testament letters consisting of but one chapter. Each of John's second and third letters contains less than 300 Greek words and was no doubt written on a single sheet of papyrus. The same themes which the author has elaborated in his first letter recur in brief in his second and third, but the form of what he writes is now less a treatise than a letter, and the particular subject treated is hospitality to travelling missionaries.

The establishment and consolidation of the Roman Empire made travel throughout the inhabited world much easier and safer than it had ever been before. It was facilitated by the great roads which the Romans built and by the pax Romana which their legions maintained, as well as by a commonly understood language. The rapid spread of the gospel in the first century AD

owed much to these advantages....

As a result, it was natural that Christian people on their travels should be given hospitality by members of the local churches. There are many traces in the New Testament of this custom. For example, Paul was entertained by Lydia in Philippi, Jason in Thessalonica, Gaius in Corinth, Philip the evangelist in Caesarea and the Cypriot Mnason in Jerusalem (Acts 16:15; 17:7; Rom. 16:23; Acts 21:6, 16).

Such hospitality was open to easy abuse, however. There was the false teacher, on the one hand, who yet posed as a Christian; should hospitality be extended to him? And there was the more obvious mountebank, the false prophet with false credentials, who was motivated less by creed than by greed, namely the material profit and the free board and lodging he hoped to receive. It is against this background that we must read the second and third letters of John, for in them 'the elder' issues instructions concerning whom to welcome and whom to refuse, and why. Genuine Christian missionaries, he writes, may be recognized both by the message they bring and by the motive which inspire them. If they faithfully proclaim the doctrine of Christ (cf. 2 Jn. 7), and if they have set out not for gain but for the sake of the Name (3 Jn. 7), then they should be both received and helped forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God' (3 Jn. 6)."

### The Text:

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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:

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.

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.

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.

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.

13 The children of your chosen sister send their greetings.

The Greek text of v. 1 reads literally: "The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in [the] truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth."

The letter is addressed to “the chosen lady and her children.” The Greek words used are *ekletos* (select, or favorite), *kuria*, which is the feminine of *kurios* (lord).

The Tyndale Commentary observes: “The letter is addressed to the chosen lady (*ekletē kuria*). Commentators differ as to whether these words describe an individual person or are the personification of a church. Those who believe her to have been a person have vied with one another in ingenious guesses about her identity.... If the recipient was an individual, she was no doubt an anonymous chosen lady.... All attempts to identify her as Mary, the mother of our Lord (because of Jn. 19:27 and her traditional residence in Asia), or Martha (which is Aramaic for ‘lady’ or ‘mistress’) are pure conjecture.”

I am inclined to think of Mary, the mother of Jesus, as being the addressee of this letter. But as stated above, that would be a “conjecture.”

The Adam Clarke’s Commentary comments: “Some have thought that *Eclecta* was the name of this matron, from the word *eklektee*, which we translate *elect*, and which here signifies the same as excellent, eminent, honorable, or the like. Others think that a particular Church is intended, which some suppose to be the Church at Jerusalem, and that the *elect sister*, 2 John 13, means the church at Ephesus; but these are conjectures which appear to me to have no good ground. I am satisfied that no metaphor is here intended; that the letter was sent to some eminent Christian matron, not far from Ephesus, who was probably deaconess of the Church, who, it is likely, had a church at her house, or at whose house the apostle and travelling evangelists frequently preached, and were entertained.”

John’s use of the word “truth” in different forms suggests that he means more than merely to express his sincerity. In the Gospels, truth became personified in Jesus Christ, who said: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”<sup>1</sup> In that sense, truth is the ultimate reality. Living in the truth means living in fellowship with God through Jesus Christ.

The Tyndale Commentary states: “John describes his relationship to the church in the words whom (plural) I love in the truth. ‘I’ is emphatic (*egō*). Perhaps he is casting a side glance at the heretics. Not only had they compromised the truth, but they were a proud and loveless lot. John’s declaration is in complete contrast. The Greek phrase translated in the truth (as in v. 3 and in 3 Jn. 1) lacks the article. It could therefore be an adverbial expression rendered ‘whom I love in truth’ (RV, NEB; cf. 1 Jn. 3:18), or ‘truly’, that is, in all Christian sincerity.... But the context with two subsequent references to the truth, with the article (1-2), surely justifies the RSV and NIV translation whom I love in the truth. It was the truth about Christ in opposition to the ‘lie’ of the heretics (1 Jn. 2:21-23). Nor was he alone in his love for them, for also all who know the truth (literally ‘have come to know’ it, perfect, *egnōkotes*) shared his love. The communion of love is as wide as the communion of faith....”

The Greek text of verses 2 and 3 reads literally: “For the truth’s sake, which dwells in us, and with us shall be forever. Grace, mercy, [and] peace, be with you from God, [the] Father, and from [the Lord] Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and in love.”

The New Living Translation renders v. 3: “Grace, mercy, and peace, which come from God the Father and from Jesus Christ—the Son of the Father—will continue to be with us who live in truth and love.”

The Tyndale Commentary comments on the greeting: “It is well known that letters written

by friends to each other in the Greek language in the first century AD conformed to an accepted pattern with a stylized beginning and end. Usually the letter opened with the writer's name and the identity of the recipients, followed by the single word *chairein*, 'greeting'.