

WRITER

John uses the word “elder” (*presbuteros*) in verse 1 to identify himself as the writer. It is a word of respect that was used by both Jews and Gentiles, and subsequently, used by the church to show respect for the elder apostle John (See 1 Pt 5:1). John’s authorship of the letter is affirmed by the church writers who wrote in the 2nd century. The letter has the same literary style of 1 and 3 John. The other two letters also contain similar thoughts as this letter. Bible students thus conclude that this is one of the five letters that John, the son of Zebedee and Salome, wrote during his life (See “Writer” in intro. to Jn).

DATE

Many Bible students believe that this letter was written somewhere between A.D. 80 and 90. However, an early date for the letter would be more likely. Some affirm that the letter was written shortly before A.D. 70, possibly around A.D. 67,68. The deceivers who were already present and going among the disciples were teaching a doctrine that Jesus Christ, or the Messiah, did not come in the flesh (vs 7). If John’s reference in verse 7 is to the judaizing teachers who could have accepted Jesus as a teacher, but not the incarnate Son of God, then the letter would have historical relevance to the time preceding the fall of national Israel in A.D. 70.

THEME

The theme of the letter is identified by the fact that the word “truth” is used five times. John thus writes concerning our loyalty to the truth of the gospel that was revealed through Jesus Christ (Jn 1:17). In support of this theme, he uses the word “commandments” four times, “teaching” three times, and pronouns in reference to these words four times. It is thus a letter reaffirming the truth of gospel in which the elect lady and her children walked. They continued to live the gospel because of who Jesus was, the incarnate Son of God.

PURPOSE

The letter is directed to the elect lady and her children. It has been difficult to determine the identity of the elect lady. However, the purpose for which John wrote was to encourage her and her children to walk after the loving nature of discipleship and be obedient to the commandments of Jesus. He wrote to warn the elect lady of those who were going about with a doctrine that denied fundamental teachings concerning the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Those who either denied or questioned the incarnation, were working against the gospel.

Outline: (1) Introduction (1-3), (2) Walking in the commandments (4-6), (3) Warning of deceivers (7-13)

INTRODUCTION

1 The elder: The Greek article is here used before the word *presbuteros* in order to indicate a specific person. The elder is not just any older person, but one who is acquainted with the elect lady and her children. Therefore, it is assumed that the elder is John the apostle, one who had been designated an elder among the disciples where he was located at the time of writing. **Elect lady:** The word “elect” indicates that this particular lady was chosen or selected for a specific work, or for a specific purpose. In a generic sense, she was a Christian lady who had children. She also had a sister who had children (vs 13). If she was or had been married, we might assume that her husband was dead or that he was an unbeliever. She was a woman who was given to hospitality of the saints, specifically those who were teachers (vs 10; see 3 Jn 5-8). Some students have assumed that John's use of the term “elect lady” is a metaphorical reference to the church. The church was elect, and thus, the elect bride for Christ when He returns (See comments Rv 12). However, there are several reasons to believe that reference here was to a specific person. The Greek word *kuria* (lady) means “lady,” and in verse 5 it is used in the vocative case, thus indicating a specific person. It is used nowhere else in the New Testament. The elect lady here had children. Such would not be characteristic of the

church, for the church does not have children. The people were the church. In 1 Peter 5:13 reference is made to Peter's wife as the "elect sister." The similar reference to the elect lady in this context would indicate that reference here is also to a specific sister. ***I love in truth:*** This is to love someone because of their obedience of and devotion to the life and teachings of Jesus (1 Jn 3:18; 3 Jn 1). The elect lady and her children were known among the disciples for loving the truth that Jesus was the revealed Son of God. ***All those who have known the truth:*** This is the truth of the gospel (See comments Gl 2:14). The manner by which John makes this statement infers that if this lady was a specific person, she was known by the church as a whole. Some students, therefore, have assumed that the elect lady was Mary, the mother of Jesus. It was into John's care that Jesus had placed Mary at the time of the cross (Jn 19:25-27). If the letter were written in the middle 60s, then this assumption, if true, would mean that Mary was in her late 70s or early eighties.

2 *Truth that dwells in us:* It is the truth that Jesus is the Son of God that abides in us. Jesus abides in us as His life permeates our lives because of our submission to His will (See Cl 3:16; 1 Jn 2:14,24; 3:19). It is the life of Jesus that abides in us and will be with us throughout eternal existence (Compare Mt 24:35; 1 Pt 1:25).

3 *Grace:* Since no man can live without sin, then only those who will be saved are those who are saved by God's grace (Rm 1:7; 5:1,2; Ep 2:5-9; 1 Tm 1:2; Ti 2:11; see comments Rm 3:20; Gl 2:16). ***Mercy:*** Mercy sets aside punishment that law says one must receive. Grace and mercy are always together, for God's grace leads to His mercy in reference to our salvation (Ep 2:4,5). ***Peace:*** The grace and mercy of God always result in peace between God and man. Man is relieved of the guilt of sin by the grace of God. He is thus spared from the just wrath of God that will be poured out on those who have not come into a covenant relationship with God through Jesus (See 2 Th 1:7-9). Those who have come into a covenant relationship with God have peace of mind. They have such because they trust in God's grace in order to be saved. They do not trust in their own performance of law (Ph

4:7; compare Rm 1:7; 1 Tm 1:2; 2 Tm 1:2; 1 Pt 1:2). Grace, mercy and peace come from God through the reconciliation offered on the cross. However, the reception of such is conditioned upon the obedience of those who would respond to the cross (See Rm 6:3-6). This is an appropriate introduction to the theme of this letter. Some had denied that Jesus was the fulfillment of all prophecies that He was the Messiah, the incarnate Son of God. If Jesus were only a good teacher, but not the incarnate Son of God, then there would have been no grace and mercy between God and man at the time of writing.

WALKING IN THE COMMANDMENTS

4 I rejoiced greatly: John rejoiced greatly concerning the faithfulness of those who had given themselves to obey the Lord (See 3 Jn 3,4). **Walking in truth:** John's joy was in the fact that those he had converted were remaining faithful to the calling of the gospel by which they were called into fellowship with God (1 Jn 1:5-7; 2:4,7; 3 Jn 3). He rejoiced over the faithfulness of the children of the elect lady who were remaining obedient to Jesus. **We have received a commandment:** There is a standard by which all men must live. It is not in men who live to direct their own lives by inventing their own religious laws (Jr 10:23). The more one directs his beliefs and obedience by his own traditions or emotions, the more he is directed away from depending on God for instruction (See comments Mt 15:1-9; Mk 7:1-9). Because it is not possible for men to construct their own religions that would bring them closer to God, God has given men His law that they might be directed in the way of the Lord (See Mt 11:28-30; Jn 6:45).

5 A new commandment: The commandment that the elect lady had heard from the time of her conversion was the commandment to love as Jesus had loved us (Jn 13:34,35; 15:12,17; 1 Jn 3:11,23; 4:7,11; see comments 1 Jn 2:7,8). Jesus gave the new commandment during His ministry. However, it is new at the time of the conversion of any individual who submits in obedience to the gospel (Compare 1 Jn 2:7,24; 3:11).

6 This is love: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His

commandments" (1 Jn 5:3; see Jn 14:15; 15:14; 1 Jn 2:5,24). True love is defined by action on the part of the one who responds to the love of God (1 Jn 4:19; see Gl 5:6). A verbal proclamation of love is not sufficient. If one would love as God has loved through Jesus, then true love is identified by what one does in his relationship with others. **You should walk in it:** John is talking about a behavioral pattern of life. One must believe correct fundamental teachings that pertain to truth (See comments Ep 4:4-6). However, fundamental truths are unprofitable unless they motivate one to carry out behavioral love toward one's fellow man (See comments Jn 13:34,35; 14:15,21; 1 Jn 2:7-11; 3:18,23,24; 4:19-21).

WARNING OF DECEIVERS

7 Deceivers have gone out into the world: The sect of Docetic Gnostics affirmed that the Christ came as a phantom or spirit that did not appear in the flesh (See Jn 1:1,14; Ph 2:6-8). They thus denied the fundamental doctrine of the incarnation of God in order to offer Himself in atonement for the sins of men (See comments 1 Jn 4:2; 5:6). These deceivers were wandering about among the disciples, teaching those things that denied the fundamental doctrine of the incarnation. However, we could conclude that there were insurrectionist Jews who were recruiting Jewish Christians for rebellion against Roman domination. In the years preceding the end of national Israel in A.D. 70, some Jewish Christians had accepted Jesus as only a good teacher, but not the incarnate Son of God who was the Messiah (Christ) of Israel. They denied that Jesus was incarnate in the flesh of man, and thus not the Messiah. The Greek equivalent for Messiah is the word "Christ." These Jews were against Jesus being the Christ (the Messiah), and thus were antichrists. **Deceiver and the antichrist:** The antichrist (*antichristoi*) about whom John here speaks was not a specific personality that would come in the future. He uses the term here to refer to anyone who would deny the incarnation of Jesus as the Christ (See comments 1 Tm 4:1ff; 1 Jn 2:18,22; 4:1-3). We must not dismiss from this context the possibility that John was talking about judaizing teachers who

may have claimed that Jesus was a good teacher of Israel, but not the incarnate Son of God and Messiah of Israel. These teachers were certainly going about among the disciples (See intro. to Gl). When the Jews of Asia Minor brought into their theology the mysticism of pre-gnostic concepts, they developed a Judaeo-Gnosticism that later infiltrated the church when they were converted to Christianity. They seem to have brought into the church their Gnostic concepts that distorted the incarnate nature of the Son of God. Though we do not know the origin of the doctrine of the denial that Jesus Christ came in the flesh, we must assume that the origin was from the religious community from which conversions were made in the vicinity of John's readers.

8 Look to yourselves: The elect lady and her children must continually examine themselves lest they be led astray by the deceivers who denied the incarnation and messiahship of Jesus. Such is a good warning to all Christians who might be led astray by deceptive doctrines (See Mk 13:9; 1 Co 10:12; 2 Co 13:5; 1 Jn 5:21). John thus places the responsibility for remaining faithful on the back of the believers. Each disciple is responsible for himself in reference to his faithfulness to the Lord. **That you do not lose:** It is an ever present possibility that a Christian can forsake his belief in those things that stimulate obedience. He can thus turn from his walk in the light to fall away, and thus be lost (See Gl 3:4; Hb 6:4-6; 2 Pt 2:20-22). In order to lose something, one must first possess it. In this case, the elect lady and her children had gained salvation by the grace of God through their obedience to the gospel (See comments Rm 6:3-6). However, they could lose their salvation if they turned away from the truth of the gospel (See 2 Tm 4:7,8; Rv 14:13; compare Jn 4:36; 6:27).

9 Goes ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ: The word *proagon* here means to go onward or before (Compare the use of the word in 1 Tm 1:18; Hb 7:18). The one who goes beyond that which is spoken does not abide in the teaching to which he was obedient (See comments Rm 6:17; compare Jn 8:31; At 17:24; Gl 1:6-9; Rv 22:18,19). The "teaching of Christ" in the context of this

letter refers to the gospel of Christ, not to a systematic theology of legal mandates to which one must conform perfectly in order to stand as a “Christian” before God. If this were the subject of John’s statement, then none of us could abide in the “teaching of Christ,” for we are all sinners (Rm 3:23). Therefore, the reference “teaching of Christ” is to gospel, not law, for if it were to law, then no one could legally obey perfectly the “teaching of Christ.” So if one rejects any part of the gospel of the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and kingdom reign of Christ, and a response thereto, then he or she has gone beyond the gospel—the teaching of Christ—which very thing was happening with the teaching of the Gnostics at the time John wrote the thoughts of 2 John 9,10. The Gnostics were teaching something similar to what Paul identified as “another gospel” (Gl 1:6-9). Some in Galatia were teaching parts of the gospel, but adding other statutes of obedience that must also be performed. The Gnostics were rejecting specifically the incarnation. In the Galatian context of Galatians 1:6-9 some Jewish Christians were adding other requirements for salvation in order to supplement the gospel. In doing such, they too were going beyond the gospel of grace by teaching requirements for our salvation other than the “teaching (doctrine) of Christ.” They had forgotten that adding to and subtracting from the message of the gospel means that one has gone beyond the gospel (See Rv 22:18,19). **Does not have God:** The conditions for remaining in a covenant fellowship with the Father and Son are to confess the Son (1 Jn 2:23), and to remain in the truth of the incarnation of the Son. When one confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, and thus, allows his life to be directed by this confession, he will direct his life by the teachings of Jesus. In this living confession, he will have life (1 Jn 5:11,12).

10 This teaching: The context here is in reference to those teachers who denied the incarnation and messiahship of Jesus (vs 7). Those who denied the incarnation were denying the sonship of Jesus, and thus, denying the gospel upon which our faith is built and our salvation affirmed (See comments Mt 16:18,19). **Do not receive**

him: Those who denied the incarnation were taking advantage of the hospitality of the saints (See Rm 12:13; 3 Jn 5-8). They were going about from house to house, teaching against the foundation upon which our faith is established. They were denying the incarnation of the Christ. **House:** Since the early disciples met in their homes for edification, it was easy for the false teachers to go about from house to house in order to teach their doctrine (Compare At 20:20). **Do not give him greeting:** The elect lady should not give these antichrists any hospitality. John's admonition is that the faithful should do nothing that would encourage these false teachers in their works of denial (See Rm 16:17; Ti 1:10,11; 1 Tm 1:6; 2 Tm 3:6). Therefore, the Christian has no obligation to help in any way those who would deny the truth of the incarnate Christ. Those who denied the humanity of God in Jesus, and His atonement for the sins of men on the cross, should not be condoned as teaching the truth. The context of this admonition does not refer to those with whom one may disagree on matters of opinion.

11 John was warning Christians not to allow themselves to be placed in a position of compromise with open and known teachers who denied the fundamental truth of the incarnate deity of Jesus as the Christ (See 2 Co 6:14ff; 1 Tm 5:22,24,25; Rv 18:4). **Evil deeds:** It is an evil deed to deny any fundamental teaching of the gospel (Compare Mt 7:22,23). It is important, therefore, to teach correctly those fundamental events of the gospel that pertain to the incarnation of the Son of God (See comments Rm 1:13-16). Our belief that Jesus was the incarnate Messiah of God is fundamental to our salvation. If Christians deny this truth, then they have no foundation upon which to claim to be Christian.

12 Many things to write: We wish that John had written more (3 Jn 13,14). However, on the subject of the incarnation, he revealed no more truth in this letter than what he wrote in his account of the life and teachings of Jesus in the record of the gospel (See Jn 20:30,31). Because he wrote so much in all his letters on the incarnation, we would assume that the entire gospel of the redemptive crucifixion, resurrection, ascension and kingdom reign

depend on the fact of the incarnation of the Son of God. If there were no body of the Son of God to be offered as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of humanity, then the crucifixion would have been meaningless. John was planning on visiting the elect lady, and thus, there was no reason to write a lengthy letter. His purpose in a short letter was as that of Paul who needed to make a trip to the disciples in Roman in order to teach them further in matters of the gospel (See comments Rm 1:13-16). We could assume, therefore, that all that God wanted revealed to us concerning the nature and truth of the incarnation of Jesus had already been revealed and written by the time this letter was written. **13 The children:** This salutation is from the children of the sister of the woman to whom John wrote. The children were thus addressing their aunt.

Commentary by Roger E. Dickson

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ABREVIATIONS

OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Cl**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pf**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**

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