

Andrews University

Digital Commons @ Andrews University

Faculty Publications

8-25-2022

Introduction to "2 John"

Félix H. Cortez

Andrews University, fcortez@andrews.edu

Keldie Paroschi

Brazil Adventist University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs>



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), and the [History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Cortez, Félix H. and Paroschi, Keldie, "Introduction to "2 John"" (2022). *Faculty Publications*. 4849.
<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs/4849>

This Contribution to Book is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact repository@andrews.edu.

1 John

The keynote of 1 John is love: God is love (4:8); love is of God (4:7) and because God loved us and sent His Son, His followers ought also to love one another (4:10-11). Christians can know that they are God's children if they love one another and if they obey His commands. As beautiful and lofty as these themes are, they are not presented just as abstract theological concepts. They are outlined in this encouraging letter in the context of a conflict within the early church that threatened to undermine the church and its message for the world.

AUTHOR

The first epistle of John is commonly attributed to the apostle John, the son of Zebedee. Although the letter itself does not provide much evidence about its authorship, it is clear that the writer was an eyewitness to Jesus' ministry, death, and resurrection (1:1-3, 5; 4:14). It gives him apostolic authority. Most of these passages are in the first-person plural ("we"), indicating that the author is referring to fellow eyewitnesses, in contrast to the second generation of believers ("you"). But on several occasions, it is clear that 1 John has one primary author ("I write you;" cf. 2:1, 7, 8, 12-14, 21; 5:13). The Gospel of John and the epistle of 1 John share several things in common. Among them are strong similarities in vocabulary ("*paraklētos*," or "advocate" John 14:16; 1 John 2:1; although the epistle refers to Jesus and the Gospel has in mind the Holy Spirit, the Gospel does say "another" advocate) and in theme (devil sinning "from the beginning" John 8:44; 1 John 3:8; "of this world" John 8:23; 15:19; 1 John 2:16; 4:5; "light" vs. "darkness" John 8:12; 12:35; 1 John 1:6; 2:11). Furthermore, the evidence from the church fathers is significant. Polycarp claims to have known John personally, and Irenaeus, his disciple, explicitly attributes the epistle to John, the disciple of Jesus, and the author of the Gospel of John. The writings of the early church never attribute any of the three epistles of John to anyone other than John the son of Zebedee.

DATE

While it is not certain when the Johannine Epistles were written, the author's description of himself as the "Elder" in 2 and 3 John and his readers as his "children" (1 John 2:1, 12, 13; 2:18, 28; 3:1, 2, 7, 10, 18; 4:4; 5:2; 2 John 1, 4, 13; 3 John 4) seems to suggest they were written toward the end of the author's life. If, as is traditionally claimed, John was the last surviving apostle who died toward the end of the first century, then the Johannine Epistles would have been written around that time, perhaps in the early-to-mid nineties, after the Gospel of John had been written. The presence of heretical teachings not present in the earliest stages of the church also seems to confirm a late first-century date for these epistles.



Date of writing
at the end of the
first century AD

AUDIENCE

The epistle lacks the typical opening and closing of a letter, but it does display several indications that John prepared it for a specific audience. He refers to the readers as “my little children” and “beloved”—evidence that he knows them well (cf. 2:1, 18, 28; 3:2, 7, 18, 21; etc.). John also addresses specific issues concerning that particular audience (cf. 2:19, 26). Tradition associates him with Ephesus, so he may be writing to a congregation, or several churches, around that area.

PURPOSE AND MAIN THEMES

The purpose of 1 John is mainly to warn its audience of false teachings circulating among the believers (2:18, 26; 4:1, 3). If John did have in mind those in the region of Ephesus, then Paul had already foretold the situation that he is dealing with (Acts 20:29, 30; 2 Tim. 3:1-7; 4:3, 4). The false teachers seemed to have been denying that Jesus was the Christ and that He had come in the flesh (1 John 2:22, 23; 4:2, 15). John clarifies these issues by reaffirming a correct understanding of the person of Jesus, the truth of the gospel, and its implications for everyday life (1:6; 2:2, 21; 3:19-24; 5:13).

STRUCTURE

Like other New Testament Epistles, the prologue of 1 John sets the stage for the entire letter (1:1-4). In this case, John establishes his authority as an eyewitness of Jesus. As one who walked with Christ, John elaborates in the rest of his letter about what it means to be a faithful follower.

The main body of the letter (1:5–2:11) begins with a declaration that stands at the foundation of John’s understanding of the Christian life: “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all” (v. 5). If believers want to have fellowship with God, they need to “walk” in the light. This entails acknowledging human sinfulness and accepting God’s forgiveness and cleansing (1:6–2:2). Believers are also called to live lives of obedience to His commandments (2:3-6), which includes manifesting love instead of hate towards others (vv. 7-11).

The reason behind John’s counsel emerges in 2:12-28. Some of the members of the apostle’s congregation had departed from the faith (v. 19). John calls these individuals antichrists since they oppose Christ and His work (vv. 18-28). Concerned that these individuals might influence others to leave the church, John reminds his readers of the central tenets of the faith (vv. 12-14) and encourages them to remain faithful (2:27–3:18).

John ends the epistle by returning once more to the topics of sin (5:14-19), knowing the truth (v. 20), and the centrality of Christ (v. 20), before issuing a final warning to keep away from idols (v. 21).

The Gospel of John and 1 John were both written to encourage people to become followers of Jesus (cf. John 20:31; 1 John 5:13). As you read through this epistle, look for the similarities and differences in how these two documents accomplish this purpose.

OUTLINE:

- I. Introduction (1:1-4)
 - A. Eyewitness Testimony of Christ (1:1-3a)
 - B. The Purpose of the Epistle (1:3b-4)
- II. Living in the Light (1:5–2:11)
 - A. Our Attitude toward Sin (1:5-10)
 - B. Our Attitude toward Obedience (2:1-11)
- III. Personal Appeals to Spiritual Children (2:12-28)
 - A. Reasons for Writing (2:12-14)
 - B. Love Not the World (2:15-17)
 - C. Beware of Antichrists and Their Heresies (2:18-26)
 - D. Abide in Christ to Prepare for His Coming (2:27-28)
- IV. Living as Children of God (2:29–3:24)
 - A. The Righteousness of God's Children (2:29–3:10)
 - B. The Love of God's Children (3:11-24)
- V. Truth, Love, and Faith Are Essential to Fellowship (4:1–5:12)
 - A. The Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error (4:1-6)
 - B. Love Is of God, for He Is Love (4:7–5:3)
 - C. Faith Brings Victory and Life (5:4-13)
- VI. Conclusion (5:14-21)
 - A. Confidence in Prayer (5:14-17)
 - B. Final Encouragement to Know God and His Son (5:18-21)

ARCHAEOLOGY

Scholars have identified the heresies that 1 John seems to be addressing with Gnosticism, Docetism, and the heresy of Cerinthus, all of which have in common the rejection of Christ as coming in the flesh (cf. 1 John 4:2). Gnosticism, a distortion of the gospel heavily influenced by Neoplatonism, preached salvation through knowledge of one's true spiritual identity. Docetism denied the incarnation of Christ. Irenaeus and Eusebius report and denounce the heresy of Cerinthus, a type of Gnosticism. Eusebius describes an interesting episode involving an encounter between the apostle John and Cerinthus. John reportedly was going to a public bathhouse in Ephesus, but when he discovered that Cerinthus was also there, he quickly fled the place, saying, "Let us flee, lest the building fall down; for Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is inside!" (*Historia ecclesiastica* 3.3.4; 3.28.6; 4.14.6). Cerinthus taught that the human Jesus was different than the divine Christ. The divine Christ would have come upon Jesus at His baptism, empowering Him to perform miracles and to preach about God, but left Jesus right before His death on the cross. For Cerinthus, Jesus' death was meaningless, and the resurrection only a myth.

2 John

Even a casual reading of 2 John reveals its intimate nature. It is a personal letter written by the aging apostle John to a congregation of believers with whom he shares a special relationship. John speaks of his satisfaction with the spiritual state of the readers, encourages them in the Christian way, warns against false teachers, and suggests ways of dealing with deceivers. The letter reveals the beauty of spiritual intimacy that can exist between believers in the early church.

AUTHOR

Second John is, along with 1 John, generally regarded as written by the apostle John, the son of Zebedee. It is easier first to establish the authorship of 1 John, then compare its language and themes to 2 and 3 John (see, for example, 1 John 2:22 and 4:2 compared to 2 John 7). The reference to the author as an “elder” could simply be an indication of his age (“presbyteros”; 2 John 1; cf. Phil. 9; 1 Pet. 5:1). Since John was the last apostle to die, the term could have become associated with him. Irenaeus explicitly attributes the authorship of 2 John to the apostle John, and Clement of Alexandria also refers to more than one epistle as coming from John.

DATE

The second epistle of John seems to have been written around the same time as the first epistle. In this case, it could date to the AD 80s or 90s, sometime after the Gospel of John had been written (see *Date* in the introduction to 1 John).

AUDIENCE

The epistle addresses itself to “the elect lady and her children” (2 John 1), either an individual (2 John 4, 5) or a specific congregation. At times, assemblies were personified as female, since the word “church” is feminine in Greek (cf. 1 Pet. 5:3). The author also refers to the readers as “children” in his first epistle (1 John 2:1; 3:2; cf. 2 John 13).

PURPOSE AND MAIN THEMES

The epistle warns its readers against false teachers (2 John 7–9), specifically against opening their homes to traveling teachers preaching things contrary to the gospel (10, 11). John also reaffirms the importance of loving one another and of walking according to the commandments of God (5, 6). It is possible that the author meant to have 1 John read in several churches, and that 2 John was a personalized note to one of those congregations.



Date of writing
at the end of the
first century AD

STRUCTURE

In the letter's opening salutation, John introduces two major topics that are the focus of his brief epistle: "truth" and "love" (1-3). As he begins the main body of the letter (vv. 4-11), John expresses great joy that the church continues to "walk in truth" (v. 4). The reason for his joy is the presence of individuals who had left the church and were seeking to influence others to follow them (vv. 5-7). John urges the church to be on guard spiritually against such individuals, making sure they do not encourage them in their evil ways by either receiving them or even greeting them (vv. 8-11). Desiring to say more in person, John then draws his letter to a close with a greeting that echoes his opening salutation (12, 13).

As you read 2 John, notice the concern the epistle has for false teachers who seek to lead people away from Jesus. Reflect on how the church should apply John's counsel to those who seek to unsettle the faith of believers today.

OUTLINE

- I. Introduction (vv. 1-3)
- II. Message (vv. 4-11)
 - A. Praise for Faithfulness (v. 4)
 - B. Exhortation to Continue in Love (vv. 5-7)
 - C. Warning against False Teachers (vv. 8-11)
- III. Conclusion (vv. 12-13)
 - A. The Hope of a Personal Visit (12)
 - B. Greetings (13)

ARCHAEOLOGY

The *Didache* is one of the earliest Christian writings outside of the New Testament, usually dated to the first century AD. It is a compilation of material that claims to contain the teachings of the twelve apostles. Although its exact origin is unknown and Eusebius and other Church Fathers questioned its apostolicity, it does contain interesting teachings that bridge the writings of the New Testament and the situation of the churches in the latter part of the first century AD. One of its teachings addresses specifically the issue of hospitality and false teachers in a similar way to that of 2 John. While it highly encourages hospitality and generosity, at the same time, it warns against abuses. If anyone comes along wanting to teach something, believers should test them by listening to their message to see if it is in accord with the gospel. The actions of a prophet should also reflect the truth of the gospel. The *Didache* tells believers to receive them, but if they ask for money, or stay for longer than three days, then they should consider them false prophets. True Christians would instead work for their living (*Didache* 11-12; cf. 2 Thess. 3:6-8).