

The Second and Third Epistles Of St John

AIM:

To get acquainted with the writer and each of his epistles.

SPECIFIC AIM:

To understand that following our Lord Jesus, and obeying His commandment, this is love.

VERSE:

“This is love, that we walk according to His commandments”. (2John6)

REFERENCES:

Exerts below from Fr Tadros Malaty “The Epistles of St John”, 2001.

ACTIVITY:

Powerpoint attached.

LESSON OUTLINE:

Second Epistle of St John

THE WRITER OF THE EPISTLE:

St. John the Beloved wrote this epistle while he was in Ephesus.

TO WHOM WAS IT WRITTEN?

This is the only book in the Bible addressed to a lady. It is important to remember we do not discriminate, for “...There is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal. 3: 28)

The interpreters differed as to who this lady is:

1. St. Jerome sees that she is a chosen lady, whom the apostle did not mention her name. Probably, St. John did not write her name due to being conservative because she is a lady or to avoid the annoyances of the Roman Empire.
2. The most common interpretation is that she is symbolic of a specific Church under St John’s oversight. Some relate that saying “to the chosen *Kiriya*”, which is a Greek word meaning to the chosen lady, or to the chosen bride of Christ.

ITS CHARACTERISTICS:

It is characterized by the same spirit of St. John who emphasizes “the truth” upon which his mission is based, for it declares Christ and “love,” for there is no “truth” without love, and there is no true love without “truth,” that is Christ.

THE BOOK IS DIVIDED INTO THE FOLLOWING:

1. Introduction: v. 1- 3
2. The truth and love: v. 4 –6
3. Warning from deceivers: v. 7 –11
4. Conclusion: v. 12,13

1. INTRODUCTION

“The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all those who have known the truth.” (v. 1)

John calls himself “the elder” or “presbyter,” which implies the meaning of priest or bishop. The Greek origin for both of them is the same. This confirms in the NT there is not always a distinction between

priests and bishops. Rather there is an assumption that the Church is a One, a True and concrete unity following one rule of faith.

“Whom I love in truth.” The shepherd loved this lady and her children, but neither for personal interest nor for obtaining any material gain nor due to hypocrisy like those deceivers, the heretics. He did not love her just emotionally because of being relatives or due to fanaticism but he loved her “in truth,” that is, in Christ Jesus. Saying this, he puts a responsibility on the lady and her children that the motive for their love should be the truth and not for mere pleasing people, rejecting every vain matter.

This love is not an isolated love but it stems from the love of Christ and the church, for “all those who have known the truth.” He is a faithful shepherd feeling the bond of love toward his children through the Lord Jesus Christ and the church. He is related to the Lord Jesus and the church even in their love toward the believers.

“Because of the truth, which abides in us and will be with us forever.” (v. 2)

This is the goal of our love and ministry and all our worship that we abide in the Lord and He in us and to be in His bosom forever. This abiding requires God’s grace and His mercy.

“Grace, mercy, and peace will be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.” (v. 3)

What supports us in our struggle against the heretics and the deceivers are:

1. The free grace of God: which is the fountain of the divine love toward sinners, for without this grace, who can be saved? Without this grace, who can be steadfast?
2. God’s mercy: The Lord overflowing His grace on us sinners, we realize God’s great mercy declared on the cross, then we can dare to ask from Him.
3. Peace: This is the gift which sin has discarded, for sin has hid God from us, but God has restored us this inner peace by which the soul lives with the source of her life, so even the devil nor temptations cannot take this peace away from us! (John 14: 27) The source of this grace, mercy, and peace is God, “God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

“From God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ”: Some thought that there are two lords: The Lord of the Old Testament who is just, strict, and severe when dealing with sinners, and the Lord of the New Testament who is kind, compassionate, and is gentle with sinners. However, St. John is emphasizing here that the Lord Jesus is “the Son of the Father in truth and love,” the Only Begotten Son the subject of the Father’s delight. (Mark 1:11) Since we have enjoyed the grace, the mercy, and the peace through the cross, then the sacrifice of the Son is from the love of the Father. “For God so loved the world that He gave His Only Begotten Son ...” (John 3:16)

St. Ambrose said: “The love of the Father is the same as the love of the Son, for the love of the Son drove Him to offer Himself and save us by His blood (Eph. 5:2), and the same love is of the Father, for it is written “For God so loved the Father that He gave His Only Begotten Son...” (John 3:16) The Father sacrificed His Son, and the Son sacrificed Himself. The subject of choice (that is, the Son sacrificing Himself), reveals the unity of the divine love.

2. LOVE AND TRUTH

“I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father.” (v. 4)

Saying that Christ is the Son of the Father by truth and love, and since we are attached to the Lord through baptism, then we, too, have to abide in truth and love. We have to declare the truth without losing the love, and love without being robbed from the truth and the true faith. God and his shepherds rejoice when we abide in love.

We notice that St. John starts by mentioning the joyful news of some of her children for encouragement until they complete the joy of his heart and the heart of the church by fulfilling the following commandment:

“And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another.”(v. 5)

Here, he directs our attention to “love.” We would assume that he would have said, “beloved lady,” but he did not, lest one may misunderstand that this epistle is directed to a lady. This reveals the wisdom of the shepherds in their behavior, so they may not cause worries to their children.

The commandment of love is not new, from the aspect of man’s knowledge.

This commandment depends on our love to God, which is built on our obedience to Him in obeying His commandments.

“This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.” (v. 6)

St. Gregory of Cyprus said: “Obeying God’s commandments makes us resemble God, not in being eternal, but in being kind and loving as He said, “Be merciful just as your Father also is merciful.” (Luke 6:36) As we obey the commandment and abide in it, then our hearts are widened by love to God and to His brothers. Through love, our hearts are widened to obey the commandment; hence, each one drives the other to continue.”

“This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it,” that is love, for through love, the Law and the truth are fulfilled. This love has to be related to the truth, so we do not ask the unity among the believers, through love only, without having unity in the faith and return to the one faith of the early church, that is, return to the truth . We do not merely ask for the outward appearance but the encounter of every soul with the truth.

3. WARNING FROM DECEIVERS

“For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.” (v. 7)

St. John correlates love with truth, and discernment with wisdom. Love is fulfilling God’s commandment, therefore, it is not appropriate to accept teachers who hide under the name of Christ to teach us against the truth. They try to meet the simple people and deceive them under the name of “love.”

But what would result from having fierce wolves to attack Christians? These are the heretics who are separated from the church, under the name of Christ. We have to congratulate ourselves when we isolate such people from the church membership, so they may not become elements of corruption and influence the little lambs and the new young members by their hatred and stubbornness.

“Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward. Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.” (v. 8, 9)

The Lord asked His church to love everyone, but she has to beware of those who claim to be her children and they are wolves corrupting the faith of the simple. Those confuse the minds of the simple and make them doubt their faith and defile their struggle.

St. Cyprian said: {The bride of Christ cannot be an adulterous, but she is pure and undefiled. She knows one house.. Whoever is separated from the church and cleaves to adultery (heresies) is deprived from her promises. Whoever forsakes her cannot enjoy the blessings of Christ, for he is a stranger and defiled, and God cannot be his father as long as the church is not his mother. Was anyone delivered while being outside Noah’s ark?, In the same manner, no one would be delivered if he is outside the church. The Lord Jesus is warning us saying, “Who is not with Me is against Me, and who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.” (Matt. 12: 30) }

“If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him, for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.” (v. 10, 11)

Although this epistle is directed toward a lady, and ladies are usually known for shyness, but he sternly asks not to accept those with wrong teachings nor even greet them so we many not participate in their crime. (straying the simple souls from the sheepfold.)

Probably St. John wrote about some people whom the lady knew Christ through them, but they were separated from the church. Let us not accept in our houses nor greet them, so we may not offend the simple when they see us with them then they will be affected by them.

Pope Alexandros of Alexandria said about the followers of Arius: {Do not accept any of them, even if they come with persistence.}

Pope Athanasius the Apostolic said; {If someone comes to you with correct doctrines, accept him as a brother and greet him. However, if someone pretends that he knows the true faith but in the same time he is in fellowship with others who are against the correct faith, advise him to forsake that fellowship. If he accepts, then treat him as a brother. If he does not accept your advice, then avoid him.}

3. CONCLUSION

“Having many things to write to you, I did not wish to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, that our joy may be full. The children of your elect sister greet you. Amen. (v. 12, 13)

We notice that there are certain matters, which were not recorded on paper but were delivered verbally from generation to generation as tradition. This happened, not only with John the apostle, but with St. Paul who left Titus to set in order the things that were lacking. (Tit. 1:5) But what were they? To appoint elders in every city, (how to appoint them?), and what are the prayers they present? These are the things, which we have received by tradition. 11

THE THIRD EPISTLE OF ST. JOHN

THE SUBJECT OF THE EPISTLE

St. John sent this epistle to Gaius, a Greek word. He praised Gaius for his generosity and hospitality for servants.

WHO IS GAIUS?

It is hard to know his personality. This name was often mentioned in the New Testament. Gaius who is from Corinth (Rom. 16: 23). Some think that this epistle is directed to him, but this is not certain.

THE EPISTLE IS DIVIDED INTO THE FOLLOWING:

1. Gaius abiding in the truth v. 1 – 8
2. Diotriphus, the haughty servant v. 9 – 11
3. Demetrius the faithful v. 12
4. Concluding Farewell v. 13, 14

1. GAIUS ABIDING IN THE TRUTH

“The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.” (v. 1)

St. John directs his epistle to Gaius and calls him the beloved, for he truly loves him and not mere hypocrisy. Here, we notice St. John has immersed in the subject of “truth,” that is “the Lord Jesus”; for he loves the truth, he talks with the truth and refutes everyone who deviates from the truth. St. John hid in the truth, to the extent that he does not see except the Lord Jesus and does not want to see anyone beside Him.

“Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.” (v. 2)

Some think that Gaius was sick, and here St. John is asking good health for him. It is good for the sick person to ask for his spiritual life and not to occupy himself with the temporal matters, for it is written, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you.”

However, it is good for the church, the shepherds, the friends to ask for his physical needs. That is why the church prays for the sick, the travelers, the troubled, and those who are in captivity. In the mean time, the church asks for the forgiveness of their sins.

“For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth.” (v. 3)

The subject of the joy of the shepherd is to see and hear that all whom he serves are abiding in the truth and are testified of the truth. This is an exhilarating joy, which makes the servant forget all the labor of the service when he sees joyful fruits; that is why he added,

“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.” (v. 4)

He rejoices when they walk in the truth because they are his children, “my children.” He stems this fatherhood from God and in God and through Him. If the relation is outside the Lord Jesus, then this verse will apply on him, “Do not call anyone on earth your father...” (Matt. 23: 9) No wonder that St. John calls the flock his children, and also St. Paul. (1 Thess. 2:8,11), Gal. 4:19) Moreover, St. Paul takes pride in this fatherhood by saying, “For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.” (1 Cor. 4: 15)

“Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well.” (v. 5, 6)

Abiding in the truth, he treated the brothers and the strangers faithfully, that is, appropriate as a loving and obedient believer to the Lord Jesus. He means by “the brethren,” the believers whom Gaius has known and hosted them in his house. The strangers are the missionaries who went back to St. John witnessing about Gaius’ love and his concern for them, for he sent them in a manner worthy of God, that is, he prayed for them and helped them financially too. Those went merely for the service and not for personal interest.

“Because they went forth for His name’s sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles.” (v. 7)

Gaius provided for them so they did not ask anyone for help. This gives encouragement to the minister in his mission, for St. Paul supplied his needs and the needs of those who work with him by the work of his hands, although it is his right to ask for temporal matters as long as he is sowing the spiritual matters..

“We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth.” (v. 8)

Thus, St. John is encouraging us to care for the workers in the vineyard of the Lord, by hosting them and helping them, so we may become partakers in their ministry.

2. DIOTREPES THE HAUGHTY MINISTER

“I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, If I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church.” (9, 10)

St. John wrote to the church, in which Gaius is a member, to remind him to take care of the needs of the ministers. Unfortunately, Diotrephes full of haughtiness and vainglory drove him to the following:

A. To have the preeminence among them: This deviates the minister from his mission, and instead of serving others, he asks for their service and their honoring him.

B. He does not receive us: which means he does not like the truth. He wants to teach and not to be taught. Bishop Ambrose said : {When I teach others, I myself learn, for only God is the One who is not taught by what He is teaching. }

St. Augustine said: {We are teachers, but in the same time we are colleagues with you in God’s school. }

St. John Chrysostom said: {When a lay person makes a mistake, he easily comes back, but when one of the clergy sins, he becomes very hard to accept advice. }

C. He himself does not receive the brethren: His love for himself made him lose the love for the service and for the salvation of others. He became a stumbling block for the believers and the servants. He rebukes and expels and excommunicates without being just and he does not care! Thus, the church confirms that any unjust excommunication goes back to the person himself.

St. John’s Stand:

“Therefore, If I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words...” As an apostle, he rebukes, not for revenge, but for chastening for the salvation of his soul and so that others may not be offended. The ecumenical councils have put special laws for chastening the shepherds when they deviate, on condition the chastening is according to a special order, so that neither the shepherds nor the flock deviate.

The purpose of this talk: The purpose of this talk with Gaius is not to condemn Deotrephe, but for Gaius not to follow his example. He said:

“Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God.” (v. 11)

Whoever does good declares his worthiness to become a child of God “the greatest goodness.” However, he who does evil and walks in haughtiness and love of ego, declares the deviation of his heart and his rejection to the light, for he cannot see God, “For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial?” (2 Cor. 6:14,15) Hence, the evil person cannot hear God’s voice, nor accept his thought nor can see Him.

3. THE FAITHFUL DEMETRIUS

“Demetrius has a good testimony from all, and from the truth itself. And we also bear witness, and you know that our testimony is true.” (v. 12)

St. John directs Gaius’ attention to a good example with a good testimony from all, from God, and from the church. Thus, he encourages Gaius so he may not despair because of the bad example of Deotrephe. St. Augustine said: {The world is like a tree with leaves. From far, it looks like a tree with leaves but no fruits, but closely, you find sweet fruits. Likewise, the world is full of wicked people, but many saints are hiding in it. We notice that St. John ascertains the testimony of all (that is from the pagans and unbelievers) before the testimony of the truth and the church. This is the beauty of God’s children, that even the wicked people cannot deny their dignity. St. Paul puts this condition for the bishop that “He must have a good testimony among those who are outside” (1 Tim. 3: 7) }

St. John Chrysostom said: Even the enemies revere those who live a godly life, for the truth shuts their Mouths.

4. CONCLUDING FAREWELL

“I had many things to write, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and ink; but I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak face to face.” (v. 13, 14)

In the previous epistle, we have seen that the apostles have delivered matters, which are not recorded with pen and ink. St. John Chrysostom said in the beginning of his sermons that God’s word is not written, but God has recorded it to us with our own language, due to our weaknesses so we may benefit; but in fact it is spirit and life. We have to taste the word of God and people see it in our lives and written in our hearts.

“Peace to you. Our friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.” (v. 14)

This is the greeting of the Lord Jesus to His disciples after the resurrection. (Luke 24: 36) In the same manner, the church, in the name of Christ, gives the Lord’s greeting to others. St. John is repeating the word “friends,” instead of saying “brethren,” to ascertain the bond of love, which unites the whole church in “the truth,” the Lord Jesus.

APPLICATION OF THE EPISTLES

How good it would be to accept the Way of Christ in its entirety. To follow His commandment. To dispose of our wealth, and all worldly distractions, and to do as Gaius did. To focus on serving the Lord, with uprightness. This will mean that we will not be phased by any false teachers, or deceivers. May the Lord give us the wisdom, the strength, and the courage to serve and love Him whilst we are living in this world, so that we may enjoy the rewards which he has in store for us in the world which is after.

Glory be to God forever. Amen.