

Here's the first question to ask about John's second letter: Who wrote it?

Here's another one: Who did he write to?

And one more: Why did he write this short letter?

Let's tackle the third question first...because, well, it's the easiest one to answer. Why did he write?

- What do you see in the text that answers that question?
- Look especially in v. 7, 10, 11. Really, it's a pretty straightforward letter.

At least that's the way it looks. Let's ask a few more questions...

What's the *antichrist* thing that John mentions in v. 7? Is there one antichrist? Isn't that just an end times thing? Is he writing end times prophecy here, saying that the antichrist will come right at the end? Is that what this is saying? What does *antichrist* mean here? Well...we'll get to that. We're not going to deal with that today—that's for another lesson.

A little Bible study tip: don't be afraid to ask questions of the text. And don't assume that something is the way it is just because you heard someone say it is. For example: John suggests that many antichrists are out in the world...if it's just an end times thing, what does he mean? Ask questions.

Okay—let's think through the letter for a bit ~

- v. 1-3—what's the theme of the paragraph?
- How about v. 4-6?
- And then v. 7-11?
- And what about v. 12-13?

Take a shot at the main theme of the letter—what is on John's heart that he needs to communicate here?

Here's my take on the main theme of this letter: It is the genuine love for one another among believers, in obedience to the command of God, that is critical in preventing the influence of false teaching to spread in the church.

Question: How does remaining obedient to God's command to love one another help believers to counteract the influences that would disrupt or even divide the church, like false teaching?

Here's the outline we'll use for 2 John:

- v. 1-3 – John's greeting to the church he loves: Grace, mercy, and peace
- v. 4-6 – John's request of the church he loves: love one another.
- v. 7-11 – John's concern for the church he loves: watch yourselves.
- v. 12-13 – John's desire for the church he loves: that our joy may be complete.

Some big picture things first...

A couple of historical notes before we go on: John wrote his three letters late in the 1st century—after the fall of Jerusalem, and before his exile to the island of Patmos where he authored Revelation.

- The likely date of writing is certainly in the last third of the 1st century, and probably in the early 90's, with Revelation written in the mid-90's.
- There is evidence to suggest that John moved to Ephesus at the time of the Jewish war (AD 66-70), and ultimately died there.
- The three letters were probably sent to churches somewhere near Ephesus. The seven churches of Revelation 2-3 were in this area as well.

Some big picture things first...

In all three of John's epistles he raises the issue of a corruption of the gospel either by inaccurate teaching, or, as in the case of Diotrephes in 3 John, a massive ego.

- And so he keeps pointing back to unshakeable, unchanging truth (notice how many times it is mentioned in v. 1-4).
- He points back to the command "you have heard *from the beginning*" - v. 5-6
- And he consistently points back to the critical importance of the doctrine of Christ (v. 7, 9-10), especially His full deity and full humanity.

Some big picture things first...

Remember what was taking place in the early church at this time: John was the only apostle still living.

- At first, the churches were largely under the guidance and leadership of either apostles or those they designated (i.e., Timothy & Titus).
- But as time passed, the apostles died and leadership tended to be from a group of elders.
- But by late in the 1st century it looked as though this model was giving way to the idea of one man (typically referred to as a bishop) who had the position of oversight over other church leaders. John address a corruption of this (naturally) in his 3rd letter.

John's greeting to the church he loves ~ v. 1-3

So, back to this: who wrote 3 John?

There's a long answer—and a short answer—to this question. We're going to summarize the short one.

Based on...

- ...the writing style,
- ...position in the canon (the NT documents),
- ...the theology of the three letters,
- ...and the writings of the church fathers of the early 2nd century...

...the apostle John is nearly universally recognized as the author (of all three letters). We'll go with that.

John's greeting to the church he loves ~ v. 1-3

John calls himself "the elder." What is that?

It could refer to a few things...

- It can simply mean an older person (the feminine form of the word is used of "older women" in 1 Tim. 5:2); i.e., Luke 15:25, John 8:9, etc.
- It can refer to the past or present (1st century) leaders of Judaism—Matt. 15:2, 28:12; Luke 7:3.
- It is also used of the leaders of the church ~ Acts 11:30, 15:2; 1 Pet. 5:1. The requirements for an elder are in 1 Tim. 3:1-7, 5:17-20; Titus 1:5-9.
- Elders must be known for spiritual maturity and a shepherd's heart in the care of souls.

John's greeting to the church he loves – v. 1-3

Ok—who is the letter written to?

There are two views:

- It was written to a godly woman who John knew personally, who had kids who were believers.
- It was written to a local church, and all of the references are not personal, but corporate.

I personally hold that it was written to a local church. Notice especially v. 13, as well as 1 Peter 5:13. Also, the word *church* in the Gk is in the feminine gender. John refers to the church as a bride in Rev. 21:2, 9; 22:17. And the Gk word *kyria* (lady) “referred to a social subunit in the Greek city-state.”

John's greeting to the church he loves – v. 1-3

Ok—who is the letter written to?

Think about this: would John *really* have written v. 5 to an actual woman he knew? “Love one another”? It would be kind of like saying this:

*Girl—me and you—we just need to love each other!
And girl—I love you because I am commanded to.*

John the romantic. It doesn't look like that. So, for our purposes, we'll assume John is writing to a local church.

If you want to assume John is writing to an individual, you are welcome to do that—this is a secondary issue. John MacArthur, for instance, holds to that. But he seems to be in the distinct minority on this one.

John's greeting to the church he loves ~ v. 1-3

So John writes to a local church, somewhere near Ephesus, late in the 1st century, because he has a concern (which we'll get into in more detail later).

But here in his greeting what stands out is this: what John thought of the church, how he saw it.

- What do you think of—what is in your heart—when you think of the church that was bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ?
- It is because of how he sees the church that he writes this letter.

So—how *does* John see the church? There are six things we can point to...

John's greeting to the church he loves ~ v. 1-3

How does John think of the church?

“The elder to the elect lady and her children...”

Elect. What in the world is that?

Understand this: we're not going to get a full explanation here this morning. Not even close.

- And this: the doctrine of election is clearly and explicitly taught in Scripture, like it or not.
- And this: it is a Deut. 29:29, Isaiah 55:8-9 thing at its core. We could go back and forth all day on it, but we cannot see and think like a free, sovereign God can. We are treading on holy ground here, and we're going to leave with unanswered questions.

John's greeting to the church he loves ~ v. 1-3

Remember this: the doctrine of election in the NT is not presented as dry theology: "It is a pastoral teaching, often found in contexts where people are suffering or struggling to keep the faith." ~ Mounce

- It is the basis for calling us to be holy ~ Col. 3:12
- It is the basis of our justification ~ Rom. 8:33
- It is how we know God hears us ~ Luke 18:7
- It is the foundation for evangelism ~ 1 Pet. 2:9
- It is how we are protected from harm ~ Matt. 24:22-24
- It is the basis of our assurance ~ Matt. 24:31
- It is what moved Paul to continue ~ 2 Tim. 2:10, Titus 1:1

That is how John thought of the church: elect.

John's greeting to the church he loves ~ v. 1-3

How does John think of the church?

“...whom I love in truth...”

John deeply loved the church...but something informed or directed it: “...whom I love in truth...” Which means...?

John's love for the church was in accordance with, or consistent with, the truth of the revelation of God's perfect love as taught by Christ and the apostles.

- The verb is *agapao*, the self-giving love of God.
- Love for other believers flows out of the love of Christ expressed toward us ~ 1 John 4:19
- He could not think of the church without wanting her highest good. Love has to be regulated by truth.

John's greeting to the church he loves ~ v. 1-3

How does John think of the church?

“...and not only I, but also all who know the truth...”

What is John saying?

All true believers—all whose hearts know the truth of the saving love of Christ, and whose hearts have been affected by that truth, love the church.

- Christians love the church ~ 1 John 2:7-10, 4:7-11
- It is the only thing that Jesus “nourishes and cherishes” (Eph. 5:29, 32).

So—brainstorm for a bit: Why should we love the church, imperfect as she is?

John's greeting to the church he loves ~ v. 1-3

How does John think of the church?

"whom I love...because of the truth that abides in us"

John Stott: "If we are Christians, we are to love our neighbors and even our enemies; but we are bound to our fellow Christians by the special bond of truth.

Truth is the ground of reciprocal Christian love. John stresses the fact by his 4 references to *the truth* in these 3 opening verses. We do not love each other because we are temperamentally compatible, or because we are naturally drawn to one another, but because of the truth which we share...So long as truth endures, in us and with us, so long shall our reciprocal love also endure."

John's greeting to the church he loves – v. 1-3

How does John think of the church?

“Grace, mercy, & peace will be with us from God...”

– John sees the church's need

What's the difference between what John says here in v. 3 and the way Paul puts it in, say, Rom. 1:7, 1 Cor. 1:3, 2 Cor. 1:2, Gal. 1:3, Eph. 1:2, etc.?

In Paul's letters it is a prayer-wish; here in John's 2nd letter it is an affirmation, not a prayer. So—why will grace, mercy, and peace be with us (with Christ's church)?

- There are two reasons...

John's greeting to the church he loves ~ v. 1-3

How does John think of the church?

“Grace, mercy, & peace will be with us from God...”

First, those things will be with us because we are so desperately in need of them.

What is peace in the NT?

- Not the absence of war...
- ...but a right relationship with God.

Peace—it is what happens when God acts in sovereign love to redeem and rescue a guilty sinner.

Take a look at Rom. 5:1, 10.

John's greeting to the church he loves ~ v. 1-3

How does John think of the church?

“Grace, mercy, & peace will be with us from God...”

Mercy—what is it?

“God's mercy describes Him as perfectly having deep compassion for people, such that He demonstrates benevolent goodness to those in a pitiable or miserable condition, even though they do not deserve it.” ~ *Biblical Doctrine*

This is why we need peace with God—because we are in the worst possible position: enemies of God. See Eph. 2:4, Luke 1:78.

John's greeting to the church he loves ~ v. 1-3

How does John think of the church?

“Grace, mercy, & peace will be with us from God...”

Grace—to those who are under the sentence of divine condemnation for their sin, God shows favor (that's the basic meaning of the Gk word in its NT context). It is the free, unmerited favor of God toward those in the most miserable condition possible.

- Grace—it is personified in Jesus Christ: John 1:14, and is the free gift of God: Eph. 2:4-9.

Notice this about these three things that John sees the church in need of ~

John's greeting to the church he loves ~ v. 1-3

How does John think of the church?

“Grace, mercy, & peace will be with us from God...”

They all have something to do with our sin and God's provision for us as sinners:

- Peace is God's expression of love to His enemies; another way to say *salvation* is to say *peace with God*.
- Mercy is God's expression of love to the miserable and helpless.
- Grace is God's expression of love to the guilty and undeserving.

John thinks of the church as needing grace, mercy, and peace. He wants the highest and best for her.

John's greeting to the church he loves ~ v. 1-3

How does John think of the church?

“Grace, mercy, & peace will be with us from God...”

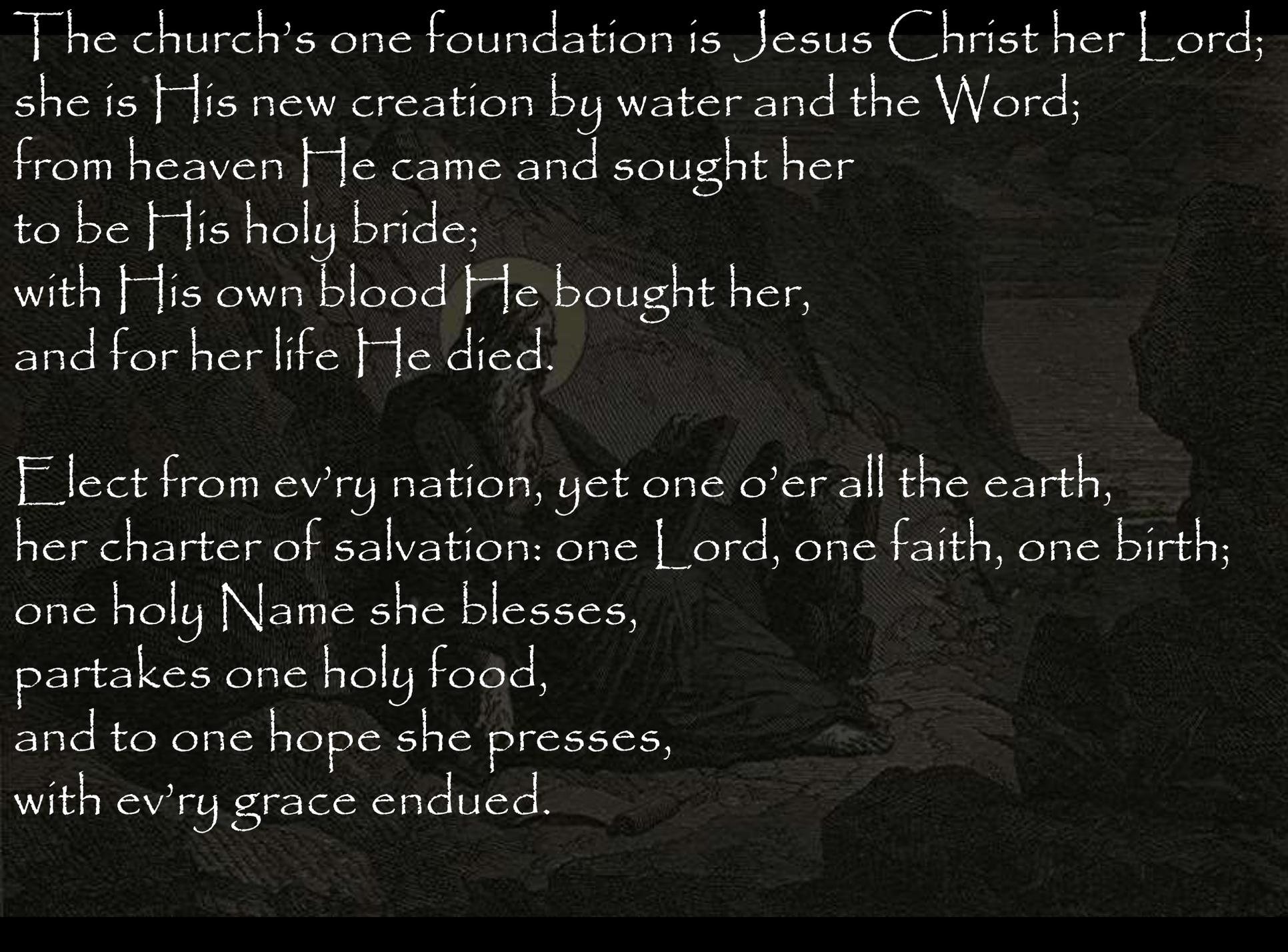
– John sees the church as supplied fully by God

John is confident—this is an affirmation of truth.

God, being what He is (gracious, merciful, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness—Ex.

34:6-7), will certainly supply His elect with every spiritual provision for their highest good.

- That is Paul's point in Eph. 1:3-14.
- In Christ there is a never-ending river of grace, mercy, and peace toward His beloved church.



The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord;
she is His new creation by water and the Word;
from heaven He came and sought her
to be His holy bride;
with His own blood He bought her,
and for her life He died.

Elect from ev'ry nation, yet one o'er all the earth,
her charter of salvation: one Lord, one faith, one birth;
one holy Name she blesses,
partakes one holy food,
and to one hope she presses,
with ev'ry grace endued.