A Patristic Commentary



The Book of John 2

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THE SECOND EPISTLE

OF

ST. JOHN

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Introduction
to
THE SECOND EPISTLE
OF ST. JOHN

THE WRITER OF THE EPISTLE:

St. John the Beloved wrote this epistle and the one following it while he was in Ephesus. If he had written them ~~in~~ on the island of Patmos, he would have referred to what he has seen there.

TO WHOM WAS IT WRITTEN?

This is the only book in the Bible directed to a lady, for "…There is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3: 28)

The interpreters differed about the lady's personality:

1. St. Jerome [1] sees that she is a chosen lady, however, he did not mention her name. This is the most common opinion. St. John conservatively may not have written her name because she was a lady or to avoid the annoyances of the Roman Empire.
2. Some relate the saying "to the chosen Kiriya" meaning to the chosen lady, "eklesketa."
3. Some think that her name is "Kiriya."
4. A fourth group relates that Kiriya means lady, and this is symbolic of a specific church, for she is the chosen bride of Christ. This group interprets "the children of your elect sister" (v.13) as being the children of the church which St. Paul shepherds.

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.

ITS DIVISIONS:

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)

St. Jerome translates the word "presbyter," which implies the meaning of priest or bishop, for the Greek origin of both is the same. The word probably implies the meaning of "priesthood" plus being elder due to old age.

"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

[1] Letters of St. Jerome 123: 12

a responsibility on the lady and her children that the motive for their love should be the truth and not for merely pleasing people and 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: 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: By the Lord's overflowing 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 [3] 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.

[3] The Divine Love "The love of God the Father," p. 216.

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. [4] 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 [5] 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."

St. Cyprian[6] said: {This is the simplicity of the church, and this is love which has to be preserved, so that love between brothers is like pigeons, then gentleness and meekness will prevail between them like meek lambs.

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.}

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[4] Interpretation 1 John 2: 8, p. 20
[5] Brotherly Love, p. 10
[6] Pastoral Love, p. 812 (The shepherd and his stand against heretics, p. 787 – 816)

"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 [7] 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, he sternly asks not to accept those with wrong teachings nor even greet them so we may not participate in their crime. (straying the simple souls form the sheepfold.)

St. John probably wrote about some people through whom the lady knew Christ, 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 and then be affected by them.

Pope Theophilus [8] said: {If someone comes to you and he does not have the correct faith of the church (Before the Chalcedon council, the church had one faith), do not ask success for him.}

Pope Alexandros of Alexandria [9] said about the followers of Arius: {Do not accept any of them, even if they come with persistence.}

Pope Athanasius the Apostolic [10] 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.}

4. 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)

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[7] Pastoral Love, p. 808 – 809.
[8] His epistle to Jerome
[9] His epistle against Ariasim.
[10] His second epistle to the monks (# 53)

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]

[11] Acts 15:27, 16:4, Jn. 21:25, Jn. 16:12, 1 Cor. 11:34