



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

Examining the text & our hearts:

Bible Reading: 2 John 1:1-6

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1 The elder: To the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth—and not only I, but also all who know the truth — 2 because of the truth that remains in us and will be with us forever. 3 Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love. 4 I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth, in keeping with a command we have received from the Father. 5 So now I ask you, dear lady—not as if I were writing you a new command, but one we have had from the beginning—that we love one another. 6 This is love: that we walk according to his commands. This is the command as you have heard it from the beginning: that you walk in love. (2 John 1:1-6 CSB)

•SUMMARY:

Second John is a brief letter from “the elder” to “the chosen lady and her children,” offering insight into John’s distinct vision of church life. Unlike the ‘overseers’ in Acts and Paul’s letters, ‘John the elder’ is the patriarch, the ‘elder statesman’ of the Johannine community, drawing on personal authority rather than holding an official position. This contrasts sharply with Pauline churches, where Paul adopted the Jewish synagogue model of appointing elders and deacons, establishing a hierarchical structure that laid the groundwork for apostolic succession, as seen in the Pastoral Epistles. In 1-3 John, “the elder” exhorts based on his eyewitness testimony within an egalitarian community, where all believers have the Spirit’s anointing, love one another, and know the truth. This structural divergence was evident in first-century Ephesus, where both churches coexisted. Historically, the Pauline churches evolved into the centralized structures of the Roman Catholic Church, while John’s community stood as a counter-model. Modern attempts to ‘recover’ the original Pauline church have followed the same path. John’s letters offer a compelling biblical alternative for us to follow today.

•BACKGROUND:

John 'the Elder' adds another aspect to the NT portrait of the person & his 'Johannine community.' This message is not based on this item – John 'the elder'— alone, but rather the overall NT portrait which includes:

1. John as the 'Beloved Disciple' in the 4th Gospel, including (a.) the 'race to the tomb' (Jn. 20:3-10), (b.) Jesus' words regarding Peter & the 'Beloved Disciple' in Galilee (Jn. 21) – both validate John's distinct ministry.
2. History suggests John outlived the Apostles James, Peter, & Paul. John moved to Ephesus' area ~70 AD.
3. 'Pauline church(es)' & 'Johannine church(es)' coexisted in the Ephesus area 80-100 CE (see V. below)
4. Paul's churches developed as described in Acts through to the Pastorals, John's churches in 1-3 John.

I. 'The Elder' – Official Position or 'Elder Statesman'?

- "From the elder, to an elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth..." (2 Jn. 1)
- John writes to 'the elect lady.' This more likely refers to a congregation than to an individual, because much of 2 Jn. is written in the 2nd-person plural. It's also questionable whether John would write to a female Christian that he & she should 'love one another' (v. 5); the phrase makes better sense if addressed to a church" ESV Study Bible
- "Was the 'Elect Lady' an individual? "In NT times, many congregations were small, comprising one or a few dozen people, & they mostly met in homes. In some cities & regions, there might be a network of house churches... The 'chosen lady' was, most likely, the host & leader of a congregation that met in her home. It was to this lady, [her children] & to her congregation that the elder writes." [Ian Paul, "The Elder & the Lady," Psephizo, Aug. 2023]
- Living in Truth & Love: The focus of 2 John is living in the love of God in accordance with the truth of Jesus Christ. This love extends not only to God but to other people. It's also discerning ['in truth']; it doesn't 'go on ahead' of biblical revelation (v. 9), & it does not... aid enemies of the gospel message (vv. 10-11). Instead, Christ's followers 'walk according to his commands' (v. 6) & through faith 'win a full reward' (v. 8)." ESV Study Bible

A. NT 'Elder' can mean office/position or simply 'aged'/'seniors' (1 Peter 5:1, 5)

- "I exhort the elders among you as a fellow elder & witness to the sufferings of Christ... 5 In the same way, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. All of you clothe yourselves with humility toward one another..." (1 Peter 5:1, 5) Note: The latter simply distinguishes 'younger people' from 'older, seniors' in terms of age.

B. Two Views on 'the Elder' in 2 John, 3 John

1. Office/Position or Personal Esteem?

- "The designation 'the elder' (Gk.: ho presbyteros) has been variously understood. Some take it as an official title, indicating that the author held the office of elder in the church, similar to the presbyters or bishops mentioned elsewhere in the NT. Others interpret it as a term of respect, reflecting the author's advanced age & his esteemed position within the Johannine community, without necessarily implying a formal office. The term thus could signify either an official role or a personal relationship characterized by authority & affection." [Colin G. Kruse, Letters of John, (2000), p. 198]

2. Official Title or Respected Senior?

- "The term 'the elder' (Gk.: ho presbyteros) in 2 and 3 John has led to different interpretations. One view suggests that it refers to an official title within the early church, akin to the office of presbyter or bishop, indicating that the author held a recognized position of authority. Alternatively, it can be understood as a self-designation emphasizing the author's advanced age & the personal authority that comes with it. This relational perspective sees 'the elder' as a term of endearment & respect, highlighting the close relationship between the writer & his readers." [Stephen S. Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John, (1984), p. 316.]

C.The Majority View: ‘the Elder’ (2-3 John) — Personal, Relational, ‘Old Man’

•“The term ‘elder’ here probably designates an individual of seniority or a respected leader within the Johannine community rather than an official position such as ‘bishop’ or ‘overseer’ as Paul uses these terms in 1 Timothy & Titus [the Pastorals].” [Raymond Brown, Epistles of John, p. 660].

•“‘The elder’ should be understood not as a formal ecclesiastical office [church position], but as an informal, relational title, reflecting a person of advanced age & authority who played a significant role in the Johannine community.” [D. Moody Smith, First, Second, & Third John, p. 38].

•“The term ‘elder’ does not imply an official church office such as ‘bishop’ or ‘presbyter’ as it does in the Pastorals but instead points to an individual of senior authority in the community.” – I. Howard Marshall

D.‘The Elder’ (2-3 John) — the ‘Elder Statesman’

?“John was the ‘elder statesman’ of Christianity; he had watched the church deal with conflict from within and persecution from without. Plentiful false teachers were accelerating the downward slide of many away from the Christian faith. John wrote this letter to put believers back on track.” [Bruce Barton, Life App. Bible Comm., p. 14]

?“When John wrote... to the church, he often addressed his readers as ‘dear children’. Yet far from being offended, the first recipients... eagerly received the message of this elder statesman...” [Grant R. Osborne, 1-3 John, p.]

E.Some allege ‘the Elder’ in 2-3 John matches Paul’s Practice

•“‘Elder’ was a common term for pastoral leaders of local congregations in the early church. In calling himself ‘the elder,’ John is simply affirming his pastoral role, as Peter also does (‘fellow elder,’ 1 Pet. 5:1).” ESV Bible.

•“2 John, 3 John [each] claims to have been written by ‘the elder,’ most likely the apostle John. In NT times & into the post-apostolic era, ‘elders’ (Gk. presbyteroi) could refer to the pastoral leaders of local congregations. They appear by this title first in Acts 11:30 [‘Elders in Jerusalem’], which speaks of church leaders (pastors) in Jerusalem in the mid-40s AD. Paul & Barnabas appointed ‘elders’ to be ministers in the churches they planted (Acts 14:23). ‘Elders’ presided at the Jerusalem council (c. AD. 49) alongside the apostles (Acts 15:2, etc.) Nearly a decade later Paul addressed the ‘elders,’ apparently the pastors of churches at & probably around Ephesus (Acts 20:17 [Paul called the church elders to come to him]. ‘Elders’ at Jerusalem were alongside head elder James when Paul reported back to the church at the end of his 3rd missionary journey (Acts 21:18). This shows that the title ‘elder’ for pastoral leaders at Ephesus had been in use 20 to 40 years by the time 2 and 3 John were written. It was widely employed in the early church, particularly around Jerusalem but also in distant areas like Ephesus. The fact that Peter understood himself to be a ‘fellow elder’ of church leaders across a wide geographical area (1 Pet. 5:1) makes it plausible for John to have referred to himself in the same manner.” [Robert W. Yarbrough, ESV Study Bible, p. 2443] Note: This argument is based on the assumption that the model of church administration (governance) in Jerusalem & Paul’s churches also applies to the Johannine communities. However, there is no reference here to John or ‘John’s churches’ to substantiate this!

II.Alternative NT Models of Church Leadership

A.Contrasting Patterns of Governance – Paul’s Churches vs. John’s Churches

•“In what is commonly called... church order [governance], there seems to be an obvious difference between the Paulines [1-2 Tim., Titus] & the Johannines [1-3 Jn.]. There is in the Johannine Letters little to suggest the establishment of an ordained... hierarchical, ministry... Unlike the Pastorals [1-2 Tim., Titus], the Johannine letters contain no nascent doctrine of apostolic succession. Yet the modes of authority...in the Pastorals [1-2 Tim., Titus] ... provide the structure for the emerging, catholic church... In the dominant catholic tradition, the Pauline Pastorals represent the wave of the future [the ‘Great (Catholic) Church’].” [D. Moody Smith, 1st, 2nd, & 3rd John, pp. 68-69]

B.The Hierarchical Structure of Paul’s Churches

•“Most scholars see in the Pastorals [1-2 Timothy, Titus] a fairly complex hierarchy of church

leadership that includes bishops, elders, & deacons. These formal offices are prominent in second-generation sources...” [Kenton L. Sparks, *God’s Word in Human Words*, p. 114]

1.Hierarchy: Apostles, Elders/Overseers, Deacons, Regular Church Members

•“The Pastorals evince a development within 1st-century Christianity towards...greater institutionalization... [They’re] beginning to harden into the more rigid structures of future Catholicism.” [J. Dunn, *Unity*, pp. 118, 121]

•“The role of Timothy & Titus within this hierarchy is not very clear... though they certainly rank above the elders, overseers & deacons.” [James Dunn, *Unity...*, p. 115]

2.Emphasis on Office (position) (1 Tim. 3:1)

•“If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.” (1 Tim. 3:1 ESV)

•“The concept of office has already clearly emerged: elders, overseers (bishops) & deacons are all titles for well-established offices (1 Tim. 3:1 ‘the office of overseer’).” [James Dunn, *Unity...*, p. 352]

3.Timothy & Titus as Apostolic Delegates

•“Timothy & Titus... are obviously not simply emissaries from Paul visiting one of his churches as his spokesman. Rather, they begin to assume ...the role of monarchical [reigning] bishops, with authority over the community & its members.” [James Dunn, *Unity...*, p. 352]

•“The position of Timothy & Titus as apostolic delegates over local church communities points to a 2nd-generation ...supervisory system. Resistance to this arrangement in practice is suggested in Paul’s admonition [in Titus 2:15].” [Benjamin Fiore, *Pastoral Epistles*, p. 19]

•“Timothy & Titus are invested with authority from the apostle...which, structurally speaking, sets them over the elders & deacons as Paul’s apostolic representatives... There’s strong evidence that Paul envisions the positions they occupy to be permanent.” [Moyer V. Hubbard, *Christianity in the Greco-Roman World*, p.]

4.Authority & Submission in the local church

•“Throughout the Word of God there are references to levels of authority in the local church. The mere mention of words like ‘bishop, overseer, elder, pastor,’ indicate that God has set a hierarchy of responsibility in our churches to establish order & keep the peace... ‘Shepherd’ means there are sheep. ‘Leader’ means there are followers, & ‘authority’ means submission must follow. There’s no way around this fact—your pastor is ‘over you in the Lord’ (1 Thess. 5:12).” [Bob Yandian, *God’s Word to Pastors*, p.]

III.Elders’ Governance in the Churches Paul Planted

A.Paul’s Model based on Jewish Synagogue Practice (Acts 14:23; Phil. 1:1)

?“The Apostle Paul...appointed elders to a position of eldership in every church he founded [Acts 14:23] ... This consistent practice provides compelling evidence that the Gentile churches were to be governed by a system similar to that used among the Jews for centuries.” [James Kirkland, *Elders & Deacons & Saints*, p.]

?“According to Acts, Paul appointed elders over his mission churches (Acts 14:23) ...& Acts 20:17 indicates that the leaders of the Ephesian congregation whom Paul summoned to Miletus were designated ‘elders.’ Paul probably established his churches along the pattern of the elder system of the Jewish synagogue. In Phil. 1:1 Paul singled out ...bishops/overseers (...– elders) & deacons... From the start Paul’s churches seem to have had leaders to administer the work of the church.” [John B. Polhill, *Paul & His Letters*, p. 403]

?“Scholars have found evidence that the synagogue is the best analogy for understanding the formation & structure of the early Pauline churches, primarily because these churches were a direct development out of the synagogues.

According to John G. Gager...

the Christian communities adopted the basic structure of the Diaspora synagogues for their meetings in terms of leadership, liturgical practices, [etc.] ... Wayne Meeks calls the Jewish synagogue ‘the nearest and most natural model’ for understanding urban Christian groups, as [they] ...were an offshoot of Judaism.” [Richard S. Ascough, *What are They Saying about...Pauline Churches?* p. 20]

?As “with the synagogue (...Christian congregations) would naturally... adopt the government of a synagogue, & a body of elders or presbyters would be chosen to direct the religious worship and... watch over the temporal well-being of society.” [JB. Lightfoot, Philippians, (1868) p. 192 quoted by RA. Campbell, Elders, (1994) p. 8]

?Luke “depicts Paul as appointing elders in all his churches (Acts 14:23) ...an act and an office which made the Pauline churches accord with the Jerusalem [synagogue] pattern of government ... foreshadowing the...[later] merging of... the Pauline churches & the Jerusalem form[s] of church government.” [J. Dunn, Unity..., p. 355]

?First in the Jerusalem church “a form of administration following the pattern of Jewish synagogue government became established... Probably [James]... adopted the pattern of synagogue government for the Jerusalem church by gathering around him a body of elders... [The later] merger of the Jerusalem pattern & the post-Pauline form [provides] the clearest evidence of early Catholicism in Acts & the Pastorals.” [J. Dunn, Unity..., pp. 108-9, 364]

B.Functional Apostolic Succession in Paul’s Pastorals (2 Tim. 2:2)

•What you [Timothy] heard from me [Paul]... commit to faithful men ...able to teach others also.” (2 Tim. 2:2)

•“The central theme of 1-2 Timothy [is] Timothy’s succession of Paul... Paul tells Timothy to instruct his successors in what he [Timothy] heard from him [Paul] (2:1-2) ... [Paul] reminds Timothy that his role in this apostolic succession is family business.” [Robert W. Wall, Preaching the Pastoral[s], p. 99]

•In the Pastorals “a concept of ‘apostolic succession’ [is] beginning to emerge –Paul to Timothy to ‘faithful men’ to ‘others’ (2 Tim. 2:2).” [James Dunn, Unity..., p. 352]

•“We...state with confidence that in the Pastoral Epistles the attempt was made to establish a succession after Paul through Timothy.” [Arnold Ehrhardt, Apostolic Succession: In the First Two Centuries, p. 34]

•“In order to safeguard [the true Jesus-tradition] the... [Pastorals] argue for structures of authority & leadership ...: Jesus ? Paul ? ...Timothy ? faithful people ? the community of believers (2 Tim. 2:2) ... Although we may not find as formal ...chain of succession here... [Yet there’s] some kind of idea of succession, which was built into the authority structures of 1-2 Timothy.” [Mikael Tellbe, Christ-Believers in Ephesus, p. 188]

•“A distinction should be made between functional succession (the presbyter-bishops take over the pastoral care of churches founded by apostles) & ...a chain of succession... It is impossible to trace with assurance any of the presbyter-bishops to the Twelve [Apostles].” [Raymond E. Brown, Antioch & Rome, p. 174 #368, pp. 73-74]

•“2 Timothy is a letter of succession. It is picked up & read by those who...recognize the importance of Paul ...for the future of the church... [Succession] is not a congregational project but belongs to a magisterium [official council] of faithful teachers.” [Robert W. Wall, Richard B. Steele, 1 & 2 Timothy & Titus, p. 216]

•Here in the Pastorals are “the roots of the later concept of apostolic succession...God has revealed to Paul the knowledge of truth...Paul in his turn will appoint Timothy & Titus as his only legitimate representatives, who follow his path...They will ensure the preservation of Pauline tradition...by designating trustworthy continuators ... [&] entrust reliable men with leadership roles ...The succession of legitimate leaders acquire[s] an essential role.” [K. Zamfir, Men & Women in the Household of God, pp. 9, 23]

•2 Tim. 2:2 “is not a formal institutionalizing of apostolic succession for the preservation of the Christian creed.” [William D. Mounce, Pastoral Epistles, p. 504]

C.No Apostolic Succession in John’s Letters (1-3 John)

•“Unlike the Pastorals, the Johannine letters contain no nascent doctrine of apostolic succession.” –D. M. Smith

D. Personal authority of 'the elder' is not transferrable, unlike office, position

•“The elder has a clear sense of personal authority... based on the fact that he is a witness or tradition-bearer for his own community; there’s no evidence that it’s an authority derived from an appointment to office... In 2-3 John ‘the elder’ clearly has a sense of his own authority...but it is not an authority based on an institution or appointed office. Rather, he is working within a different sort of framework. ...[There’s] a considerable contrast with the Pastoral Epistles.” [Paul Trebilco, *Early Christians in Ephesus*, pp. 489-90]

E. Contrasting Church Leadership Structures — John’s Letters vs. Paul’s Pastorals

•Based on Different Visions: “The Pastor[ial]’s vision [is] of Paul as the sole or principal teacher of the (whole) church... The Johannine community’s vision [is] of a church led by the Holy Spirit though symbolized by the Beloved Disciple [Jn. 21].” [M. Eugene Boring, *Hearing Paul’s Voice*, p.]

•“There are significant differences between the Pastoral Epistles [1-2 Tim., Titus] & the Johannine Letters [1-3 Jn.] & the locus of authority. In the Pastorals [1-2 Tim.] we have the development of appointed leadership positions, & the beginning of institutionalization. The locus of authority is in the Pauline tradition, but this is mediated by recognized and authorized teachers.” [Paul Trebilco, “Christians in the Lycus Valley,” in AH. Cadwallader (ed.) *Colossae in Space & Time*, p. 194]

•“The writer [of 1 John] addresses his readers... as ‘My little children’... Otherwise there is no hint of ecclesiastical [Church] hierarchy...” [James DG Dunn, *Neither Jew nor Greek*, p. 779]

•“By contrast, the author of 1 John can write a letter without mentioning any leaders & indeed stress that the community does not need a teacher. In 1 Jn. 2:27 we read: ‘As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, & you don’t need anyone to teach you. Instead, his anointing teaches you about all things & is true & is not a lie; just as it has taught you, remain in him.’” [Paul Trebilco, *Op. cit.*, p. 194]

•“There is a remarkable lack of hierarchical structures in the Johannine Letters. It is rather the horizontal, family relationships that are highlighted; the author repeatedly addresses the group of believers as a whole as ‘the children,’ ‘beloved,’ or ‘the brothers [& sisters].” [Mikael Tellbe, *Christ-Believers in Ephesus*, p. 201]

•“We find differences between 1-2 Timothy & the Johannine Letters...in terms of general social structures. The author of 1-2 Tim. articulates... hierarchical structures & orders in all areas; from the task of the husband as the [overseer] of both the family & the church, & of women [vis-a-viz] ... teaching roles, to the role of widows, the older & younger men & women & slaves. Such social structures are almost totally absent in the Johannine Letters, women & slaves are not mentioned at all &.... The older & younger members of the community ... are addressed by ...ambiguous terms. Once again, [John] does not argue in terms of certain community structures & orders. His vision of the community... seems much more egalitarian... We may suspect that the [Elder] not only presents another way of validating the true tradition, but that [the Elder] does so in deliberate response, or as a reaction, to the routinization of the offices in the hierarchical structures... in the Pauline tradition that belongs to Ephesus.” [Mikael Tellbe, *Op. cit.*, p. 210]

IV. John’s Churches – An Alternative Way of Doing Church

•“The Elder...presents another way of validating the true tradition... [&] does so in deliberate response...to the routinization of the offices in the hierarchical structures... in the Pauline tradition... [in] Ephesus.” –M. Tellbe

A. No single, God-approved way of doing church

•“The NT do[es] not attest to any kind of comprehensive uniformity or a single indistinguishable pattern (where every assembly [church] did exactly the same thing & saw themselves in exactly the same way) but rather they evidence a collage of...what it means to be the church... Church leaders... [should] no longer assume that their task is to find a single uniform description of the NT church.” [JP. Harrison, JD. Dvorak, *NT Church*, pp. xiv-xv]

•Bible scholars “have not been able to establish one acceptable Scriptural model or way of organizing

the church. From...the NT... we can gather that there was no one uniform pattern even in the early church. It is important to acknowledge the improvised & fluid emergence of church structures in the NT & early Christianity.” [Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, Introduction to Ecclesiology, p. 184]

B. ‘The Elder’ (2 Jn. 1, 3 Jn. 1) not an official position or institutional office

- “In 2 & 3 John ‘the elder’...has a sense of his own authority... but it is not an authority based on an institution or appointed office... He is working within a different framework, with his authority based on his own person ...in the fact that he is a tradition-bearer... [Here,] we see a considerable contrast with the Pastoral Epistles [1-2 Tim., & Titus].” [Paul Trebilco, Early Christians in Ephesus..., pp. 489-90]
- “In 2 & 3 John ‘the elder’...asserts some form of authority... personal authority based in witness & being a tradition-bearer & not the authority of office or appointment... There are significant differences between the Pastorals [1-2 Tim. & Titus] and 1 John ...We are seeing... the actual situation prevailing among the readers

...This indicates that these sets of documents [Pastorals vs. 1

-3 John] are written to different [Christian] communities.” [Paul Trebilco, Op. cit., p. 503]

- “In 2 & 3 John...it is because of witness that the elder is a tradition-bearer –because of what he has seen and heard... that he is ‘the elder.’ There is no suggestion of the elder being recognized as the holder of ‘an office’ or of a formal position ...authority is based on personal tradition-bearing... The Pastorals [1-2 Tim., Titus] & the Johannine Letters ...[have] very different leadership structures.” [Paul Trebilco, Op. cit., pp. 503-4]

C. ‘The Elder’ exercises his personal authority ‘democratically’

1. Authority expressed Democratically

- “The elder has a strong sense of his [personal] authority over & responsibility for the Johannine community... he... expresses his relationship in an egalitarian way, as one of them, on the same level as they are... There’s ...a ‘democratic’ tone to his...communication. Tho’ he can use the parental ‘children,’ he often uses ‘dear friends’ (3 Jn. 1, 2, 5). The church members are ‘the friends’ (3 Jn. 14) ... The elder can speak harshly about the false teachers... the author expresses his authority... mildly & ‘democratically’.” [Thomas F. Johnson, 1, 2, 3 Jn. p.]

2. Exhorts from beside believers, not above

- The Elder “does not hesitate the address his recipients with imperatives [directives &] ...to intervene in another congregation...On the other hand [there’s] persuasion... He utilizes the inclusive ‘us’ liberally as well as ‘our,’ along with ‘we’... [2 Jn.] reflects a...pastoral respect for fellow believers, an egalitarian strain.” [Peter Rhea Jones, “Missional Role of Ho Presbyteros,” in RA Culpepper (ed.) Communities in Dispute, pp. 145-6]

D. ‘The Elder’ (2-3 John) doesn’t fit Paul’s Model

- “The ‘elder’ of 2 Jn. 1 & 3 Jn. 1 cannot be the lone elder at the church [in terms of office] for several reasons:

1. First... ‘the author is writing to two different people [the ‘elect lady’ & Gaius] at apparently 2 different churches. Would he be their elder?’ If so, then we have an anomalous situation unparalleled in the rest of the NT a single elder for at least 2 churches... If not, why would he not mention which church he was elder over? If [John] were the elder at the church in Ephesus, [for e.g.,] ‘what business does he have meddling in other churches’ affairs?’

2. “2nd... there’s a very slim chance that John is actually writing these 2 letters [2 Jn., 3 Jn.] to one & the same church, whose elder he is. [But, this] ... would produce a problem insofar as John would have been an ‘absentee elder’ who gives no certain evidence that he will even visit the church ... there (2 Jn. 12, 3 Jn. 10)! (Although this is clearly his desire, he refrains from absolute certitude.) Notice 2 Jn. 12: ‘...I hope to come to see you & talk with you face to face....’ Likewise, 3 Jn. 10 says “if I come... ” & v. 14 says ‘I hope to see you’.”

3. “3rd, the apparent meaning of ‘the elder’ in these 2 little letters seems to be the equivalent of ‘the

old man.’ ...The term used [elder,’ presbuteros] ...can only be given a technical nuance in contexts that seem to demand it.’ Presbuteros is a word that frequently meant simply ‘old man’ (e.g. As in Acts 2:17 & 1 Tim. 5:1). This [designation of presbuteros] fits better the context of 2 & 3 John, because by the time John settled in Asia Minor as the last living apostle, it would be quite appropriate for him to take on a term of endearment & affection: ‘The letter is from the old man.’” (Daniel B. Wallace, Who Should Run the Church? Bible.org)

•“In the [early]... Church ‘elders’/‘Presbyters’ ...came to hold an authoritative position in the local [Christian] community (Acts 20:17, etc.) apparently as a group... The absence [in 2-3 Jn.] of a distinguishing personal name [e.g. ‘the elder John,] or of the name of a local church [‘the elder of the Ephesian Church’] makes a reference to an essentially collegiate office [Eldership, Presbytery] unlikely.” [Judith Lieu, 2nd & 3rd John, p. 53]

•“We might envision... a leader among the elders [e.g. ‘James and all the elders’ Acts 21:17b] ...a number of interpreters have seen the Elder of 2 & 3 John in such a role, having the primary responsibility for a local church ... Yet it is doubtful whether this explains our enigmatic ‘The Elder’ for ...the absolute use of the title in 2 John when writing to another church implies a recognition which is not tied to a single community. Hence the designation ‘presbuteros’ is unlikely to signal status within the ecclesiastical structure of the church as known to us; it clearly identifies the author to those who belong to the same Christian tradition as he. Yet it must be more than an affectionate [label] ... ‘The Old Man,’ [since] the question of authority runs through both letters.” [Judith Lieu, 2nd & 3rd John, pp. 54-55]

E.The Elder (2 Jn. 1; 3 Jn. 1)– ‘Old Man,’ ‘Elder Statesman’

•“At various places the author calls his audience ‘my children,’ which would be quite natural for an old man & authority figure who converted various members of the audience. This is less likely for a mere church elder... [It’s] ...probable... especially since 1 Jn. 2:12-14 [has] family terminology used in general of church members, that this term means ‘old man’ –the patriarch of these house-church members. They are his family of faith. Whereas our author calls himself ‘the old man,’ his congregation apparently referred to him as the ‘Beloved Disciple’ ...judg[ing] from the 4th Gospel.” [Ben Witherington, Letters & Homilies..., p. 399]

•“The author of 2 & 3 John refers to himself as the Presbyter/Elder (2 Jn. 1; 3 Jn. 1), without further definition. However, the title [‘the Elder’] seems to be used here without the same technical meaning as in the Pastorals [1 -2 Tim., Titus] ... where authority is specifically connected with the appointment of an office. ...It seems rather to refer to a person who exercises authority by virtue of his role as a venerated old man & as a bearer of the Jesus-tradition, & as such, he has a position of authority.” [Mikael Tellbe, Christ-Believers in Ephesus, p. 200]

•“Although John the [Elder] has a sense of his own authority, the primary locus of authority is not derived from his own position, but from the Jesus-tradition... and from the community of believers as the bearer of this tradition ... There is a remarkable lack of hierarchical structures in the Johannine Letters. It is rather the horizontal, family relationships that are highlighted... [Note] the specifically family-oriented expression ‘the chosen lady & her children’ (2 Jn. 1) ... The true believers ...live together in a community of family relationships.” [Mikael Tellbe, Christ-Believers in Ephesus, p. 201]

V.Paul’s Church & John’s Church coexisting in Ephesus 80-100 CE

•Rick Strelan chides scholars who “do not conceive that ‘the church’ in Ephesus at the end of the 1st-century consisted of a number of ‘churches’ each with their own structures... [He approves Raymond] Brown [for suggesting Ephesus could have] different churches with different theologies.” [Rick Strelan, Paul, Artemis, & the Jews in Ephesus, pp. 15-16]

•“From around 80-100 CE there were a number of different groups in Ephesus who regarded themselves as Christians – [1.] the Pauline group addressed by the Pastorals, [2.] the Johannine group spoken of in 1-3 John, [and others] ...The Pauline group & the Johannine group were distinct & separate communities, although they maintained non-hostile contact.” [Paul Trebilco, Early Christians

in Ephesus..., pp. 712-3]

VI. Different Trajectories

A. Paul's Pastorals – Trend to Catholicism

•“It's...difficult to deny that the Pastorals are already some way along the trajectory of early Catholicism.” –J Dunn

•“If the increasing institutionalization of early Catholicism begins to emerge in the NT itself...most strikingly in the Pastorals [1-2 Tim., Titus], so too does a protest against early Catholicism... more strongly in John's Gospel & the Johannine Epistles...” [James Dunn, Unity..., p. 359]

•“The trajectory of early Catholicism begins within the 1st-century and some NT documents lie firmly on it. The clearest examples are the Pastorals...in them institutionalization is already well-advanced, in them Christian faith has already set fast in fixed forms.” [James Dunn, Unity..., p. 363]

B. Johannine Christianity – A Reaction & Counter-Trend

•“Early Catholicism was not the only trajectory...to emerge from the 1st-century... The Johannine alternative... has in fact prospered after a fashion.” [James DG. Dunn, Unity..., pp. 364-5]

•“Johannine writings are better understood as a reaction against early Catholicism.” [J. Dunn, Unity..., p. 363]

•“John's individualism is... a protest against the...institutionalizing trend so evident in the Pastorals... the Johannine writings seem...opposed to the... sacramentalism...already established in early Catholicism...If the increasing institutionalization of early Catholicism begins to emerge within the NT itself... most strikingly in the Pastorals, so too does a protest against early Catholicism...most strikingly in John's Gospel and the Johannine Epistles...” [James DG. Dunn, Unity..., pp. 358-9]

•The Elder “presents another way... in deliberate response, or as a reaction, to the routinization of offices in the hierarchical structures... we find... in the Pauline tradition that belongs to Ephesus.” [Mikael Tellbe, Christ-Believers in Ephesus, p. 210]