

The Epistles of John

Week 7: 3 John 1-4

Third John provides insight into a personality conflict that arose at the end of the first century and the strategy adopted by the elder to resolve it. Clearly then, there is much that is valuable for our consideration in this letter. The church has neglected it for too long —at its own expense.

3 John Introduction

3 John is a personal letter, not a public letter

3 John is the only NT book which does not mention Jesus or Christ by name.

At it's core, 3 John is about church polity, or “Who is in charge?”

3 John involves 4 people

- The elder
- Gaius the elder's dear friend
- Demetrius - likely the carrier of the letter
- Diotrefes - the problem

Gaius is apparently a convert of the elder

3 John is the shortest book in the NT and in the entire Bible

3 John Introduction

John again constructs this letter with the building blocks of key word repetition:

- “beloved” (four times) *dear friend in some translations*
- “truth” or “true” (seven times)
- “witness” (five times)

3 John 1-4

3 John 1–4 (ESV)

The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.

Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul. For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

3 John 1-4

Just as 2 John, this letter is also sent by ‘the elder’

He writes with authority

There are only five letters (epistles) written to individuals: 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon and 3 John

Philemon 1–3 (ESV)

Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved fellow worker and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 John 1-4

To my “dear friend” (beloved) appears four times in the letter and at significant locations (vv. 1, 2, 5, 11). “Dear friend” is probably too weak to convey the affection the term bears. The elder desires to express deep and genuine love for this man. Gaius is near and dear to his heart. He is loved by John.

John asks God for the best in every way for Gaius

At the same time the elder wants him to prosper in every way. This verb literally means “to have a good journey”

Detour

A 20th century problem which came from a misunderstanding of verse 2 in the KJV:

3 John 2 (AV)

Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.

3 John 2 (ESV)

Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul.

3 John 2 (NIV)

Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.

3 John 1-4

The report was that Gaius was in the truth and walking in the truth. The emphasis is twofold. First, he was faithful in what he believed. Second, he was faithful in how he lived. In doctrine and deed Gaius was commendable, praiseworthy, and consistent.

As Stott writes: “Whoever walks in the truth is an integrated believer in whom there is no dichotomy between profession and practice. On the contrary, there is in him an exact correspondence between creed and conduct.”

Application for This Week

How would someone describe you or me?

Would he use words like “dear friend” or “beloved”?

Would someone say we “walked in the truth”

Would someone be overwhelmed with joy when hearing about our reputation, behavior and testimony?

Homework

John McArthur has said that he reads each book of the Bible 30 times before he begins to study it in preparation for teaching it. I'd like us to all read 3 John just one time per day this coming week to prepare for next week.

Read one translation of 3 John each day this week. It takes less than 2 minutes. Go slowly and think about what is being said.

Write down any questions or things you'd like to discuss in class next week on the first page or email them to me.

Thank you for coming!

See you next week