

3 John

I. Setting

3 John is the 25th book of the New Testament and 20th among the Epistles. They are the primary doctrinal portions of the New Testament.

It is not that the Gospels and Acts do not contain doctrine, but that the purpose of the Epistles is to explain to churches and individuals how to apply the teachings of Jesus.

Jesus' earthly life models ministry. In every area of ministry, we must apply the example of Christ. He was filled with the Spirit, sought to honor God, put a high value on people, and lowered Himself as the servant of all. Once He ascended to heaven, He poured His Spirit out on believers and the New Testament church was formed. Acts focuses on the birth, establishment, and furtherance of the work of God in the world, through the church.

The Epistles are written to the church, further explaining doctrine.

A. 3 John is the 4th New Testament book attributed the Apostle John

1. Five New Testament books are attributed to the Apostle John, including the Gospel of John, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John and Revelation.
2. This makes John one of the largest contributors of the New Testament
 - a. Statistics can be made to say a lot of different things. Since the New Testament was not originally written with chapters and verses, the best way to determine percentage of writing is through word count.
 - i. John –
 - By book count wrote 18% of the New Testament
 - By chapter count wrote 19% of the New Testament
 - By verse count wrote 17% of the New Testament
 - By word count wrote 20% of the New Testament
 - ii. Luke – wrote 27% of the New Testament
 - By book count wrote 7% of the New Testament
 - By chapter count wrote 20% of the New Testament
 - By verse count wrote 27% of the New Testament
 - By word count wrote 27% of the New Testament

- iii. Paul – wrote 25% of the New Testament
 - By book count wrote 48% of the New Testament
 - By chapter count wrote 33% of the New Testament
 - By verse count wrote 25% of the New Testament
 - By word count wrote 23% of the New Testament
 - b. These stats do not include the book of Hebrews although many attribute its authorship to Paul.
- B. 3 John is the shortest book in the New Testament. Some have referred to it as a “postcard epistle.”
- C. Date
 - 1. 3 John was written towards the end of John’s life and the end of the 1st century.
- D. Author
 - 1. 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John and the 4th Gospel are not signed, the writer simply calls himself ‘The Elder’ (2 John 1, 3 John 1).
 - a. This is somewhat unique among the New Testament epistles. The thirteen epistles of Paul all begin with the writer’s name, as do the epistle of James, the two epistles of Peter and the Epistle of Jude. That leaves only Hebrews and the three epistles attributed to John as “unsigned” epistles.
 - b. Because of the similarity in writing it is clear that the same person wrote the three epistles and the 4th gospel.
 - c. John never named himself, choosing instead to call himself:
 - i. ‘The disciple whom Jesus loved’ (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20)
 - ii. ‘The other disciple’ (John 18:15–16; 20:3–4, 8)
 - iii. ‘The Son of Zebedee’ (John 21:2)
 - d. The bulk of scholars, and the weight of church history, agree that the author of these three letters was John the Apostle.

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2. John refers to himself as an Elder, which speaks of both his age and his position in the church.
 - a. He was a leader who served in a Pastoral role in ministry.
 - i. The term Elder is used interchangeably with the terms bishop/overseer and pastor/shepherd.
 - ii. The conditions required for a person to serve as an elder are listed in 1 Timothy 3.
 - iii. There is a distinction made in 1 Timothy 5:17 between elders and elders who were also teachers
 - b. John would also serve in the role of the elder statesmen who had walked with the Lord for many years and was now passing on his knowledge to the next generation.

II. Outline

- A. 3 John is a personal letter that revolves around three individuals: Gaius (the recipient), Diotrephes (the problem), and Demetrius (probably the bearer of the letter)
 1. Gaius - a godly man and recipient of the letter
 - a. There are three Gaius's mentioned in other parts of the Bible:
 - i. Gaius of Macedonia - Acts 19:29
 - ii. Gaius of Derbe - Acts 20:4
 - iii. Gaius of Corinth - Romans 16:23; 1 Corinthians 1:14
 - b. Gaius" was a common name in the Roman Empire of the first century. Because the name was common, it is unlikely the Gaius of 3 John should be identified with any of these, if for no other reason than, 30 years has transpired since Paul wrote and Gaius seems to be a younger man. It seems from the phrase, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in the truth" that Gaius was a convert of the ministry of John.
 - i. The writings known as "Apostolic Constitutions" list this Gaius as the Bishop of Pergamum, appointed by John.

- ii. Gaius may have been the pastor of a church; Diotrephes may have pastured a nearby church

2. Diotrephes - a troublemaker

- a. This is the only mention of Diotrephes in the New Testament. All we know of him is what is listed here:
 - i. He was a man with authority in the local church. It is possible that he held the position of a pastor.
 - ii. He loved the preeminence; a word speaking of his love for position.
 - Over time men would enter the pastorate not for a love of Christ and people, but because of a love for position.
 - iii. Diotrephes was perhaps the first monarchical bishop who acted like a dictator and abused his powers.
 - Today, it is common in many circles for men to serve as 'Bishops', having authority over many congregations. This does not seem to fit the Biblical model where the churches appear to be autonomous, and rest under the authority of the Word of God alone.
 - iv. He loved to gossip. Instead of spreading the good news he loved to stand against those whom God was using.
 - Tragically, this is a common practice today. Many love to find fault with how others are serving Christ, instead of getting to the business of serving Christ themselves. It is always dangerous when a work is defined by what they are not, instead of what they are, or by what they don't do, instead of what they do.
 - v. He does not receive the brethren. Instead of supporting those who did the work of God he looked upon them as a threat. It may be that he was guilty of lording it over the church instead of pastoring the people.

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3. Demetrius - the bearer of John's letter to the local church
 - a. Apparently he is one of the traveling missionaries and the bearer of the letter from the Apostle in Ephesus.
 - b. "The Apostolic Constitutions" lists Demetrius as the Bishop of Philadelphia, who was appointed by the Apostle John.

B. Backstory –

2 John deals with the problem of heretical, itinerant preachers, while 3 John deals with the admonition to help itinerant Christian preachers.

1. John is writing to a friend and co-laborer in the ministry named Gaius, who apparently came to Christ through the ministry of John and either served in the local church or perhaps as its pastor. Gaius is commended for his faithfulness in ministry and character, while being warned about the ungodly behavior of Diotrephes.
2. This letter serves as a great illustration of the value of missions and the danger of self-exaltation.
 - a. The Gospel, then and now, is spread through the faithful missionary work of individuals. That work is never accomplished alone. It is God's design for some to go and for others to support. Gaius is commended because of his faithful support of missionaries.
 - b. The early church struggled with how to evaluate and support traveling missionaries.
 - i. An early writing from the early second century called 'The Didache' has these guidelines concerning traveling teachers:
 - "Whosoever, therefore, comes and teaches you all these things that have been said before, receive him. But if the teacher himself teaches another doctrine to the destruction of this, hear him not; but if he teaches so as to increase righteousness and the knowledge of the Lord, receive him as the Lord.
 - Let every apostle that cometh to you be received as the Lord. But he shall not remain except one day; but if there be need, also the next; but if he remains three days, he is a false prophet. And when the

apostle goes away, let him take nothing but bread until he lodges; but if he ask money, he is a false prophet.”

- ii. When John wrote this epistle, travelers were dependent on the hospitality of other people, since hotels and restaurants were extremely rare. When Christian preachers traveled to spread the gospel, other Christians were expected to support their ministry by offering them hospitality.
 - iii. Those who offered hospitality participated in the travelers’ ministries and received a reward for doing so.
 - **Matthew 10:41**
The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward.
 - **Hebrews 13:2**
“Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.”
 - iv. The same is true today. With prayer and finance, we can be involved in the work of world evangelism by supporting those who do the work.
- C. The letter follows the basic pattern of most ancient letters, with an introduction (vs. 1–4), body (vs. 5–11), and a conclusion (vs. 13–14). For teaching purposes the book may be outlined around its main characters or the word beloved.
1. Main Characters: 3 John focuses upon 4 characters:
 - a. 1:1 7 & 13-14 – a look at John, referred to as the elder.
 - b. 1:2-8 – a commendation for Gaius, the recipient of the letter.
 - c. 1:9-11 – a condemnation for Diotrephes, a man in need of rebuke.

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- d. 1:12 – a praise for Demetrius, who seems to have been the courier between John and the church

2. Beloved:

- a. John refers to Gaius as BELOVED 3 times (vs.2, 5 &11).
 - i. 1:2- followed with a promise.
 - ii. 1:5- followed by a commendation
 - iii. 1:11- followed by a warning

D. Key words

As you read through the book notice the use of repeated words like:

- “beloved” - four times; vv. 1, 2, 5, 11
- “truth” or “true” - seven times; vv. 1, 3 4, 8, 12
- “witness” - five times; vv. 3, 6, 12

III. Exposition

A. 3 John 1:1-4 – Introduction

1. The Elder

- a. John refers to himself as an elder, which would speak of both his age and his position in the local church.
 - i. An elder is a term that refers to the office of a pastor having oversight of the local church.
 - ii. John’s role went far beyond the care of the local church. As an apostle his authority carried over to all churches

2. The beloved Gaius

- a. One of 4 men named Gaius listed in the New Testament. Tradition holds that this Gaius came to Christ through the

ministry of John and became the pastor of the church in Pergamum.

- b. Three times John refers to him as beloved. Each time introduces a new subject to the letter:
 - 1:2 – A promise of prayer
 - 1:5 – A commendation for Gaius
 - 1:11 – A warning about evil

3. I pray

- a. Prayer played an important role in the life of the New Testament writers; having learned the importance of prayer by:
 - i. Watching Jesus – Mk 1:35
 - ii. Listening to Jesus – Matt 6:9-13
 - iii. Practicing prayer themselves – Acts 4:31
- b. They continued to be actively involved in prayer.
- c. Paul's letters were filled with prayer for the saints:
 - i. Ephesians 1:15-19
 - ii. Ephesians 3:14-19
 - iii. Philippians 1:9-11
- d. James spoke of the importance of prayer; James 5:14-18
- e. John made a point to pray for his friend Gaius.
- f. John prays for health and success for his friend Gaius.
 - i. "I pray that you prosper in all things just as your soul prospers."
 - Notice that this is not a promise or the basis of a Christian doctrine, but the desire of one saint for another.

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- The obvious question is whether or not the Bible guarantees prosperity and health for all those who follow Christ
- The word “prosper” can mean “to have a good journey.” Here it is used metaphorically. John asks God for the best in every way for Gaius. Further, he specifically prays for “good health.”
- One man put it this way: “It was never meant to be a proof-text for “health, wealth, and prosperity” preachers. Bible texts removed from context can be used to assert anything. The text cannot mean today what it never meant in its own day. The only inspired person is the original author. We must follow its thoughts, not interject our own!”
- What we know for sure is that Gaius had a healthy soul and a sickly body.
- It is clear Gaius was a godly man in the peak of spiritual health, although his physical well-being is questionable.

*Compare your bodily health to your spiritual health
How do you fare? Are you in better shape physically or spiritually? What concerns you the most? Bodily exercise profits little, godliness in all things
(Paraphrase, 1Timothy 4:8)

- John knew Gaius had a healthy soul because some, who had met Gaius, brought John glowing reports about *the truth that was in Gaius*, and the way he walked.
We read of, **“the truth that is in you and just as you walk in the truth” 3 John 1:3**

*The emphasis is twofold. First, he was faithful in what he believed. Second, he was faithful in how he lived. To walk in the truth means to know it, believe it, live it and pass it on to others.

4. I rejoiced

- a. Prayer is for what has yet to happen, rejoicing is for what has been accomplished.
- b. John gives details into how Gaius was living for eternity and establishing a healthy soul.
- c. What we know about Gaius: he was converted through the ministry of John, he has gone on to grow in Christ, and become an example to all of us.
- d. It is important to note what Gaius was commended by John in 3 John 1:5-8, describing the Gaius' ministry.
 - i. The Gospel always spreads the same way. Men and women, who have met Christ, take the good news to those who have not yet been saved.
 - Romans 10:14
 - John 9:36
 - Acts 8:31
- e. Here Gaius is commended, not for being the one who went but, the one who supported those who went.
 - i. Notice, we read, they took nothing from the gentiles. This refers to the fact that the support for their ministry did not come from the world, but from the churches.
- f. John calls Gaius a fellow worker, co-laborer or companion because, although he may have never gotten on that horse, ship or plane, he made it possible for others to go.
 - i. Those who send get equal share with those who go.
 - ii. While it is not the world's job to support, it is ours.
 - iii. We may not physically go where they go, but when we support them, we go with them anyway.

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- iv. We work together, as one, for the truth. Some give support and some are sent. Both are essential.
- v. Would that our God would multiply both “the sent” and “the supporters.” Gaius is a wonderful model for the latter.

5. I wrote

- a. Here the tone of the letter changes as John is forced to rebuke the ungodly behavior of Diotrephes.
- b. What we know:
 - i. Diotrephes is mentioned only here in New Testament.
 - ii. It seems he held a position of authority in the local church, perhaps even as a pastor.
 - iii. His actions reflect those who Peter warns about; who lord it over the flock rather than shepherding the flock.
 - iv. Diotrephes is condemned for 4 things:
 - He loves preeminence: He loved the preeminence; a word speaking of his love for position. Over time men would enter the pastorate not for a love of Christ and people, but because of a love for position.
 - Diotrephes was perhaps the first monarchical bishop who acted like a dictator and abused his powers.

*Today, it is common in many circles for men to serve as “Bishops” having authority over many congregations. This does not appear to fit the Biblical model where the churches seem to be autonomous and rest under the authority of the Word of God alone.

- He loved to gossip; Instead of spreading the good news he loved to stand against those whom God was using.

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- He does not receive the brethren.

Instead of supporting those who did the work of God he looked upon them as a threat.

He exercised authority that was not his; it may be that he was guilty of lording it over the church instead of pastoring the people

c. Beloved do not imitate evil

- i. John uses the example of Diotrephes to warn Gaius regarding his own behavior.
- ii. Do not imitate evil, but what is good
- iii. Paul wrote similarly: "For your obedience is come abroad unto all men. I am glad therefore on your behalf: but yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil."
Romans 16:19 (King James Version)
- iv. Too often we are well versed in movies, song lyrics, team schedules, sporting stats while we are ignorant of those things that will produce righteousness in us.

d. Demetrius has a good testimony

- i. There are two men in the New Testament named Demetrius.

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- The first is found in Acts 19, he is an idol maker from Ephesus who opposed the work of God
- The second is the man mentioned here
- While it is possible for an idol maker to come to Christ and even become a missionary, there is no reason to think these two men are one in the same.

ii. What we know about Demetrius

- He seems to have been one of the missionaries that John referred to earlier
- He had a good testimony
 - From all who knew him
 - From the truth itself
 - From John and those who sent him
- It is vital that we have a lifestyle that not only backs up the things that we say, but also draws others to faith in Christ

e. I had many things to write...

John concludes the letter giving some insights into who he was. Even though he was aging and travel was difficult, he still wanted to make his way to the church and visit the saints. He had a deep love for the believers and uses the words Beloved, Brethren, Children, and Friends to describe them. He saw the value of investing in others, even at great personal cost to himself.