

STUDY ON THE BOOKS OF SECOND AND THIRD JOHN

WALKING IN LOVE!

Read 2 John & 3 John

Introduction.

As you study 1 John you became acutely aware of the battle being fought in Ephesus and the surrounding churches between the orthodox Christian faith taught by the Apostle John and the spiritualized, corrupted teaching of John's opponents. They denied that the human Jesus was Christ, the Son of God. They refused to obey Jesus' commandments carefully, especially his command to love.

As you recall from 1 John – that it isn't really a letter. Rather it is a sermon or tract designed to explain true teaching about Christ to the churches in Asia Minor and contrast it with the false teaching being spread. But 2 and 3 John actually are letters – epistles from the hand of John the Apostle to a congregation and a church leader – designed to give specific guidance in the face of the false teaching.

Both letters refer to the teaching that John spelled out in detail in First John, so I'll refer you there rather than repeating all the details. This lesson, however, is primarily concerned with hospitality to visiting teachers – refusing to welcome false teachers and assisting true teachers.

Letter Openings in 2 and 3 John

	2nd John	3rd John
Sender	<i>The elder (1a)</i>	<i>The elder (1a)</i>
Recipient	<i>To the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth...</i>	<i>To the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth...</i>

In 2 and 3 John, the apostle identifies himself not by name, but with a title: "The elder" (*presbyteros*). The word could describe the age of the writer; old age began at about 40 years. But since both Jews and Greeks recognized that older, experienced men made good leaders, "elder" became a designation for officials. As for the sender, we are clear.

In terms of the recipients of these letters, the recipient in 3 John is a person, Gaius. Easy. But the recipient in 2 John is a bit more difficult, almost like a kind of code. Why, we're not sure. The "chosen lady" (NIV) or "elect lady" (NRSV, KJV) is most probably a way of referring to a church. The feminine used of a group of God's people is well established: Israel is referred to variously in the Bible as a virgin, the daughter of Zion, a mother, and a widow. The Church is the "bride of Christ." A church in Rome is referred to by Peter cryptically as "she who is in Babylon, chosen together with you" (1 Peter 5:13). "Chosen" or "elect" (*eklektos*) refers to God's sovereign choice of the church. "Her children" are, no doubt, the members of the congregation.

Greetings

	2nd John	3rd John
Greetings	<i>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. (v3)</i>	<i>Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers. (v2)</i>

The greeting in 2 John is a familiar Christian greeting, similar to something you'd find in one of Paul's letters. Notice, however, that John is careful to speak of "Jesus Christ, the Father's Son," since the heretics denied Jesus' divinity. The greeting in 3 John sounds very much like what you'd expect in a Greek letter: a wish for the recipient's health and the hope that his situation is going well. However, John puts this in the form of a prayer for Gaius.

Joy upon Hearing

	2nd John	3rd John
Joy upon hearing	<i>I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father. (v4)</i>	<i>For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. (vv3-4)</i>

Notice that "walking in the truth" is John's point of joy. What he means is that he has seen and heard that members of the recipient church (2 John) and Gaius himself (3 John) are following the apostolic teaching about who Christ is, how to live righteously, and how to love one another, rather than the false teaching circulating through the region. He sounds just like a proud parent.

The Message of 2 John

The message has three parts:

1. Love. John reminds the church of the command to walk in love.
2. Deceivers. John warns the church of the false teachers.
3. Hospitality. John commands the church not to host or welcome the false teachers.

This is a short letter, so John is trying to be concise. We will use this study to focus more on the lessons of 3 John as most of the message covered in 2 John, we have already reviewed in other lessons contained in 1 John.

The Message of 3 John

Now let's examine John's Third Letter. There are three characters:

1. Gaius -- the recipient of the letter, who has been showing hospitality to visiting Christian missionaries.
2. Diotrophes -- a house-church leader who has refused to show hospitality to these missionaries and excommunicates anyone who does.
3. Demetrius -- a Christian, perhaps a missionary himself, and perhaps the bearer of this letter of introduction.

The purpose of Third John, then, is to influence Gaius to continue to show hospitality to visiting Christian missionaries, in particular, we think, Demetrius.

The letter gives us three-character examples to learn from, two positive, one negative, plus a rationale for supporting Christian missionaries.

Gaius (vv3-6)

We don't know anything about Gaius except what can be deduced from this letter. The name Gaius is perhaps the most common of all given names in the Roman Empire at the time. The three other people

named Gaius in the New Testament are almost certainly different people. Here's how John addresses Gaius. Note the virtues he exhibits:

*“For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and **testified of the truth** that is in you, just as you **walk in the truth**. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children **walk in truth**. Beloved, you **do faithfully whatever you do** for the brethren and for strangers, who have borne witness of your **love** before the church.” (vv3-6a)*

John's goodwill towards Gaius came from his understanding that he walked in the truth. Nothing pleased John more than to know that his children walk in truth. John knew that Gaius walked in truth because brethren came and testified of the truth that was in Gaius. His walk of truth was noticed by others, and they could talk about it because they saw it.

A good example (Gaius)

“Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well, because they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth.” (vv5-8)

Gaius has been faithfully caring for "strangers" (*xenos*) in verse 5. In verse 8, "show hospitality" (NIV), "support" (NRSV), "receive" (KJV) is (*hypolambanō*), "to take someone under one's care, receive as a guest, support, protect." In secular Greek, the word is used of caring for exiles, admitting a visitor, and, of a doctor who would take in hand or treat a patient. Gaius has been "taking in hand" the visiting missionaries, leaving them free to do their work of teaching the Word.

This passage teaches us several things about supporting missions and missionaries:

1. Missionaries go forth deliberately to serve Christ.
2. Missionaries go out "for His name's sake," that is, in Jesus' name.
3. Missionaries don't seek funds from non-believers, primarily, but from believers.
4. Helping missionaries makes us "co-workers" (NRSV) or "fellow helpers" (KJV).

Diotrephes, the Domineering Leader

“I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the pre-eminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church.” (vv9-10)

The only thing we know about Diotrephes is what we read in these two verses. His name is a rare one. It means, "nourished by Zeus, or foster-child of Zeus," though Diotrephes is now a Christian. Here is what we learn:

- **Diotrephes is self-centred.** Leaders need self-confidence to be able to lead well. But Diotrephes is driven by the need to "be first" (NIV), "put himself first" (NRSV), "have the pre-eminence" (KJV). *Philoprōteuō* means, "to have a special interest in being in the leading position, wish to be first, like to be leader." He is insecure in the presence of anyone who might be perceived as on a par with him.
- **Diotrephes wants to be the exclusive authority**, so he neither recognizes John's apostolic authority nor wants Christian missionaries working in his area. He can't afford to have others challenge him, particularly an apostle! He has an independent spirit that will submit to no one.

- **Diotrephes is domineering and controlling.** Not only does he express his opinion, but also suppresses others' opinions, coerces them by using threats, and acts pre-emptively to get rid of anyone who challenges his authority. If need be, he will excommunicate them from the church he leads.
- **Diotrephes is a mean-spirited slanderer.** "Gossiping maliciously about us" (NIV), "spreading false charges against us" (NRSV), "prating against us with malicious words" (KJV), literally "with malicious words talking nonsense about us."

I don't know any easy answer for a church afflicted with a Diotrephes. So long as such a person retains power, the church is hurt. But the battle that ensues when you attempt to remove such a person from power can be terribly injurious to a congregation. The best answer is prayer -- prayer that God will either heal the leader or remove him or her for the sake of the body.

An Exhortation to Gaius

"Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God." (v11)

John is saying, Gaius, you must choose. Either model your actions after one who is evil (Diotrephes) or model your actions after one who is good (probably Demetrius, praised in the next verse, or perhaps John himself). Ultimately, John calls Gaius to choose not on the basis of personalities or power, but on the grounds of righteousness and unrighteousness. John almost says that Diotrephes just hasn't seen God (11b) -- at least that his character and actions seem to indicate this.

Demetrius

"Demetrius has a good testimony from all, and from the truth itself. And we also bear witness, and you know that our testimony is true." (v12)

John recommended this man to Gaius. Perhaps he was the one who carried the letter from John to Gaius, and John wanted Gaius to know that Demetrius was worthy of Christian hospitality. Demetrius was so faithful to the truth that even the truth was a witness on his behalf.

Since John doesn't spell things out in the letter, we are left to deduce what we can:

- Demetrius is known by reputation by Gaius, but not personally.
- Demetrius is well known to John, well enough to warrant this strong personal recommendation.
- Demetrius is coming to the area and will need hospitality. Otherwise, why would John compliment Gaius on his hospitality (v5) and show concern about Diotrephes' lack of hospitality (10b)?

Closing Words

"I had many things to write, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and ink; but I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak face to face. Peace to you. Our friends greet you. Greet the friends by name." (vv13-14)

We can sympathize with John's preference for personal, face to face communication rather than the writing of letters. Yet we are thankful that John was forced to write, so that we have the record of this letter of 3 John.

In addition to a familiar blessing of peace upon Gaius, John also reminded him (and us) of the common ties of Christians — even if they are separated by miles, they are still friends in Jesus, and appropriately they should greet one another.

