

The Third Epistle of John

Therefore we ought to support such men, so that we may be fellow workers with the truth. (3 John 1:8 NASB)

3 John Summary

Someone read 3John 1:1-7

Someone read vv 8-14 (15)

Canonicity

Due to the brevity and casual nature of 2&3 John, it is not surprising that they were among the last to be accepted as canonical (define “canon”). Eusebius in his Church History (ca 290ad) lists them as “disputed, although well known and accepted by many.”

The contents of 3John reflect that it is the product of the same author as 1&2John.

Authorship

Following the traditional format of a letter written in Biblical times, the author refers to himself at the very beginning. But he does not use his name, instead he refers to himself as what?

The Elder (Greek=*ho presbuteros*), from which we get the name of what mainline denomination?

So, if the author was the beloved Disciple – as I believe it is – the why do you think he doesn't give his name?

Similar to GJohn, 1John, and 2John.

Out of humility – remember, he is one of the Sons of Thunder reborn to the Disciple of Love.

But, see Rev 1:1. Why do you think John identifies himself by name here?

See Isa 1:1, Jer 1:1, Eze 1:3, Dan 7:1, etc.

Consciously writing a prophetic vision, like the OT prophets

So, to sum up, the author, in my view, is the Apostle John. He was probably writing from Ephesus (although there is no direct evidence of this), and was writing either in the first half of the 80's or perhaps 10-15 years later.

His theme is that a nearby church was showing Christian love by being hospitable to true teachers of the Gospel, with the notable exception of Diotrefes, whom I'll address more fully later, and much more when we get to that passage. Thus, the little letter serves as a kind of counterbalance to 2John, which – as we learned – dealt with *not* giving hospitality of any kind to teachers who denied the Incarnation. In contrast, in this letter the Elder commends a member of a local church,

Gaius, for showing kindness and a welcoming spirit to itinerant missionaries who teach that the Christ “came in the flesh.”

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The Form

Like 2John, it is short enough to fit on one piece of papyrus, and contains a more or less standard greeting and conclusion. In fact, it is the shortest book in the NT, in the Greek text (by both word count and line count).

Interestingly, English bibles are split over how the verses are divided up in 3John. Some Bibles, such as the NASB and ESV, divide v14 in half, making an additional verse (15). The NIV follows the KJV, and combines them into a single verse (14).

Question: Which is correct?

Trick! Chapter and verse divisions were not added until the Reformation!

The Audience

The beloved Gaius was the recipient of the letter. ‘Gaius’ was the Greek form of the Latin Caius. It was as common as John or James is today. It was probably delivered by the third person mentioned in the letter – who is that?

Demetrius

And why do I say he delivered this letter to Gaius?

Purpose

As I said, this letter compliments 2John very nicely in that it fleshes out how churches should respond to travelling teachers and evangelists. In his previous letter, John proscribed hospitality to false teachers. If that was all we had to go on, we would have only one side of the story: The negative side. But praise God we have 3John, which shows us the positive side. It encourages Gaius to continue opening his home and providing meals for “strangers” who come proclaiming the true Gospel.

VV1-2 : “Beloved Gaius”

Gaius of Corinth

1 Cor 1:14; Rom 16:23

Gaius of Macedonia

Acts 19:29

Gaius of Derbe

Acts 20:4

Apostolic Constitutions (ca 370ad) says that John appointed bishop of Pergamum.

Some commentators argue, based on this tradition and the proximity of Pergamum to Ephesus, that both 2 & 3 John were sent to Pergamum.

Most commentators agree that this tradition is too late and too sparse to be relied upon, and the recipient is not to be identified with any of the Gaiuses that are mentioned in connection to Paul.

Apparently, “Gaius” was one of 18 names available to Roman parents. It was a personal name (as opposed to a surname or last name), and by this time, was generally only used by family and close friends.

What does this fact say about John and Gaius?

This illustrates why he was “beloved:” John and Gaius knew each other intimately. John was not loved Gaius merely for his actions, but he felt like family to him.

V2. “prosper” literally means “that you be led along a good road.” One commentator paraphrases it like this: “That you may make a safe voyage of it.”

John adds “just as your soul prospers.” Why do you think he adds this?

He’s expressing his confident assurance in the spiritual welfare and health of Gaius.

John wishes that Gaius’ physical health would be as strong as his faith. This is vital to the further services John intends Gaius to render. The order is important: The spiritual is the standard measurement for the physical.

As one commentator puts it:

The Church is beset with many and varied dangers from without, but none are so damaging right now as the spiritually sick saints within.

This serves as a wonderful example of prayer both for the physical as well as the spiritual wellbeing of our fellow Christians.

V3. John wasn't merely "very glad," he was overjoyed (or "gave me great joy" - NIV; "rejoiced greatly" – ESV). In the Greek, this is: "Rejoiced exceedingly, exceedingly." (*echarēn lian*). Greek often uses doubling like this to exaggerate or lay stress on a feeling or thought.

Here we have a glimpse of the stream of travelers between churches in the region which enabled John to keep tabs on their spiritual health.

Christ came at just the right time in history – the Roman roads were so sophisticated, that many still exist today. This made possible frequent visits, which was particularly vital when the Gospel was still being disseminated by word of mouth (but, of course, believers still had the OT scriptures; all the NT authors used the LXX most of the time).

Further, as Terry pointed out, Greek was a precise language, and was the *lingua franca* of the whole known world, was flexible, and capable of representing the Gospel with clarity.

V4. "My children" could be a reference to John's spiritual children that he converted himself. But it probably has a broader meaning here, that is, his Christian children, believers for whom he feels a warm, fatherly affection and a sense of responsibility as their spiritual mentor.

The word "truth" had the article, indicating John has a specific truth in mind. What do you think it is?

God's Truth. They had not merely understood it intellectually, but had understood in their hearts as well.

Such reports concerning his dear children always produces joy in the hearts of Christian leaders everywhere.

V5. Who are "the brethren?"

Someone read the last clause of verse 5 in the KJV

"to the brethren, and to strangers"

Is this one group or two?

Now, someone read from a modern English translation.

"the brethren, and especially when they are strangers" (NASB)

Is this one group or two?

Can somebody who has been in this class for awhile tell me why the difference?

The older Greek MSS that most modern English Bibles are based on are more reliable than the ones available in 1611 when King James commissioned the Authorized Version.

V6. He suffered the greatest humiliation possible even before He drew His first breath as a human, the mere act of taking on humanity was the ultimate act of self-denial, to humble Himself, to the point of death for *US*.

And it was Gaius' experience of this love of and for Christ that animated his sacrificial love for his Christian brothers.

And for John, love is never a mere feeling or empty words; it is always an action.

1Jn 3:18

And where does our text say the brothers gave their testimony?

“before the church”

“before” implies they stood before (in front of) the congregation. “The church” does not have the article preceding it. It is close to saying “in church” in English.

V 7. It is shocking that Dio would act like this to the last surviving Apostle. Or is it? What incidents in the NT can you think of that indicate people regarded themselves more highly than they regarded Jesus and the Gospel?

1. Judas
2. The disbelief of Jesus' brothers
3. The flight of all the Apostles but John when Christ was crucified
4. The denial of Peter
5. The abuses at the church in Corinth
6. Mark's departure from Paul

So, is it really so surprising that Dio thought that he should “desire to be first,” even over John?

Dio may have been an elder or deacon, but he clearly desired to rule over the whole church.

V 10. All three verbs (receive, forbids, puts) are in the present tense, signifying what (again)?

Ongoing action.

To quote John Stott: “Self-love vitiates (negates) all relationships. Dio slandered John, cold-shouldered the missionaries, and excommunicated the loyal believers because he loved himself and wanted to have pre-eminence. Personal vanity still lies at the root of most dissensions in every local church today.”

Dio stands as a warning of the danger in confusing personal ambition for zeal in proclaiming the Gospel.

V 11. The one who does evil has not seen God – that is, has no real Christian experience. His conversion must be judged to have been an illusion. Evil, unloving conduct – as exhibited by Dio – calls into question his profession to be a Christian in the first place.

This offers the question: Was Dio saved?

V 12. “and you know that our testimony is true.”

“You” is singular, and was directed to Gaius himself. John appeals to his own reputation. Gaius knows that he can fully rely on John’s testimony because (to echo the Apostle) it is true and not a lie. John’s character was such that Gaius could implicitly trust John. Such self-testimony is natural coming from John the beloved disciple, but unnatural coming from another.

V 13. We noted how similar the conclusion of 2Jn is to 3Jn. Yet there are some minor differences. What do these differences indicate?

V 14. Why do you think John wants to visit Gaius so soon?

Diotrephes and the trouble he is stirring up. He is creating a crisis that John wants to deal with personally.

V 15. How does the NT always refer to fellow members of the Church?

Brothers / Sisters

Why does John refer to them as ‘friends?’

He may be following Christ’s example in Jn 15:12-17.

But here, I think the disciples are intended, although we may also be considered Christ’s friends.

I think it’s more likely that John wants to emphasize that even though we ought to love others as we love ourselves, it is just as important that we LIKE one another.

Who else said that they “call the sheep by name?”

GJohn 10:3

John is following his Master in this, as he did in all other matters. For John, the unity of believers did not minimize his high regard for individual worth and warm personal friendships.

This concludes our study of 3 Jn. Thanks to all of you for giving me an excuse for diving deeply into the little letter! I have enjoyed this study more than I can express.