

Mount Pisgah A.M.E. Church

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Bible Study, Wednesday, June 15, 2016

Survey of the Bible

Lesson 66: 3 John

The Book of 3 John

The book of 3 John is the third in a series of three epistles (along with 1 John and 2 John) written with similar concerns. While 1 John is more of a General Epistle, and 2 John is more of a Pastoral Epistle, 3 John is more of a recommendation letter like Philemon. It is written to an individual to commend certain behaviors and warn against other behaviors.

Author

Like 1 John and 2 John, the author of this book is broadly accepted as John, the son of Zebedee. He is the apostle John who also wrote the gospel of John and the book of Revelation. In spite of its brevity, the similarity and style and theme argue for it having been penned by the same author as 1 John and 2 John.

The Times and context of 3John

The parallels between 2nd and 3rd John suggest that these epistles were written about the same time (AD 90). John's headquarters during this time is thought to have been in Ephesus, the largest city of the Roman province of Asia. John evidently commissioned a number of traveling teachers to spread the gospel and to solidify the Asian churches (some of which were "house churches" as is suggested by 2 John). These teachers were supported by believers who received them into their homes.

Third John was probably delivered by a messenger named Demetrius. Some of the traveling teachers (referred to as "the brothers" in the text) had given John a report that a believer named Gaius had been particularly kind to them, but also that a "disciple" named Diotrephes hostile. Diotrephes had taken control of an Asian church and made himself into its authoritarian head. He criticized John's leadership and rejected his traveling teachers when they came through the region.

Gaius was a common name in the Roman Empire, and three other men by that name are mentioned in the New Testament. This Gaius lived in Asia, which distinguishes him from the others.

In verse 9, John mentions a previous letter that he had written that Diotrephes had rejected. This may have been 1st or 2nd John, but it is more likely a letter that has been lost or was destroyed by Diotrephes.

Overview

Third John is the shortest book in the Bible, but it is very personal and vivid. It offers a contrast between two men (Gaius and Diotrephes) who respond in opposite ways to the itinerant teachers who have been sent out by the apostle. The faithful Gaius responds with generosity and hospitality, but Diotrephes is arrogant, self-serving and responds with opposition. Thus John writes this letter to commend Gaius for walking in the truth, but to condemn Diotrephes for walking in error. He uses this contrast as an example of how one who "has seen God" acts, versus one who has not. The book offers a salutation, a commendation, a criticism, a testimony, and a closing greeting.

Outline

- I. **Salutation (v. 1)**
- II. **Commendation (vv. 2-8)**
 - A. For Godliness (vv. 2-4)
 - B. Walk in Love (vv. 5-8)
- III. **Criticism (vv. 9-10)**
 - A. Pride & Ego (v. 9)
 - B. Gossip and maligning (v. 10)
- IV. **Testimony (vv. 11-12)**
 - A. Follow the good (v. 11)
 - B. Demetrius as an example (v. 12)
- V. **You Are Not Alone (vv. 13-14)**

Keys to Understanding 3 John

- How itinerant teachers were received into homes when they went into a region was an indication of not only how *they* were viewed, but how their philosophies and teachings were viewed. “Letting someone in” was tantamount to “letting in” their ideology.
- The basic theme of 3 John is to enjoy and continue to have fellowship with fellow believers, especially full time Christian workers. Five purposes can be discerned:
 - To commend Gaius for his following the truth and his hospitality to the teachers sent out by John and to encourage him to continue his support of these teachers.
 - To rebuke Diotrephes for his pride and misconduct
 - To provide a recommendation for Demetrius
 - To inform Gaius of his intention to support his ministry, and of the support of other believers

Some Lessons from 3 John

- This book mentions in its greeting the importance of holistic health. In ministry it is important to be concerned not only about the “prospering of souls” (i.e., that disciples are growing stronger in the Lord spiritually) but that people are “walking in good health” in every aspect of life. There are times when we, in our passion for souls (and even worse, numbers), don’t emphasize concern the emotional, physical, and intellectual well-being of disciples. If we do not provide the right balance we are not doing our job.
- John sees Gaius as “one of his children,” and expresses excitement that “his children are walking in the truth.” There is no greater joy for a teacher, parent, mentor or guide than seeing his/her children “get it” – to be actually putting into practice (living out) the teaching and example that has been presented. Our passion ought not be for disciples to have just “head knowledge” of God’s principles (know Bible verses, etc.), but that they actually be DOING God’s principles. This requires a Godly *example* – people need to SEE the Word living in the teacher’s life, not just read it.
- Arrogance and authoritarian leadership is not a sign of strength, but rather a sign of insecurity and a lack of trust in God’s Spirit to move people in the right direction. A leader who has to continually remind people that s/he IS the leader is really not the leader. Also a leader (or believer) that has to tear competitors down or push them out in order to assert their authority is not a leader either. A true leader can be hospitable and welcoming and trusts God’s Spirit enough to let people see the fruit and judge for themselves.