

“The Third Epistle of John”

INTRODUCTION:

- A. It is not unusual for us as Christians to wonder:
 - 1. What was the early church like?
 - 2. We know a lot about its early leaders, such as apostles Paul and Peter; but what about the average Christians themselves?
 - 3. Were they more spiritual than Christians today?
 - 4. Did they experience the kind of problems seen so often in churches today?
- B. Several books of the New Testament reflect the life of the early church:
 - 1. This is especially true of the 3rd Epistle of John
 - 2. It is a private letter, between the apostle John and a Christian named Gaius.
 - 3. It provides portraits of three different men, and in so doing gives us a glimpse of 1st century life in local churches.
- C. When one examines the descriptions found in this letter, we learn that there is not much difference between people in that time and people in the church today.
- D. Therefore this epistle is just as relevant for us even though we live 2000 years later.
- E. In this message we will:
 - 1. Consider some background material concerning the epistle.

2. Discuss the difference between the three men described in the letter.
3. Conclude with some lessons that can be gleaned from 3rd John.

I. Background Information:

A. The Author – “the Elder”

1. Most scholars, including Gill, believe the “elder” to be the apostle John.
2. The Internal evidence:
 - The three epistles of John utilize much the same language and ideas.
 - All bear similarity to concepts and language to the Gospel of John.
 - The term “elder” is a fitting description of John as the author, writing in his old age.

B. The Recipient - “The beloved Gaius”

1. “Gaius” was a common Roman name. It appears five times in the New Testament

Acts 19:29; Acts 20:4; Romans 16:23; 1 Corinthians 1:14; and here in 3rd John.

2. From verse 4 we learn that Gaius is a spiritual convert, and a dear friend of John.
3. We also learn that Gaius is known for his hospitality.

C. The Place and Date of Writing:

1. Most believe that John wrote this letter from Ephesus because he lived there in the later years of his life.

2. Estimation of the date of writing varies widely, some placing it before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., while most place it around 90-95 A.D.

D. The Purpose of the Epistle:

1. To confirm that Gaius behaved properly in supporting the true teachers who passed by his way.
2. To admonish him to continue being hospitality (Verses 5-8).
3. For the Apostle John to express condemnation of Diotrephes for rejecting John and others whom he should have received (Verses 9-10).
4. To encourage Gaius to imitate what is good, and to commend Demetrius as a good example (Verses 11-12).

E. Brief Outline:

1. Greetings, with an expression of great joy (1-4)
2. The confirmation of Gaius (5-8)
3. The condemnation of Diotrephes (9-10)
4. The commendation of Demetrius (11-12)
5. Concluding remarks (13-14)

F. A Comparison between 2nd and 3rd John:

1. Both letters focus on the words "love" and "truth" (2 John 1 & 3; 3rd John 1)
2. But notice this difference:
 - In 2nd John, love is enjoined, but there is a warning against tolerating those who denied the truth.

- In 3rd John, love is praised, and there is commendation for supporting those who proclaimed the truth.

3. Another comparison:

- 2nd John condemns the departure from the truth which is known as “heresy”
- 3rd John condemns the lack of love among Christians which results in “division”

II. The Three Men of Third John:

A. Gaius - A man that John would have to prosper (Verses 1-8).

1. A dear friend of John, whom he prayed would prosper physically as well as he did spiritually (Verses 1-2).
2. John loved and prayed for Gaius, because he was a man who:
 - Had a good reputation (Verse 3a).
 - Walked in the truth (Verse 3b).
 - Gave John great joy when hearing of his faithfulness (Verse 4).
 - Was hospitable toward the brethren (Verses 5-6a).
 - Was encouraged to continue supporting gospel preachers (Verses 6b-8).

B. Diotrephes - A man who wanted to have the Preeminence (Verses 9-11).

1. A description of Diotrephes' character...

- Self-promoter - he always wanted to be first (Verse 9a).
- Insubordinate - he would not receive the authority of apostles (Verse 9b).
- He “prated” against the Apostles.

“Prate” means to bring idle accusations, make empty charges, accuse falsely with malicious words, to slander.

- Vindictive - He would not receive certain brethren, and cast out other brethren – Verse 10b

2. Diotrefes’ character serves as a warning: “he who does evil has not seen God” – Verse 11b

C. Demetrius – On the other hand was a man who was a good pattern (11-12).

1. John encourages Gaius to imitate what is good, for he who does good is of God – Verse 11
2. John recommends Demetrius as a pattern for Gaius,
3. Why? Because Demetrius hath good report of all men” (Verse 12).
4. From the truth itself Kistemaker said,

“Demetrius lived according to the mandates of God’s Word so that his life showed clear evidence of the truth.”

Thus we have portraits of three men in this letter that give us some insight into the life of the early church.

5. There were some good men (Gaius, Demetrius), but sadly there were some bad as well (Diotrefes).

There just isn’t much different today, is there?

Conclusions:

- A. Christians are not always what they should be.
 1. We may have to serve while receiving opposition from others.
 2. We should not allow this to effect our service.
- B. Christians often imitate other Christians:
 1. John says to imitate what is good for two reasons:
 - Those who do good are of God (and are imitating the Lord).
 - Those who do evil do not know God
 2. Who are you imitating?
 3. What example are you setting?
 4. If John had written a letter in which your name was mentioned, what would he have said about you?
 - Would he have prayed for your prosperity?
 - Would he have condemned your desire for prominence?
 - Or would he have set you up as a pattern for others to follow?

If we will but “walk in the truth” like Gaius, we will have a good “testimony” from all like Demetrius!

Spiritual And Material Prosperity (2-4)

INTRODUCTION

A. Third John is an epistle addressed to Gaius, a man whom John desired to prosper:

“Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.” (Verse 2).

B. In verse 2, John alludes to two kinds of prosperity:

1. There is spiritual prosperity (“even as thy soul prospereth”)
2. And there is material prosperity (“that thou mayest prosper and be in health”)

C. The manner in which John mentions and compares these two kinds of prosperity is interesting, and raises several questions worth considering:

1. What are the signs of spiritual prosperity?
2. What is the propriety of praying for material prosperity?
3. Would we want John to pray such a prayer for us?

The Lord willing we will attempt to answer these questions.

I. The Signs of Spiritual Prosperity

A. The Truth is abiding in you:

1. John rejoiced greatly when he heard from others that the “truth” was in Gaius (Verse 3a).
2. The “truth” being “in” Gaius was an indication that his soul was prosperous.

3. What does it mean to have the “truth” in you?

Two possibilities:

- It could refer to the abiding of Jesus in one’s soul, as He is the truth.

“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” (John 14:6)

- It could refer to the incorporation into our very heart and soul the teachings and principles of the gospel of Jesus

It pretty much means the same thing, for the latter brings about the former:

“He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (John 14:21-23).

“And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.” 1 John 3:24

4. A prosperous soul, then, is one in which:

- One’s heart and mind receive all the things of God
- One that is feeding daily upon the Word of God, and growing spiritual because of it.

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious” (1 Peter 2:2-3).

B. You are walking in the truth:

1. John joyfully wrote of Gaius “walking in the truth” (Verses 3b-4).
2. In a sense, this is a mixing of metaphors:
 - The truth abides in Gaius.
 - Gaius walks in the truth

Perhaps that simply illustrates the limitation of human language to describe spiritual realities

3. The point is: to have prosperity, there must be progress
 - It is not enough to simply sit and say “I have the truth in my soul”
 - One must be acting upon it, living according to it, as illustrated by Jesus in His sermon on the mount.
 - True blessedness comes in being a “doer” and not just a “hearer”

“But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.” (James 1:22-25)

Spiritual prosperity comes when one feeds upon the truth of God found only in His Son Jesus Christ, and lives his or her life in harmony with that truth.

So Gaius prospered in his soul, and so can we!

Gaius, as every Christian, needed spiritual prosperity. But he also needed material prosperity. This brings up the question of:

II. The Correctness of Praying for Material Things:

A. John's prayed for Gaius:

1. John thought it proper to pray for things other than Gaius's spiritual needs (Verse 2)

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

- That you may prosper (grow, flourish, do well) in all good things, or as Gill said, "Or succeed in all temporal affairs."
- "And be in health" or have good health.

Therefore, we see that it is proper to pray that God might bless us in all areas of life.

B. John was following the example set by others:

1. The example of the Psalmist

"That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace: That our garners may be full, affording all manner of store: that our sheep may bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our streets: That our oxen may be strong to labour; that there be no breaking in, nor going out; that there be no complaining in our streets. Happy is that people, that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people, whose God is the LORD. (Psalm 144:12-15).

2. The example of our Lord

(Matthew 6:11 - "Give us this day our daily bread").

C. The Challenge is to keep everything in the proper perspective:

1. If a person desire for material riches is for personal gain, then we should not expect God to answer favorably

“Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (James 4:2-4).

2. However, it is proper to pray for material increase if the gain is for unselfish reasons:
 - We can pray for health, that one might live longer to serve the Lord in this life
 - We can pray for success in business, that we might have the means to help others

Now, a few observations concerning.

III. Material gain or wealth in Relation to Spiritual riches:

A. “Even as thy soul prospereth.”

1. John prays that Gaius would prosper materially just as he does spiritually.
2. In view of Gaius’ spiritual maturity (the truth abides in him, he walks in the truth), this prayer if answered would be a blessing to Gaius and those around him
3. However, for others material prosperity would be a curse instead of a blessing. Why? Because it would be detrimental to them.

B. Material riches are good, But Spiritual wealth is Eternal

1. Paul deals with this subject in I Timothy 4:7-8:

“For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come”

I Timothy 6:6-7 says, “But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

2. We can't take material prosperity with us, and it takes spiritual maturity on our part (wisdom from God) to properly use the material possessions that God blesses us with.

Note: the negatives in these verses

1 Timothy 6:8-10, “And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, **O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.**”

CONCLUSION

- A. We may certainly pray for our material necessities, we must be careful to never lose sight of the fact that our greatest need is the spiritual riches that are eternal. **Are you walking in the truth? Is the truth abiding in you?**
- B. Concentrate your efforts on growing spiritually, and the Lord, in His Divine wisdom and grace, will bless you in all other ways accordingly!

Supporting Ministers of the Gospel (Verses 5-8)

INTRODUCTION

1. In verse 3 the Apostle John referred to his joy of hearing that Gaius is “walkest in the truth.”
2. The area of Gaius’ life in which this was especially true was in showing hospitality to traveling ministers (Verses 5-8)
3. In II John verses 9-11 clearly teach us that we are not to help those who do not proclaim the doctrine of Christ.

“Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. **If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed. For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.**” II John 1:9-11

4. The opposite is seen in III John where we see the “good” that is done when we support those that are spreading of the gospel.
5. In this message, we shall consider:
 - The scriptural authority for supporting ministers of the gospel.
 - The reasons the Apostle John gives for do so.

I. The Scriptural Authority for Supporting Ministers

- A. The Lord Jesus Christ taught that we are to do so:

1. Humanly speaking the Lord Jesus Christ dependent upon others for support as He went about preaching.

Example: Lazarus, Martha, and Mary's home

“And it came to pass afterward, that he went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve were with him, And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, And Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which **ministered unto him of their substance.**” Luke 8:1-3

Example: Zacchaeus

Luke 19:5, “And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house.”

2. When the Lord send out the twelve disciples, He taught that “the workman is worthy of his meat.”

These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, Nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat. Matthew 10:5-10

3. Likewise when he sent out the seventy, He said “the labourer is worthy of his hire.”

B. The Apostle Paul also taught on this responsibility.

1. For personal reasons the Apostle Paul usually sustained himself, but he defended the obligation of supporting ministers.
2. In I Corinthians 9:3-14 he gives several examples:
 - Just as soldiers are not expected to support themselves (Verse 7).
 - The Minister, like a farmer or shepherd is to enjoy the fruits of their labors (Verse 9).
 - The Law illustrated this truth by commanding the oxen not to be muzzled as it treads out the grain (Verses 8-10).

I Corinthians 9:11, If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?

- This verse explains that it is reasonable and logical that those who sow spiritual things reap material things.
- I Corinthians 9:13 uses the example of the provision for those who served in the temple.

“Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar?”

- “Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.” I Corinthians 9:14

The Lord, The Apostle, and the Scripture deal very clearly with this subject; therefore there should be no question about the scripturalness of supporting ministers of the gospel whether are a pastor, missionary, or evangelist.

II. III John 3:5-8 gives us six reasons that ought to motivate us to do so.

A. It is a testimony of our faithfulness:

1. John wrote of Gaius in verse 5:

“Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers.”

2. When we show hospitality to brethren (and ministers), it demonstrates our faithfulness to the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ.

B. It is a testimony of our love for one another.

1. John said of those who had received Gaius' hospitality that they “...borne witness of thy charity before the church (Verse 6).

2. We demonstrate that we are keeping the “new” commandment given to us by the Lord Himself.

“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” John 13:34-35.

C. It honors God.

1. John says that it is “after a godly sort” to send ministers on their journey in this manner.

2. “after a godly sort” means “worthy of God”

3. The way in which we support the man of God can be as if we were honoring the Lord Himself.

4. I believe that a new church honors the Lord by sacrificing to put their pastor “full time.”

When we honor and support the servants of God who faithfully proclaim His Word, it is because we honor and respect the One they serve!

D. It is a testimony to the lost.

1. The ones Gaius was encouraged to support were those who were “taking nothing from the Gentiles” - III John 7
 - This likely means they would not solicit support from the unsaved
 - Depending instead upon their brethren
2. When ministers of the gospel solicit help from those lost souls they are trying to save, it sends a bad message
 - Perhaps the ministers are in it just for the money...
 - If what they taught was worth anything, why don't their own followers support it?
3. When the gospel is offered free of cost, being supported whole-heartedly by those who know it best, it can be a powerful testimony of the value we place on it!

E. It Shows Obedience to God:

1. John, by inspiration of the Spirit of God, tells us “We therefore ought to receive such” - 3 John 8a

We as a people and church should receive visiting preachers, evangelist, and missionaries into our homes, gladly entertain them while they are with us and supply their needs while they are with us.

It is customary when a pastor invites a missionary to speak that the church will:

- ▶ Provide lodging for the night
 - ▶ Provide a meal
 - ▶ Help the missionary or evangelist with their travel and living needs with a love offering.
2. Thus, supporting ministers of the gospel is not only an opportunity, but an obligation!
 - It could be said that it is an exchange of material things for spiritual things
 - The Apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 9:11, stated that this was considered this to be reasonable

F. It makes us co-laborers for the Truth:

1. As John concludes in verse 8: “that we may become fellow workers for the truth”
2. When we support a minister of the Gospel, whether our pastor, and evangelist, or a worthy missionary, we become co-workers in what they do.
 - If we support teachers of error, we share in their evil deeds - 2 John 10-11
 - But when we support teachers of the gospel, we have fellowship in their ministry and one day enjoy the same rewards

“He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.” Mt 10:40-42

CONCLUSION

- A. So we not only have scriptural authority for supporting ministers of the gospel, but many reasons to do so!

- B. The rapid spread of the gospel and growth of the early church was facilitated by such people as Gaius, Aquila and Priscilla, Philemon, and others who could be called upon without hesitation.

May the spirit and liberality of Gaius fill the hearts of Christians and churches that we can have a testimony of being fellow workers for the truth!