

11. 3 John of a Verse by Verse Study of the Letters of John and Jude

3 John has authenticity as an epistle of John from the greeting which is the same as 1 John--*The Elder*. What a disappointment it must have been to John after writing so persuasively in the first two letters, to now confront a mean and divisive person in Diotrephes, the villain of 3 John. Before beginning, it is important to repeat the teaching on love of the brethren, which was so important to the first two letters. In 2 John 5-6:

5 And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. 6 And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.

John repeated the commands on love with 1 John 5:2-3:

2 This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. 3 This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome.

In spite of the necessity of confronting Diotrephes, John addresses the letter to the fine Christian friend, Gaius, and he includes in the letter praise of Demetrius.

Introduction

3 John 1-4

1 *The elder,*

To my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth.

2 *Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well. 3 It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth. 4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.*

John pays closest attention to the words praising Gaius coming from the brothers. John pointed out how that Gaius was faithful to the truth and walked in the truth. Walking here and elsewhere implies a way of life. This use is repeated in the letters of John who starts 1 John with just such an expression in 1 John 1:5-7:

5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we claim to have fellowship with him yet **walk** in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. 7 But if we **walk** in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. [Emphasis added]

In 1 John 2:6, John related this use of walk to living in Jesus—a requirement for those living the Christian life: “Whoever claims to live in him must **walk** as Jesus did.” In 2 John 6, John adds that we walk in obedience and that we walk in love: “6 And this is love: that we **walk** in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you **walk** in love.” In John’s final writing, the Revelation, Jesus states that the worthy walk with him, “4 Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will **walk** with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy.” Rev 3:4.

Hospitality Especially Those That Work for the Truth

3 John 5-8

5 Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you. 6 They have told the church about your love. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. 7 It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. 8 We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth.

John focuses on the faithfulness of Gaius in helping the brothers. Gaius was to conduct himself and, indeed had conducted himself in a manner worthy of God. The brothers had gone out for the sake of the Name and by authority of Jesus. The use of the word *Name* as a proper noun suggests a wide use of the term in this manner in the early church. Luke recorded Peter using the word *name* in Acts 4:12 of the authority of Christ as the savior: "12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other **name** under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." Paul confirmed this use in everything that we do in Col 3:17, "17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the **name** of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." In 1 Peter 4:16, Peter identified those who follow Christ as Christians, "16 However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that **name**."

John called for hospitality toward these brothers as those who work together for the truth. However there is a general command for Christians to show hospitality to all men especially those who are faithful. Paul had written in Gal 6:9-10:

9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. 10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Paul also noted that Gaius was a hospitable brother in Rom 16:23, "23 Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings."

In this time of worldwide depression, we should note the general commands to all Christians that they show hospitality. Elders are to show hospitality. Titus 1:8 teaches, "8 Rather he must be hospitable." All Christians are so commanded in Heb 13:1-3:

13 Keep on loving each other as brothers. 2 Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. 3 Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

This universal teaching is reiterated in Rom 12:13, "13 Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality." Hospitality must be given from the heart and without grumbling, according to Peter in 1 Peter 4:8-9: "8 Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. 9 Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling."

Loving to Be First

3 John 9-10

9 I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. 10 So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church.

Diotrephes was a malicious gossip who wanted to be first. Some versions use the word *preeminence*. He was so aggressively evil that he even put those with whom he disagreed out of the church. Paul also condemned gossip in 2 Cor 12:20, "I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, **gossip**, arrogance and disorder."

Malicious gossipers fit in Paul's description of those who do the works of the flesh. In Gal 5:19-21, eight of the works of the flesh are divisive sins:

19 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; **hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy**; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Diotrephes and all those of a like-mind will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Being Well Spoken Of

3 John 11-12

11 Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God. 12 Demetrius is well spoken of by everyone – and even by the truth itself. We also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true.

In verse 11, John draws a strict dichotomy between doing good and evil—those who do good are from God, and those who do evil have not seen God. John holds Demetrius up as one who is well spoken of by the truth itself.

Conclusion

3 John 13-14

13 I have much to write you, but I do not want to do so with pen and ink. 14 I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face.

Peace to you. The friends here send their greetings. Greet the friends there by name.

John's salutation is brief, since he hoped to see them shortly.