

3 John

Authorship: The apostle John, again christening himself as “the elder,” is the author of this, the last of his three letters.

Date: John probably composed this during the same time frame as the other two, sometime around AD 90.

Unique Features: This is the shortest book in the Bible, but its message is as important as that of the longest books.

Background & Historical Situation: Third John deals with a problem in church leadership. The elder obviously had wide influence; he sent messengers to churches to help them. The Christians were still a small minority. Church organization was not clearly fixed. No church papers gave news of other Christians and so bound the churches together. Instead, traveling leaders and their helpers did much to hold the churches together in a unity of interest and spirit. Letters from leaders also helped in this, as Paul’s writings prove. Like him, the elder sent messengers and wrote letters to churches. But in one church, probably in Asia Minor, his leadership was opposed. Diotrephes, evidently a local leader in that church, determined to keep it independent. He rejected the elder’s authority. He refused to receive traveling Christians who represented the elder, and forbade any other Christian to entertain them. If anyone did receive them, Diotrephes put him out of the church. AS the elder says, he “likes to put himself first” (3 John 9).

Purpose: John wrote this letter to commend Gaius, to condemn Diotrephes, and to introduce Demetrius, the bearer of the letter.

Recipient: The recipient of this final epistle of John is called only “Gaius the beloved” (3 John 1). He is identified no further, so he must have been well-known to the members of the Asian churches where John served during the last years of his life.

Key Passage: “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth” (3 John 4).

Outline:

I. The Elder Addresses Gaius in Love (1)

II. Love Must Prevail in the Circle of the Truth (2-12)

- A. Commendation of Gaius: He Walks in the Truth and Love (2-8)
- B. Commendation of Diotrephes: He Rejects Authority and Lacks Love (9-10)
- C. Recommendation of Demetrius: He Does Good (11-12)

III. Peace Should Prevail among Friends (13-14)

Sources:

Elwell, Walter A. and Robert W. Yarbrough. *Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1998).
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