

3 John

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November 3, 2021



3 John Introduction

- Like all of John’s writings, 3 John was written toward the end of the first century, sometime possibly around 90-95 AD. And it appears that the letter was correctly placed between 2 John and The Revelation. It seems likely that 3 John is a follow-up specifically to 2 John. The big difference between the letters is that 3 John is written privately and personally to a certain man named Gaius who may have been a member of the Chosen Lady’s congregation from 2 John. Vs. 9 even refers to John having “wrote something to the church.” 2 John was written in code to an entire congregation, referring to the church as the “the Chosen Lady” rather than “to the church which is in Ephesus” or some other normal greeting. This was due to the letter likely being written during a time of persecution, so the sender and the recipient are hidden from the minds of those who may wish to do them harm. Here in 3 John there is no code, no pretense, for it is a personal letter. And while it would still have been possible for the letter to fall into the wrong hands, John is not specific about *which* Gaius, for the name was as common as Bob or Mike or Steve in our own time. Indeed, there are three other people in the New Testament with the same name. There was the Gaius of Macedonia who was with Paul at the riot in Ephesus of Acts 19:29. There was the Gaius of Derbe who traveled with Paul to take the offering to Jerusalem in Acts 20:4. And there was the Gaius of Corinth who had been, as Paul says in Romans 16:23, a most hospitable host to him and the whole church in Corinth, and was one of the very few people actually baptized by Paul himself (1 Cor. 1:14). According to tradition, the Gaius of 3 John was later made Bishop of Pergamum by John himself.
- If 3 John is a follow-up to 2 John then it gives us a bit more insight into the problems the church was struggling with. As we mentioned when looking at 1 and 2 John, the church was threatened by persecution from the Roman authorities on the outside and false teachings on the inside. Again, John seems confident in the church’s ability to stand firm against outside threats, but he is terribly concerned about what he has seen concerning the destruction of the churches from the inside. False teachings can be like a cancer or a deadly virus, killing a church from the inside out.

- 3 John is written in the classic style of a first century letter. The sender identifies himself, offers a greeting to the recipient, and then offers a prayer for the recipient's good health, and then the body of the letter, concluding with a final greeting. There are countless letters that somehow are still preserved these 2000 years which follow the exact same pattern.
- But why preserve these two small letters? The question has been asked for centuries. Perhaps the answer is found in the commonality between all churches. In 2 John the primary concern is in NOT showing hospitality to false teachers, so as not allow heresy to get a toehold in the church. In 3 John we DO want to show hospitality to good teachers who have left hearth and home to do the Lord's work. The two letters therefore balance each other and serve as a guide to all other churches on the vital question of Christian hospitality. All who walk in the Light and embrace the Truth are to be well cared for.
- During my time here you may have heard me refer to "one of our kids", but not meaning the two we birthed and raised. "Our kids" can also refer to the young people who have grown up in our churches, who we have poured ourselves into, and who are now adults. One of our kids is the campus minister at the University of Kentucky. One of our kids is a pastor in Alabama. One of our kids is a missionary in Romania. Some of "our kids" watch online every Wednesday and Sunday. John here is writing to one of "his kids." Vs. 4 says, "I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth." I know exactly what he means and how he feels and there is no greater joy.