

Introduction to NT Books

Dr. Thomas M. Strouse

XXIII. Third Epistle of John

A. The Authorship of Third John

1. External Evidence—Patristics testified to Johannine authorship, including Irenaeus, Dionysius, Cyprian, and the Council of Carthage accepted it in the canon in 397.
2. Internal Evidence—the use of the title Elder and distinctive terms such as love, truth, and walk, connect it with Second John and other Johannine writings.

B. The Audience and Time of Third John

1. John addressed the letter to Gaius who may have been ill in health (ὕγιαίνειν) and who was known by John and others (vv. 1 3, 5-6).
2. At three other men were named Gaius, either from Macedonia, Derbe, or Corinth.
3. Probably written at the same time with John's other Epistles.

C. The Purpose of Third John

1. He informed Gaius of his love and prayers (vv. 1-2) and stand for the truth (vv. 3-4).
2. He appreciated that Gaius was one of his converts who walked in truth. This gave him the greatest joy (v. 4).
3. He also revealed his concern about Diotrephes' arrogant ascendancy (v. 9).
4. He encouraged the disciples to follow Demetrius (v. 12).

D. The Flow of Third John

1. John hoped that Gaius' physical health was as prosperous¹ as his spiritual health (v. 2).
2. Gaius had helped missionaries with hospitality and financial support (charity)² (vv. 5-8).
3. The apostle had written (Ἐγραψά) to the church, presumably Gaius' church. This letter may have been a previous letter or the current Epistle (v. 9).

¹He used the verb εὐοδόω twice for "prosper" (cf. Rom. 1:10 and I Cor. 16:2).

²This noun ἀγάπη probably refers to remuneration.

4. It may be that in his illness Diotrophes usurped Gaius' authority (v. 9). Diotrophes had the condition of "loving to be first one" (ὁ φιλοπρωτεύων). He wanted the preeminence (πρωτεύων) over the assembly, instead of the Lord (Col. 1:18).

5. He had sinned against John and rejected the missionaries associated with the Elder (v. 10).

a. He had committed deeds against the apostle.

b. He spoke "malicious words" (λόγοις πονηροῖς) against John.

6. Furthermore, he forbid that the missionaries be received, and ex-communicated any one supporting the missionaries (v. 10).

7. John gave the advice to follow those who are good and not those who are evil. Those who do evil hath not seen (οὐχ ἑώρακε)³ God, he averred (v. 11).

8. On the other hand, Demetrius, who probably was bringing the current letter, was a man of good report (v. 12).

9. To summarize, as Gaius was ill, Diotrophes took over the leadership of the church, and rejected John's letter, spoke evil of John, rejected John's missionaries, and expelled followers of John from the assembly. John encouraged the church to receive the believer Demetrius who probably was carrying the Third Epistle of John.

10. John wanted to write more, but he was going to wait until he arrived at the church to speak to them "mouth to mouth" (στόμα πρὸς στόμα).

³He negated the perfect verb, indicating Diotrophes' permanent state of not seeing God (i.e., being saved).