

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 9/16/09 Wednesday evening

New Testament Survey—3 John

It was quite eye opening to us. Right after Sherry and I were married, we headed to seminary. Sherry found a job as the secretary for the faculty at a Christian college. After working as a secretary in the secular world for the previous three years, she assumed (as did I) that this would be an ideal situation. Working for and with Christians! Wow, heaven on earth, this would be a dream job. We quickly learned that people are people everywhere. Professors have projects they want done, and they want it done *now*. But when you are the secretary for 50 professors, well, you can begin to imagine the dynamic. I can still remember Sherry coming home from work at night, shaking her head, and describing her amazement at how "Christian" professors treated her and each other. We quickly learned that pride and ego aren't just commodities present in the secular world. Sadly, it's possible even for Christians, for Christian leaders in fact, to become preoccupied with their agenda, and promote it passionately, even to the harm of their brothers and sisters, and worse, to the harm of the testimony of the gospel.

It's actually nothing new. John faced the same dynamic, and it's one of the reasons he wrote a letter to address it, the epistle of 3 John.

To do: 3 John is a letter. Peruse the letter and write down the three or four main things that John wanted to communicate to his friend in this letter. In other words, why did he write this letter? Don't get lost looking at the individual words without seeing the big picture.

- **Who wrote the book?**

--The Elder (1), a reference to the apostle John

Discuss: What similarities do you see between 3 John and 2 John?

*The writer calls himself "The Elder" in both

*Both are written to recipients whom John says he "loves in the truth" (verse 1 of both)

*In both John shares what brings him great joy. What? To hear that his children "walk in the truth" (2 John 4, 3 John 4)

*Both are short letters, very personal in nature.

*Both contain both instruction and warning.

*Both end similarly, "I have much to write to you, but..."

- **When was the book written?**

--A.D. 85-95 (about the same time as 2 John)

Q: Who received the letter? V 1 Gaius

Q: What do we know about Gaius? V 1 A dear friend of John; loved in the truth

A common Roman name. He was a Christian in one of the churches to which John ministered in Asia Minor.

- **Why was the book written?**

--3 John addresses the practical concern of how local church members must work together for the sake of Missions.

1. John commends the team-player, Gaius (1-8).
2. John warns the dictatorial leader, Diotrephes (9-12).

More in a moment about the specific problem...

- **What is the outline of the book?**

- I. Greetings (1-2)
- II. John commends Gaius (3-8).
- III. John rebukes Diotrephes (9-10).
- IV. John recommends Demetrius (11-12).
- V. Conclusion (13-14)

- **What is the message of the book in one sentence?**

--3 John teaches us how churches are supposed to treat missionaries.

- **What contribution does the book make to biblical theology (that is, how does this book relate to the rest of the Bible)?**

1. *3 John shows us how to measure true success.*

Discuss: According to v 4, what should be the most important thing to us in ministry? To hear that "our children are walking in the truth"

Q: Who does John mean by "children" here? Not biological children, but converts

Q: What does "walking" signify?

a. Walking speaks of a journey. A journey has a starting point, a course to follow, and a destination to be reached.

b. Walking speaks of progression. The Bible does not speak of the Christian life as a run but as a walk. Why? Walking is methodical, deliberate, plodding along, constant moving ahead, not necessarily at lightning speed, but making progress.

c. Walking speaks of consistency. The tense of the Greek verb is present, and as such depicts the pattern of one's living. When we walk in the truth, we are following the pattern of our Master.

Key: To walk in the truth means more than giving assent to it. It demands more than just hearing the Bible and saying, "Yea, I agree with that." It requires what? There must be no inconsistency between our profession and our practice.

d. Walking in truth is not an option. It's top priority. 2 John 4 says it's a command from our Father.

Application: When it comes to "walking in truth" most of us don't lack knowledge (we know plenty of truth). We lack in the faithful application of biblical knowledge to our lives. What can we do as a church to help address this need?

2. *3 John teaches us about Missions.*

a. Missions involves teamwork.

Discuss: How do you see this developed in 3 John?

b. Missions is the task of the local church.

"Going" in missions is the task of the "brethren" (5), not just professional Christian workers.

Key: Missions is the responsibility of local churches. Though missionary agencies, Bible schools, and other para-church groups can help as extensions of the church, they should not assume our responsibility as a local church in appointing, sending, and supporting missionaries.

c. Giving in Missions is the privilege and responsibility of all Christians.

It's not just the "wealthy" and "financially secure" Christians. The "we" in verse 8 speaks to all of us.

Discuss: Giving applies to more than money. What else can we give to help missionaries, according to verse 8? We can open up our homes, entertain traveling ministers of the gospel, perhaps give tangible items like books, computers, clothing, etc.

3. *3 John teaches us about "dragons" in the church.*

There were two very different kinds of leaders in Gaius' church.

a. There are people like Diotrephes.

Q: What was true of Diotrephes? See v 9? He loved to be first. What does that mean? He had to be in control, in the limelight, to call the shots. It was his way or the highway.

Q: What else did Diotrephes do? V 9 "Had nothing to do with us"

Q: What else, acc. to v 10? Refused to welcome the "brothers" (=the missionaries speakers John sent). Here was a man who refused to submit to the authority of the church. In addition, he tried to get rid of those who disagreed with him.

b. There are people like Demetrius.

Q: What was true of him? V 12 Well-spoken of by others in ministry (=a team-player), and by the truth itself. Commended by John himself.

A little over a decade ago, Marshall Shelley wrote a book, *Well-Intentioned Dragons* with the subtitle, "Ministering to Problem People in the Church." Quote from the beginning of the book (pp. 11-12)...

4. 3 John gives us insight on praying for health needs.

Q: For what does John pray in v 2? Good health for Gaius

Q: Is it okay to pray for good health? Sure.

Q: But what is the qualifier at the end of verse 2? John knew Gaius' soul was prospering. He was spiritual healthy. John's desire was that Gaius' health would prosper to the same degree his spiritual health prospered.

Discuss: Would you like for someone to pray that your physical health would match your spiritual health?

Discuss: What's the biblical way to pray for those who struggle with health needs?