

Third John

Authorship

Ancient tradition attributes 3 John to John, the son of Zebedee, one of Christ's twelve apostles. The author refers to himself simply as "the Elder." A quotation by Papias has been misconstrued to posit a different John known as "the Elder." There is no good reason to deny Johannine authorship of this epistle.¹

Date

It is most likely that the Johannine Epistles were written after the Gospel and before Revelation.² The Gospel of John may have been written as early as A.D. 48-52. Revelation was probably written in A.D. 68-69. A date of A.D. 64-65 fits the internal and external evidence.³

Original Readers

Ephesus seems to have been the locus of John's ministry. Hodges contends that John had been responsible for the early Jewish-Christian congregations in that area and that he had returned to Jerusalem (or somewhere else) from which the three epistles were written.

Occasion

Robinson contends that ". . . the epistles were . . . written to reassure Jewish Christian congregations in Asia Minor, who were the product of the Johannine mission and in danger of being shaken from their faith and morals by false teachers of a gnosticizing tendency. In other words, the situation is remarkably parallel to that which we postulated for Jude and 2 Peter."⁴

¹ Hodges remarks: "It would be hard to find four books anywhere in Greek literature that exhibit a style more likely to stem from one mind than does the style of the Gospel and the epistles. Even the English reader can detect this, but in Greek the impression of a single writer is overwhelming. This being the case, the strong support given by ancient tradition to authorship by John the son of Zebedee for both the Gospel and the epistles should be seen, not as two sets of evidence but as a single voice" in Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistles of John* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 21.

² This is the conclusion of Hodges, *ibid.*, 23, and John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1976), 289.

³ *Ibid.*, 307 and Hodges, *Epistles of John*, 26.

⁴ Robinson, *Redating*, 285. Hodges basically concurs with this (*Epistles of John*, 27); he writes: "I believe that First, Second, and Third John were all written from Jerusalem and sent out for delivery by someone headed for the province of Asia, probably Demetrius (3 John 12). First John was a circular letter . . . and was intended to be passed around the circuit of churches for which John felt special responsibility, perhaps the seven churches of Asia . . .

Second John is a cover letter intended for one of these churches, probably Ephesus, with which John was well acquainted . . . Third John is a personal letter to Demetrius' hoped-for host, Gaius, who stands at the end of his journey."

Theme Statement

The truth is upheld when its servants are received and aided.

Outline

- I. Salutation: John commends Gaius for walking in the truth.1-4
 - A. John loves Gaius in the truth.....1
 - B. John prays that Gaius might prosper in all ways.2
 - C. John reports his delight at hearing of Gaius' walk in the truth.3-4
- II. Body: John commends the reception of brethren who bear the truth.5-12
 - A. Gaius is commended for his support of laborers in the truth.....5-8
 - 1. Gaius has a reputation for encouraging the brethren and strangers.5-6a
 - 2. Gaius is encouraged to continue to receive fellow workers in the truth.6b-8
 - B. Diotrephes is condemned for his exclusivist spirit.9-11
 - 1. He loves to have preeminence in the church.9
 - 2. He prates against the apostles with malicious words.....10a
 - 3. He refuses to allow brethren to be received by the church.10b
 - 4. He is not to be imitated by Gaius.....11
 - C. Demetrius is commended as one who bears the truth.....12
- III. Farewell: John expresses his intention and sends greetings.13-14
 - A. He expresses his intention to visit them.13-14a
 - B. We wishes them peace and sends friends' greetings.....14b

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Theme Development

As in 2 John, the elder is intent on supporting the truth. In this case that support entails commending those who encourage workers in the truth and condemning one who does not.

I. Salutation: John commends Gaius for walking in the truth (1-4).

John writes to Gaius as a dear friend, who has attained such status due to their mutual participation in the truth. It may be assumed that this truth is that of the incarnation, as stated in 2 John. Gaius was prospering in soul because of his walk in the truth and John wishes for him similar blessing in situation and health. The evidence of Gaius' walk in the truth was his positive treatment of visiting brethren.

II. Body: John commends the reception of brethren who bear the truth (5-12).

Gaius stands in contrast to another in this particular assembly, one Diotrephes, with respect to treatment of those outside the church who support the truth. Whereas those who deny

the truth are to be excluded from fellowship (cf. 2 John 10), those who support the truth are to be welcomed.

A. Gaius is commended for his support of laborers in the truth (5-8).

Gaius is to be commended because he recognized and readily welcomed those who bore the testimony of Christ in a worthy way, even though unknown to him otherwise. He was truly cognizant of the unity of the body of Christ and willing to receive those whom the Head may send their way in the work of the truth. John perhaps feels that Gaius needs to be encouraged to continue in this practice because he was being resisted in this ministry by another of the brethren, Diotrephes.

B. Diotrephes is condemned for his exclusivist spirit (9-11).

The reason for Diotrephes' unwillingness to receive visiting workers was because it threatened his perceived position of leadership (9). John condemns this attitude and promises to deal with it if he comes (10). This church potentate's characteristics are exposed so that the faithful brethren will know what not to follow as an example of Christ-like leadership (11). When Demetrius arrives, perhaps bearing this and the other two letters, he is to be welcomed as a bearer of the truth (12).

III. Farewell: John expresses his intention and sends greetings (13-14).

John has many other things to tell them but wishes to be able to do it in person. In the meantime he is content to wish them the peace of God and greeting from their friends.

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