



The Epistles of John

Introduction to the Third Epistle of John

I. THE STATISTICS

- A. One chapter, fourteen verses, 294 words
- B. Sixty-fourth book in the Bible, twenty-fifth book in the New Testament
- C. Other Statistics
 - 1. Next to shortest book in the Bible by number of verses with fourteen
 - 2. Shortest book in the Bible by word count with 294 words
 - 3. Consider the connections with the number seven:
 - a. 3 John is the twenty-eighth chapter in the New Testament written by John: that is four times seven.
 - b. 3 John is the seventh chapter written by John as an epistle.
 - c. 3 John has fourteen verses: that is two times seven.
 - d. The average number of words per verse is twenty-one (three x seven; and this divides evenly).
 - e. The number of different words used (not counting the same word more than once) is 154 (twenty-two x seven).
 - f. 3 John 1:4, 7, 8 each have fourteen words (two x seven).
 - g. 3 John 1:11, 14 each have twenty-eight words (four x seven).
 - h. The key word *truth* is used six times. However, the word *true* is used once, making a total of seven times for the concept.

II. THE HUMAN AUTHOR

- A. Still Unnamed
 - 1. Never named in the gospel of John
 - a. The disciple who leaned on Jesus' breast (John 21:20-24)
 - b. The disciple whom Jesus loved; often called the beloved disciple
 - 2. Never named in the epistles of John
 - a. Paul's epistles all begin with his name, except Hebrews.
 - b. James' epistle begins with his name.
 - c. Peter's epistles begin with his name.
 - d. Jude's epistle begins with his name.
- B. His Life
 - 1. His name corresponds to the name *Jonah* and means *a dove*.
 - 2. Son of Zebedee and Salome (Luke 5:10; Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40)
 - 3. His brother was James (Mark 1:19) who died as a martyr (Acts 12:1-2).
 - 4. He was a fisherman (Mark 1:19).



5. Jesus named James and John “Boanerges, which is, The sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17).
6. He had been a disciple of John the Baptist (Acts 1:22-23).
7. He was one of the inner circle of three (with James and Peter).
8. He was considered a pillar of the early church (Galatians 2:9).

III. THE TIME OF AUTHORSHIP

A. Demonstrated by the Age of the Apostle

1. The age of the apostle during the ministry of our Lord
 - a. Though we are not given the specifics of the age of John, there are a few things that lead you to believe he was a young man.
 - b. When running to the tomb to see the absence of the body of Christ, John outran Simon Peter (John 20:4).
2. The age of the apostle in the epistles of John
 - a. 2 John 1:1—*the elder*
 - b. 3 John 1:1—*the elder*

B. Demonstrated by the Writing Instruments

1. Writing with ink and pen
2. Similar phrasing to 2 John 1:12

IV. PURPOSE AND THEME

A. Purpose

1. John was sending some brethren to minister and had sent a letter to Diotrephes in the church where they were going.
2. Diotrephes had rejected the letter and the brethren (3 John 1:9-10).
3. Gaius had a reputation for receiving the brethren (3 John 1:5-6).
4. This letter is sent to encourage him to do so again.

B. Theme

1. This epistle deals with a specific problem: the reception and aid of the brethren who will pass through as they go about their ministry.
2. In short, this epistle is about ***the importance of hospitality***.
3. It is a blessed act of love when performed and wickedness when some refuse to do it.

V. THE DIVISION

- A. The Testimony of Gaius (3 John 1:1-8)
- B. The Treachery of Diotrephes (3 John 1:9-11)
- C. The Task of Demetrius (3 John 1:12-14)



The Third Epistle of John

The Testimony of Gaius

3 John 1:1-8

I. JOHN'S GREETING (3 John 1:1-2)

A. The Elder (3 John 1:1)

1. Various uses of the word *elder*
 - a. It can be a reference to age (1 Timothy 5:1-2).
 - b. It can be a reference to wisdom (Job 32:4-7).
 - c. It can be a reference to an office of leadership (Numbers 11:16; Matthew 21:23; Titus 1:5).
 - d. In the case of the apostle John, all three apply.
2. The purpose for using this title
 - a. Both Peter (1 Peter 5:1) and John (2 John 1:1; 3 John 1:1) referred to themselves as an elder.
 - b. Paul identified himself as "Paul the aged" (Philemon 1:9).
 - c. The idea is that these men were old when they wrote these epistles.
 - d. But John could also be claiming his office as an elder.
 - (1) This title was used of pastors, but also of other high offices.
 - (2) In using this more general title, John expressed his humility.
 - e. Consider the absence of the title "apostle."
 - (1) Disciple(s)
 - a) Used 241 times in the Gospels
 - b) Used thirty-one times in the book of Acts
 - c) Used zero times past the book of Acts
 - (2) Apostle(s)
 - a) Used eight times in the Gospels
 - b) Used thirty times in the book of Acts
 - c) Used thirty-four times in Paul's epistles
 - d) Used three times in Peter's epistles (1 Peter 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1; 2 Peter 3:2)
 - e) Used one time in Jude (Jude 1:17)
 - f) Used zero times in John's epistles
 - g) Used three times in Revelation (Revelation 2:2; Revelation 18:20; Revelation 21:14)
 - (3) Elder
 - a) Though John was a disciple, he did not use that title.
 - b) Though John was an apostle, he did not use that title.
 - c) John used the title *elder* or *servant* as found in Revelation 1:1. Apparently, the other titles were out of date and John simply used elder or servant in their place.

**B. The Wellbeloved Gaius (3 John 1:1)**

1. His identity
 - a. Gaius was a common Roman name of the time.
 - b. There seems to be four men named Gaius in the New Testament (see Acts 19:29; Acts 20:4; Romans 16:23; 1 Corinthians 1:14; 3 John 1:1).
 - c. The reference to Gaius in 3 John is several decades later than all the other references to that name. Therefore, it is not as likely that this Gaius is identical to any of the earlier men of that name.
 - d. The Gaius of 3 John was a solid believer known by John and others.
 - e. John identified Gaius as:
 - (1) One to be loved (3 John 1:1)
 - (2) One to be blessed (3 John 1:2)
 - (3) One to be rejoiced in (3 John 1:3-4)
 - (4) One to be trusted (3 John 1:5-6)
 - (5) One to be sought out for help (3 John 1:6-8)
 - f. Were it not for this reference, Gaius would have been forgotten.
2. The wellbeloved
 - a. In 3 John, John referred to Gaius as “beloved” three times (3 John 1:2, 5, 11) and as “wellbeloved” once.
 - b. It is partly in the nature of the apostle John to use this terminology as we see in 1 John where he referred to the “beloved” five times.
 - c. Gaius meant this much to John. John had a special love for Gaius.
3. Loved in the truth
 - a. Some so-called loves are merely founded upon the lust of the flesh.
 - b. John clarified his love for Gaius was founded and anchored in the truth.
 - c. This is crucial for believers because the fleshly feelings come and go. However, if our love is anchored in the truth, it will not change.

C. The Wish (3 John 1:2)

1. Above all other wishes
2. A wish for Gaius’ prosperity and health
 - a. Charles Mallary commented: “Though probably delicate and feeble as to bodily health, he possessed a healthful, prosperous soul. The wish expressed in his behalf by the Apostle John is quite remarkable... The apostle does not seize upon his external, temporal prosperity as the standard by which he measures out his desires for the health and enriching of his soul; but, on the contrary, he desires him to be blessed in bodily health, and other earthly advantages, as God had favored him in spiritual bounties...”—from *The Nature of Soul Prosperity* (p. 2).
 - b. The nature of the wish
 - (1) This was not a wish for wealth for Gaius.
 - (2) Gaius’ soul prospered. He was right with God and God has richly blessed him spiritually.
 - (3) Apparently Gaius had some external frailties.
 - (4) John wished Gaius’ external condition matched the internal.



- (5) What if our exterior condition (prosperity, health, appearance) matched our inner spiritual life? What if others could judge your inner life by your outward condition? How would you look right now? What would your health be like?
- c. What is prosperity?
 - (1) It is connected with God's blessings (Genesis 24:40).
 - (2) It is connected to obedience (Deuteronomy 29:9; Joshua 1:8).
- 3. Only a wish
 - a. John wished (a personal desire) prosperity and health for Gaius.
 - b. Consider the following classifications of wishes found in the Bible:
 - (1) Evil wishes
 - a) Job declared he had not allowed his mouth to sin by wishing a curse to the soul of an enemy (Job 31:30).
 - b) The psalmist spoke of those who "wish me evil" (Psalm 40:14).
 - (2) Selfish wishes
 - a) In Psalm 73:7, the psalmist speaks of those who "have more than heart could wish."
 - b) When frustrated (Jonah 4:8), Jonah "wished in himself to die."
 - c) When facing a destructive storm at sea (Acts 27:29), the sailors threw out four anchors and "wished for the day."
 - (3) Spiritual wishes
 - a) In Romans 9:3, Paul testified, "For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh."
 - b) In 2 Corinthians 13:9, Paul and his coworkers wished for the perfection of the Corinthians.
 - c. Wishes, therefore, are neutral in and of themselves. Their content and motives will classify them as sinful, selfish, or spiritual.
 - d. This also proves that wishes are not necessarily associated with the will of God. Just because something is wished does not make it so.

II. JOHN'S REJOICING (3 John 1:3-4)

A. The Testimony of the Brethren (3 John 1:3)

- 1. The brethren testified of the truth in Gaius.
- 2. The brethren testified that Gaius walked in truth.

B. John's Greatest Joy (3 John 1:4)

- 1. Gaius was one to whom John had ministered – "my children."
- 2. What joy to know that our children walk in truth!
 - a. Physical children—"The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice: and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him" (Proverbs 23:24).
 - b. Spiritual children
 - (1) Begotten through the gospel (1 Corinthians 4:15)
 - (2) Of whom I travail in birth again (Galatians 4:19)