

Do what is right

September 17, 2009

I find an interesting contrast between these two little letters, 2 and 3 John, by apostle John, as he presented us the balance of truth.

2 John was written to a godly woman about her family, while 3 John was written to a godly man about his church. John warned “the elect lady” about false teachers from the outside in 2 John, but he warned Gaius about dictatorial leaders inside the fellowship in 3 John. The false teachers in 2 John would appeal to love so that they might deny truth, while Diotrephes would appeal to truth as, in a most unloving way, he would attack the brethren.

A. TIMELINE AND TARGET AUDIENCE

The Book of 3 John was written in late 90s A.D. Some biblical scholars believe that 3 John was written after John wrote Revelation. This letter is the shortest NT epistle in the original Greek and it gives us a glimpse into an early assembly, its people and its problem. We all will notice that we still have similar people and problems as they did in the first century.

This letter was addressed to Gaius, one of the leaders of the assembly. But John also discussed two other men in this letter – Diotrephes and Demetrius. Wherever there are people, there are problems because of our sinful nature – and the potential for solving problems through the Word of God. Each of us must honestly face the question, “Am I a part of the problem or a part of the solution?”

B. THEME

In 2 John, there was one word repeated five times in 13 verses – TRUTH. But in 3 John, the apostle John used it six times in 14 verses. I hope that you all remember the illustration of river water and river bank I used in last teaching regarding the balancing of truth and love. Love must be contained within the truth and the truth must embrace love.

C. THE BELOVED GAIUS

3 John:1-8 The Elder, To the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth: 2 Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers. 3 For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. 4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. 5 Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, 6 who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well, 7 because they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles. 8 We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth.

We don't know if this specific Gaius is connected with the other men by this name mentioned in the NT epistles. The identification is difficult because Gaius was a very common name in the Roman Empire.

There is no question that the apostle John dearly loved this man. By reading v4, we get the feeling that Gaius must have been one of John's converts. If you had a privilege of leading someone to Christ, you feel extra close to those whom we get to be a part of their spiritual birth.

I must take some time to talk about v2. This kind of a greeting was very common in that day, so we must not build too much on it. It would be like, "I hope that this letter find you well" in our greetings.

However, in the circle of the Word of Faith movement which is led by Kenneth Copeland, they use this verse as a base for their Prosperity Gospel doctrine which is a heresy. They chose to interpret this common greeting to a Christian guarantee. Please allow me to explain to you why their doctrine is wrong.

The Prosperity Gospel declares that you as Christians must have abundance of wealth and great health since you are children of God. If you don't have them, then you are lacking faith in God. Copeland says that this v2 is an universal verse that applies to every Christian. But did you notice that apostle John was singling out Gaius in his prayer for him?

Anyone who takes the basic course of the Bible interpretation which is known as 'hermeneutics', knows that it emphasizes contexts. Within contexts, there are historical context, grammatical context and literary context. Within literary context, this verse applies within a local context for an individual named Gaius, not an universal context for everyone in general, e.g. John 3:16.

Apostle John made an analogy between the condition of our health and the condition of our soul. Obviously Gaius was spiritually healthy according to apostle John here. If John prayed for the Christians in general and it was answered immediately in the same manner, I wonder how many physically sick Christians would there be according to their spiritual health.

Why did it make Gaius have such a good testimony? God's truth. The truth was "in him" and enabled him to walk in obedience to God's will. True living only comes from the living truth through the Word of truth. The Spirit of God uses the Word of God to reveal the Son of God, and then to enable us to obey the will of God and "walk in truth."

We have learned from John's second letter the importance of Christian hospitality in that day. John warned "the elect lady" against entertaining false teachers, but in this letter he commended Gaius for showing hospitality to the true ministers of the Word. Gaius was an encouragement, not only to the brethren in general, but especially to "strangers" who came to fellowship with the church and to minister.

Why would Gaius do that? What was his motivation? I find two reasons:

1) It honors the Lord.

We are never more "godlike" than when we are sacrificing to serve others.

2) The support for God's servants is a witness to the lost.

While others tried to con their ways into people's lives and wealth, the servants of God who were supported by the people like Gaius became great witnesses to the lost sinners because they were not out there to gouge money out of them.

The reward for these support people is the same as those who are out on the front lines. 1 Samuel 30:21-25 shows this principle, where the spoils are distributed equally among those who fought and those who supported. King David understood that the supply lines were just as vital as the soldiers, and God would reward both soldiers and supporters properly and generously.

In other words, as you tithe to this church, a portion, 15% of your tithe goes to the missions fund that supports our missionaries and organizations around the world, mainly Bulgaria, Kenya, Israel and Costa Rica. The missionaries and the workers of those organizations will receive their rewards from the Lord when they get to heaven. You, too, will receive the same reward as if you were there since you are supporting them.

Philippians 4:17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account.

D. DIOTREPHES THE DICTATOR

3 John:9-11 I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the pre-eminence among them, does not receive us. 10 Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church. 11 Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God.

It seems like many churches have members who insist on “self-appointed boss” and having their own way. I must confess that sometimes it is the pastor who assumes dictatorial powers and forgets that the word ‘minister’ means “a servant.” But sometimes it is a board member, or an elder or a deacon, perhaps a longtime member of the church who thinks he or she has “seniority rights” and thinks that they own the church.

They want to lord over people with their selfish motives. They have outward godly appearance, but they have the same heart like the Pharisees of Jesus time. They desire the praise of people just as satan wanted the praise of humans.

It appears that the so-called successful ministers today often are more like a Madison Square Garden celebrities than submissive servants of God. They’d love to plaster their faces all over their ministry websites and books.

Diotrephes was motivated by pride. Instead of giving the preeminence to Jesus Christ, he claimed it for himself. His mantra was “What is in it for me?” He was most unlike John the Baptist who said, “He [Jesus] must increase, but I must decrease.”

Diotrephes even rejected apostle John who was with Jesus Himself personally because he was a threat to him. The apostle rebuked him by name here in this epistle.

Romans 16:17-18 Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. 18 For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.

John gave us two clear examples, one good – Gaius and one bad – Diotrephes, and he now applies the point – follow the good, because we serve a good God and those who follow Him will likewise do good.

Church “dictators” are dangerous people but, fortunately, they are easy to recognize. They like to talk about themselves and what they have “done for the Lord.” They also have the habit of judging and condemning those who disagree with them. They are experts in putting labels on other Christians and classifying them into categories of

their own intention. They base their fellowship on personalities, not the doctrines that are fundamental to the faith. The tragedy is that these “dictators” actually believe that they are serving God and glorifying Jesus Christ.

As I have said this before, the majority of church splits are done by these church dictators who completely base on personal differences, not on doctrines. We had a few share of them in almost nine years of our church history.

E. DEMETRIUS THE EXEMPLAR

3 John:12 Demetrius has a good testimony from all, and from the truth itself. And we also bear witness, and you know that our testimony is true.

What a compliment for Demetrius from apostle John! Demetrius was so faithful to the truth that even the truth was a witness on his behalf.

Demetrius was the very opposite of Diotrephes, a prime example of one who knows the truth and practices it. The placement of Demetrius’s name at the end of the letter suggests that he might have been the one who carried John’s letter to Gaius.

F. FAREWELL GREETING

3 John:13-14 I had many things to write, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and ink; 14 but I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak face to face. Peace to you. Our friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.

The conclusion of the letter is similar to the conclusion of 2 John, and perhaps was a standard way to end letters in John’s day.

G. APPLICATIONS

- 1) We must distribute the love of God to others within the boundary of the truth of God.
- 2) True living only comes from the living truth through the Word of truth.
- 3) The object of the servanthood in Christianity is OTHERS, not ourselves.