

WEDNESDAY BIBLE FELLOWSHIP

Christ Church, Crouch End Hill

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No: 73

3 John

Open:

Did you ever run out of money when you were away from home?
What did you do? Who extended loving hospitality to you?

Read 3 John

Introduction

One of the issues that John was concerned with in 2 John was the presence of false teachers in the church. And John warned his readers that they must have nothing to do with such teachers. But he'd also urged them to love each other. So, why do we have 3 John in our bibles? The clue is in verse 11. I think it's the key verse of the whole letter. John says, "Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good." The purpose of 3 John is to help us learn by example. Successful businesses have known for years that if you want to develop someone's potential it's not good enough simply to teach them, you must also mentor them. The same is true for Christians. If we want to make progress in our Christian lives then, yes, it is vital we receive clear Bible teaching but it's also important that we are shown examples to follow. And that's the beauty of this short letter at the end of the New Testament. It contains four examples to challenge our current behaviour. Three examples for us to imitate and one example for us to avoid like the plague. We meet John, we meet Gaius, we meet Diotrephes and then, very briefly, we meet a man called Demetrius.

Questions for discussions

1. What conflicts were going on in the church that prompted John to write this letter? _____

2. What example of care is given by John in the opening verses of 3 John? _____

3. We saw last week the challenge that John gives us to consider what we are really most excited about. Does his concern for Gaius health undermine his priorities for spiritual things? (vv2– 4)

Comment

We begin with the example of John. I love what he says in verse 2. "Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well." You can tell he really cares for Gaius, can't you? He's concerned for Gaius' physical well being and his spiritual well being. So he prays for Gaius' health that he might enjoy good health and that all may go well with him. So it's not wrong at all to lay before the Lord our concerns for one another's physical well being. We should be praying for each other in this way. Maybe for health issues, safety on journeys, job worries, family issues and a whole host of other things. It's not unspiritual to pray about those things. But notice what else John is interested in.

It's Gaius' spiritual well being. And in fact that is what really gets him going. So he says in verse 3: "It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth..." This is what John is really excited about. He delights that Gaius is still walking in the truth-that he is pressing on as a Christian and that he is growing in his love and knowledge of the Saviour. In all the ups and downs that Gaius is facing in the church and in his personal life, the best thing about him, according to John, is that he is pressing on in the truth.

John's concern for Gaius reflects that kingdom priority. But I want to suggest to us a slightly different application from this joy of John's. You see if our greatest need is to keep going in the faith and if that is what excites the apostle the most, then we must make sure that we are pressing on. In short, every so often it is worth giving ourselves a spiritual health check- up.

4. What type of character sketch would you draw for Gaius and how can you reflect Gaius desire to be of help to itinerant Christian workers? _____

5. What difficulties and challenges did the itinerant teachers faced? _____

6. In picking close friends (like Gaius was to John), what do you look for? _____ and how can you be that kind of friend to others?

7. What advice does John give Gaius (v.11)? _____

8. How would you describe Diotrephes and what was he known or notorious for? (vv.9-11). _____

9. How would you describe Diotrephes relationship to Elders (like John) in the church ? Explain. _____

Comment

One of the ways that Gaius was showing his love was by welcoming and showing hospitality to faithful teachers, quite possibly sent out from John himself, who were passing through town on their mission work. But others in the church had not welcomed such teachers and had in fact opposed them and those in the church who were hospitable to them. And their actions revealed a great deal about the state of their hearts. It was a very painful situation for this church to be in. In effect it was divided from within and the trouble centred on the leader, a man called Diotrephes. So John writes to encourage Gaius and send a warning to Diotrephes about his actions. .

10. How will you describe Demetrius? (v.12) _____

11. In what ways does this letter tackle the hospitality issue differently from 2 John? _____

12. Why is John urging that these teachers be cared for in their travels and why should this be so important at this time? _____

Comment

John was advising Gaius, a kindly man but probably not so strong a character as the aggressive Diotrephes. John is seeking to get Gaius on his side for, left on his own, Gaius might well give in to Diotrephes.

We don't know anything about this Demetrius character except what is written here. Reading between the lines, some suggest that Demetrius was sent by John with the letter and John is telling Gaius to receive him well. Why? Because he is spoken well of by John and his friends and that is no mean reference. Also Gaius himself seems to know him. "You know that our testimony is true," says John. But notice what John says in verse 11. He says that Gaius is to "imitate not what is evil but what is good." Gaius should not look to Diotrephes as a model to follow but Demetrius. He is spoken well of by everyone, even by the truth itself. That probably means something like he lives a life worthy of the gospel of Jesus. This is the sort of person Gaius is to follow and use as a model for his own Christian life.

Diotrephes may have his reasons for being uncharitable to the itinerant preachers. Perhaps they were not saying things 'the way we say them'. While asserting his leadership in the local church, Diotrephes found it convenient to flout the authority of John who was an apostle. He is so determined to see that the local congregation had no interference from outside so much so that he was prepared to expel those who are still prepared to accept the authority of John. He has allowed his position to get into his head. The true Christian leader must always remember that strength and gentleness must go together and that leading, submitting and loving must go hand in hand.