

NAME

The epistle is named “Ioannou C” (Ιωαννου Γ) after the traditional author, John the apostle. The letter is called “Third John” to distinguish it from John’s two other canonical epistles.

AUTHOR

Laney:

The author of the epistle is not named. However, as in 2 John, he introduces himself as “the elder,” and this would indicate that the same individual authored both epistles. Though questioned by Origen and placed among the Antilegomena by Eusebius, the epistle was widely accepted as Johannine in the fourth century and was endorsed by the Council of Carthage (397 A.D.). The work was considered authentic by Athanasius (367 A.D.) and Hippo (419 A.D.).

The vocabulary, style, and thought of the epistle unites it with 2 John and points to the apostle John as author. Both epistles stress “truth” (2 John 1-4; 3 John 1-4,8) and refer to hospitality (2 John 10,11; 3 John 5,8). Both writers rejoice over those who are “*walking in truth*.” In both letters the author expresses in almost identical words his intention to visit the recipients (2 John 12; 3 John 14). John the apostle and author of 1 and 2 John clearly authored this third epistle.

DATE

Laney:

The epistle was probably written about the same time as 2 John. If 2 John is the earlier letter referred to in 3 John 9, then the sequence of the communications would be established. It is unlikely, however, that 3 John 9 refers to either 2 John or 1 John. The letter would have been intended for a small circle of readers and was probably lost. It must be assumed that the second and third epistles were written about the same time, around 90 A.D.

THEME

Halley (page 44): “*Rejection of John’s Helpers*”

Laney: “*Walking in Truth*”

John writes to commend Gaius for walking in the truth and to encourage the continued exercise of hospitality so that the messengers from John might have opportunity to minister in the community. The letter is intended to censure the conduct of Diotrephes and to inform Gaius of the apostle’s plan to visit the community and deal with the situation in person.

Mitchell: “*Christian Hospitality*”

This letter was sent for a two-fold purpose: 1) to encourage Gaius in his Christian hospitality; and 2) to deal with Diotrephes, a self-appointed dictator who was attempting to ex-communicate all who did not measure up to his personal standard.

Key Word (Nelson’s): Enjoy fellowship with the brethren - the basic theme of this letter is to enjoy and continue to have fellowship (hospitality) with fellow believers, especially full-time Christian workers. This is contrasted between the truth and servanthood of Gaius and the error and selfishness of Diotrephes.

Mitchell:

This epistle is the converse of 2 John. It shows who are to be received and helped in Christian work.

COMPARISON WITH 2 JOHN:

2 JOHN

Key: Attitude towards *false* teachers
Emphasizes not fellowship with error
Shows limits of Scriptural fellowship

3 JOHN

Key: Attitude toward *true* teachers
Emphasizes hospitality to truth
Shows the breadth of Christian fellowship

Yet this epistle is similar to 2 John in many respects. Both are personal letters to individuals. Both are letters which are short because the writer expected to see the addressees soon (2 John 12; 3 John 14).

Outline:

- I. Introduction 1,2
- II. The Commendation of Gaius 3-8
- III. The Condemnation of Diotrephes 9-11
- IV. The Commendation of Demetrius 12
- V. Conclusion 13,14

RECIPIENT

Laney:

The addressee of the epistle is the "beloved Gaius." Three other men in the New Testament are known by this rather common name (Romans 16:23; 1 Corinthians 1:14; Acts 19:29; 20:4,5). It is not likely that this Gaius is to be identified with any other in the New Testament. Gaius was a consistent Christian (3) known for his generous hospitality (5). Gaius was a well loved friend of the apostle John.

Nelson's:

The Third Epistle of John is addressed to Gaius, a man whom John "loves in the truth" and who "walks in the truth." His life is a sharp contrast to a man called Diotrephes, whom John describes. The chart below highlights the difference in the two men and two ways of "walking."

COMPARISON OF GAIUS AND DIOTREPHES:

Gaius

Walks in Truth
Faithful worker for the truth
Shows hospitality to itinerant Christian ministers

Diotrephes

Loves to have preeminence
Spreads malicious gossip against John
Refuses to receive the brethren from other assemblies

Historical Setting:

Laney:

John the apostle had received a report from some of his itinerant representatives who had visited the district where Gaius lived (3). John had learned of the faithful character and hospitality demonstrated by Gaius (3,5) and the problem with arrogant Diotrephes (9,10). Diotrephes had usurped authority in the church and was refusing to receive the messengers sent by John (10). He even forbade the other brethren to receive the messengers and punished those who did with excommunication! In addition Diotrephes was unjustly accusing John and rejecting his teaching (9). The character flaw of Diotrephes was his arrogant ambition and desire to promote self rather than Christ.

Now the apostle enlists the help of Gaius to assure acceptance of and support for the ministering brethren who had been flaunted by Diotrephes (5-8). John expresses his desire to visit Gaius soon and to deal with the problem in person (10). It is not certain that Gaius and Diotrephes belong to the same local church, but if not, their congregations may have been close together. Demetrius, who is so highly commended (12), may have served as the carrier of the letter.

CONTRIBUTION TO CANON

Description of and challenge to continue hospitality.

RESOURCES

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Nelson's Quick Reference - Bible Maps And Charts, Nashville, Tennessee; Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1994

As general resources I've relied on my class notes from various professors at Biola University (especially those of Dr. Curtis Mitchell), Western Conservative Baptist Seminary (WCBS - [especially those of Dr. J. Carl Laney]), and Talbot Seminary as well as notes shared with me by Annie Kartoian.

Additional reference material has come from the study Bibles of the English Standard Version, New American Standard Version, and The New Living Translation.

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