

3 John 1 (Nicolas Simon) 170158

The Christian Shepherd: 2004, Holy Scriptures: First, Second and Third John, The (1)

John's epistles were written very late in the first century. Mystical interpretations had arisen concerning the person of the Lord Jesus Christ; Christianity was viewed as a system that must grow and develop with time a view widely held today. It is the "last time" (1 John 2:18). The Apostle counters these thoughts by taking the reader back to the beginning when Christ was manifest here in this world.

John presents things in the abstract, giving the essential character without reference to experience. "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin" (ch. 3:9) is a statement of fact. Likewise, "He that committeth sin is of the devil" (vs. 8). These do not describe a person, but the new life in contrast to our old nature. It is vital that we have a perspective outside the context of experience, especially when Christendom is so corrupted by false doctrine. In John's epistle it is not walking according to the light, but rather walking in the light (ch. 1:7).

Outline of First John

The grand theme of the first epistle is eternal life in the Son of God. In John's Gospel we see that life everywhere displayed in the person of the Lord "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Here we see the result in the believer as a partaker of that divine life.

This epistle is not expository, but rather the outpouring of the aged Apostle's heart. Thirteen times John refers to that which he was writing or his purpose in writing. Repeated references are made to the things that we as believers know and to those things whereby we know the true from the false. Seven times he uses the expression "born" or "begotten of God," showing what characterizes the new nature. We are members of a new family.

John writes, desiring that the believer's joy may be full (1 John 1:4). This can only come by being in communion with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ, as known and revealed by the apostles. He writes that believers should not sin; the advocacy of Christ restores communion when we do (ch. 2:1). In closing, he declares, "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God" (ch. 5:13).

In the second chapter, believers in different stages of maturity are addressed the fathers, young men and babes. While the young men and babes are warned of the dangers ahead, to the fathers he twice writes, "Because ye have known Him that is from the beginning" (ch. 2:14). Desirous of nothing more and nothing new, Christ, who is from the beginning, is everything to them. Even the babes in Christ have an unction from the Holy One the Holy Spirit and "know all things" (vs. 20). They needed to possess nothing further; there was no new thing to know.

In the third chapter, the children of God are manifest, as are the children of the devil. In the fourth chapter we have tests whereby we may distinguish false spirits from the true. We ought to love one another; it is characteristic of the divine nature. Such love is exercised in obedience; it will not be at the expense of the truth. "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep His commandments" (ch. 5:2).

We should allow nothing in our lives that displaces Christ as the object of our affection. "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (vs. 21).

Second John

John's second epistle is addressed to the "elect lady and her children" (2 John 1). Possibly "lady" should be left as the feminine proper name "Kyria"; it is not, however, a reference to the church as some have suggested, for the church is not elected; individuals are.

Like the first, this epistle is concerned with the maintenance of the truth. John greatly rejoiced to find among her children those walking in the truth (vs. 4). Again we have "that which we had from the beginning" (vs. 5). Here it is that we love one another, but the love that flows from God maintains the truth: "This is love, that we walk after His commandments" (vs. 6). Many deceivers have gone out into this world; they are not to be received and must be rejected because of their doctrine (vss. 7-10). The affectionate and hospitable nature, especially that of a sister, could overstep its mark in receiving such an individual. John warns that we should not greet such a one (vs. 10). "God speed" in the Greek is the word "rejoice" and was used as a salutation; likewise, we should not encourage those who deny the person of the Lord, even with something as innocent as a greeting.

Third John

This letter is addressed to the well-beloved Gaius of whom John could say, "I love in the truth" (3 John 1). Here was a brother for whom John could wish above all things that he might prosper and be in health—even as he prospered in his soul (vs. 2). In this epistle it is not those that are to be rejected, but rather those who are to be received: "We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellow helpers to the truth" (vs. 8).

Again the subject is the truth: "I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth" (vs. 3).

Gaius' charity and hospitality is recorded (vs. 6). Diotrephes, on the other hand, loved to have the preeminence and would not receive the Apostle. His prating and malicious words would not be forgotten (vss. 9-10). Demetrius had a good report of all men and of the truth itself (vs. 12).

Trusting to see them shortly, John sends greetings and instructs Gaius to greet the friends by name and so should we (vs. 14).

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