

1. **INTRODUCTION:** The Epistles [letters] written by the Apostle John actually form a composite message to the Church along with his Gospel and Revelation. As with all Scripture, they are written to speak into a specific occasion of need in the Church at that time with application made relevant through hermeneutic interpretation. In understanding what was intended for these original hearers, we can more properly interpret the documents and then apply relevant insights to our present day environment. The following is a brief discussion of 3 John with an analysis of who wrote it, why it had been written, and how we might now apply it.

2. **AUTHOR, DATE, PURPOSE FOR WRITING; and HISTORICAL TIMEFRAME:**
 - a. The similarities between 1, 2, and 3 John make a strong argument for having been written by the same author. The similarity of 1 John and the Gospel of John “farewell discourse” of chapters 13-17, shows even more remarkable similarities. Most scholars agree that John is the author of the Gospel and Epistles bearing his name, as well as for Revelation. There is no credible alternative.
 - b. The content of 3 John demonstrates a very close relationship between 1 John and 2 John. Some scholars suggest that 2 and 3 John are companion letters that actually preceded 1 John. The conclusion of 2 John [vs 12-13] seems to support this concept. Since John had planned on delivering a longer and more developed message to this church in person, presuming John was unable to visit this church as he hoped (vs 12), the more detailed letter of 1 John would have been a reasonable solution. There is credibility to this notion in the content itself, and it certainly fits the well with the overall narrative of these letters.
 - c. The introduction of 3 John states that it was written to “my dear friend Gaius” – vs 1. Where the introduction to 2 John was written to “the chosen lady” meaning the church. The introduction to 1 John is far more formal with the body rich with pastoral teaching on doctrine and theology.
 - d. Another interesting factor is the verb tense used in these texts. John used “second person plural” in 2 John verses 6-12 while the “second person singular” is employed elsewhere. This later second person singular is used exclusively in 3 John. The singular form would be to correspond to a specific person, while the plural from to the elders and possibly the congregation as well. The subject matter in 2 John is in general very much like 1 John. This both supports the presumption that 2 and 3 John preceded 1 John, and also supports the destination of a congregation rather than a woman and her family.
 - e. Unlike 1 and 2 John which were written to a particular congregation, this letter was written to “Gaius” who was most likely a member of the neighboring church through which John communicated. It appears from the content that 2 John had been intercepted by “Diotrephes” (vs 9) and John received a report that the action he had called for in his letter had been blocked by this man who was somehow in league with the false teachers. Thus, in John 3, John writes to a known and faithful man he trusts in Gaius who John expects will deliver and implement the letter at the troubled congregation and then see it is distributed to the other churches in the area. John no doubt anticipates each will face the same problems he sought to correct.

- f. The purpose for which 3 John was written is addressing the same issues of itinerant false teachers presented in 1 and 2 John. John argued in both 1 and 2 that offering these false teachers hospitality is harmful to the church because they are enemies of Christ. John is making the point that it is important to use discernment in accepting those who are “friends of Christ” and rejecting those who are “enemies of Christ.” These “false [iterant] teachers” whose teachings sounded reasonable, were in fact leading many astray. It is logical from the historical context that John is fighting against these false teachers from his place of exile to keep his churches focused on the true Gospel of Christ.
- g. Please refer to the introductory and “author, date and purpose, and historical timeframe” sections of 1 John which apply to both 2 and 3 John.

3. **STRUCTURAL OUTLINE AND INTERPRETATION** – because this letter is so brief, the outline and the interpretation will be combined together:

- a. **Salutation – 1:1-2**
 - i. 1:1a – designates the author.
 - ii. 1:1b – designates Gaius as the recipient.
 - iii. 1:2 – John’s best wishes to is dear friend.
- b. **Main body of the letter – 1:3-12**
 - i. 1:3-8 – John’s commendation of Gaius
 - 1. Vs 3-4 – John makes a strong commendation of Gaius having heard from mutual Christian friends how Gaius has been faithful in walking for Truth, and the result of Gaius’ continued obedience being steadfast and true brings John great joy.
 - ii. 1:5-8 – Gaius demonstrates his love by the way he lives... he is a man of character and faith.
 - 1. Vs 5-7 – the “brothers” indicates they are true followers of Christ, and that they are also called “strangers” indicates they are missionaries sent to strengthen the church who Gaius is supporting. John’s commendation indicates Gaius not only knows the Truth and lives it, be he is capable of discerning the Truth in the words and teachings of others. In short, he is a mature Christian properly supporting his church.
 - 2. Vs 8 – John trusts Gaius’ judgment and encourages him to continue to identify and support such honorable men. In light of the attacks from false teachers, John sees in Gaius a wise leader that God has placed within the congregation.
 - iii. 1:9-11 – John’s condemnation of Diotrephes
 - 1. Vs 9-10 – Diotrephes has not only assumed authority but is leading the congregation astray in his refusal to welcome the true brothers, and by inference welcoming false teachers.

2. Vs 11 – where Gaius has provided a positive example of leadership, Diotrephes has provided a negative example. John here clearly identifies Diotrephes as fundamentally being evil and serving evil, evidence that he does not know or serve God faithfully.
 - iv. 1:12 – John’s recommendation of Demetrius – unlike Diotrephes, Demetrius is spoken well of by the faithful who know him as well as the truth he speaks. Therefore, John identifies him as a man who may be trusted.
 - v. John’s concluding thoughts – 1:13-14
 1. Vs 13-14a – John has much more to say to Gaius and this church, and hopes to be able to do so in person. This also lends credibility that 2 and 3 John were written soon after the other, and that 1 John was likely written to provide the details he could not give in person sometime later.
 2. Vs 13 – John offers his commendation of God’s peace to Gaius. John sends regards from mutual friends who are with John in exile, and the fact that he desires Gaius to greet the brothers by name attests to John’s personal knowledge of the members of this congregation.
4. **THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS** – of primary interest regarding the theological implications of John’s epistles and especially of 3 John, has to do with problems that can result within church leadership. Diotrephes has subverted John’s message to the church in 2 John; and with Diotrephes’ help, false teachers had now invaded the church. The consequences of one misaligned leader left to their own devices can do great harm in the church. In absentia, John had to rely on leaders whose character he knew to be faithful and true... such were Gaius and Demetrius. The theological implications of John’s writings provide much fertile ground for understanding and vetting leadership.
- a. Christian character is a crucial component for leaders and teachers in the church, here is a link to an article on intentional character development on the AD website - <http://www.authenticdiscipleship.org/pdfs/3-leadership-dev/LD%20-%204.4%20-%20Coaching%20for%20Character%20Development.pdf>
 - b. Jesus scathing rebuke of the false leaders of first century Jerusalem is preserved in Matthew 23:13-39. The use of “Woe to you” and “blind guides” and “blind fools” in reference to these leaders clearly expresses Jesus’ disgust with them. In contrasting the false teachers of the Scribes and Pharisees of the first century in Jerusalem, John states some of Jesus’ qualifications for leadership in the “I AM” statements of Jesus:
 - i. I Am the Bread of Life – John 6:35-58 – Jesus’ Words are pure spiritual food. While physical bread supports life in the physical body, so spiritual bread supports spiritual life. Church leaders need to know and clearly teach the Scriptures, to clearly teach how Jesus’ Words have been fulfilled in the prophecies revealed in the Scriptures, and then how to apply these truths to the lives of the congregation.

- ii. **I AM the Light of the World – John 8:12-9:5 – Jesus is God in the flesh... the EMMANUEL “God with us” of Isaiah 7:13-14.** Jesus Words are the true source of light for humanity. The reference to light is to be able to see clearly and travel securely. All others who fail to remain true to Jesus’ words are acting in their own wisdom and are blind guides to God’s people. Church leaders need to teach in the light that Jesus has revealed. Unfortunately, many leaders through the ages have taught more through the authority of their position or through earthly wisdom of their own making.
 - iii. **I AM the Gate for the sheep – John 10:7-9 – the only way [gate] to good pasture and security is through Jesus.** Church leaders protect and preserve the sanctity and security of the Gate, rather than create a new one intended to make people feel comfortable. Often Jesus’ teachings were uncomfortable for the status quo, but His priority was to point people toward the Truth and encourage Godly character development in discipleship, rather than merely making people feel better about themselves.
 - iv. **I AM the Good Shepherd – John 10:11-18 – shepherds are conscripted to serve the sheep on behalf of their master, the sheep are not there to serve the shepherd.** Church leaders need to remain true to this calling. The sheep are not merely a means to an end; they are the end to which shepherds are called to serve:
 - 1. To love God, to serve Him and live with Him forever – Great Commandment – Matthew 22:34-40.
 - 2. To go and make disciples of all the nations – Great Commission – Matthew 28:16-20.
 - v. **I AM the Resurrection and the Life – John 11:21-27 – Jesus in His life and ministry are the only Way to eternal Truth and Life with God (See 1 Corinthians 1:21-24).** Anyone who teaches otherwise is not doing God’s work, instead they are doing the work of the anti-Christ (See John 14:23-27).
 - vi. **I AM the True Vine – John 15:1-11 – Being relationally connected with Jesus through the Spirit is the only way of “abiding” – which means to resolutely stand for and to endure something... it means to persevere in both growth and endurance, and the result of abiding is Spiritual fruit developing in their character.** Paul teaches about this process in Galatians 5:16-25. Leaders train people to endure in Christ Jesus so they become more like Jesus from the inside out, not merely to hold on in loyalty to a leader’s or church’s position on something.
- c. **G. M. Burge in his article on John’s Epistles presented in the Dictionary of the Later New Testament & its Developments, makes the observation that both the epistles and gospel of John “place a high premium on the quality of Christian community.”**
- i. John teaches in John 13:34; 15:12 & 17 that love is the centerpiece of Jesus’ followers; meaning selfless “Agape Love” – loving others as Christ loves them. This is echoed in 1

- John 4:7-8, 19-21; and stems from God’s love for humanity presented in John 3:16 and 1 John 4:10.
- ii. Burge goes on to state that “Vibrant [Christian] community is the natural outgrowth of people who genuinely live in God’s Presence. But the reverse is also true. When people within the church exhibit hostility, self-interest and division, [which John identifies as] when they ‘hate’, they prove that their lives are being lived ‘in the darkness’ (1 John 2:9-11).” John says this proves that God’s regenerative Life is not yet in them, without which leads to death (1 John 4:20).
- d. False Leaders have long been a problem for God’s People:
- i. There is little doubt that John’s pastoral heart was inflamed against those who undermined the Gospel, and who were spreading self-interest and dissention in the faith community. In 3 John, Diotrephes is identified as such an individual. But first, John commends Gaius and validates his confidence in him (vs 5-8). Then he repudiates Diotrephes (vs 9-11). Then John provides a counter balance in Demetrius who can help support Gaius and reject Diotrephes.
 - ii. What this leadership problem demonstrates is that there will always be false teachers and false prophets in or around the church who are actually ‘wolves in sheep’s clothing’ (Matthew 7:15). It also demonstrates that a Godly leader must make certain the church understands who should be trusted and who should not be trusted. This is not about a popularity contest, instead it is about diligently caring for those the servant leader loves and has invested their life in cultivating them for the Kingdom of God.
 - iii. The prophet Ezekiel wrote to condemn the false leaders of his day in Jerusalem in Ezekiel 34:1-10; and in Ezekiel 34:11-31 he prophesied about the restoration of His people under the leadership of the Messiah. To be a leader of God’s people is a very great blessing and a great responsibility:
 - 1. The standard of leadership is to lead as Jesus led [servant leadership], and to teach as Jesus taught.
 - 2. The object of leadership is to care for and intentionally develop Christian disciples in the Name of Jesus to continue His mission of redemption on earth.
 - 3. The result of effective leadership is to observe Christ-likeness in God’s people as people are progressively transformed from the inside out where the fruit of the Spirit is on display to the Glory of God.
- e. Before he met Christ, Saul was an arrogant pharisaical zealot intent on his personal and professional advancement; after meeting Christ, Paul was a humble servant of Jesus and a brave warrior and leader of God’s people. Paul warned church leaders to be aware of false teachers in Acts 20:28-32 much as John would warn his churches some years later:
“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that

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after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build *you* up and to give *you* the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”

f. **Both Paul and John knew it was important for church leaders and teachers to have a strong theological foundation from which they could identify false teaching. While many today seem to want to ignore basic doctrine and theology, it is an error to do so. Here are a couple of links to resources on the AD website on basic doctrine and theology:**

- i. <http://www.authenticdiscipleship.org/pdfs/1-biblical-literacy/Theology%204.1%20-%20Developing%20a%20Theology%20of%20Ministry.pdf>
- ii. <http://www.authenticdiscipleship.org/pdfs/3-leadership-dev/LD%20-%206.6%20-%20Basic%20Doctrine%20&%20Theology.pdf>