

Covenant History Series
Third John—Of Gaius and Diotrephes

Sunday, December 13, 2009

Introduction

- I. The letter is addressed to a man by the name of Gaius: **The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth** (v. 1)
 - A. We cannot be certain who this Gaius was. There are two other men with this name in the NT
 - 1. There was a certain traveling companion of the apostle Paul, who is mentioned in Acts
 - a. Acts 19:29 — While Paul was in Ephesus we're told that "the city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed together into the theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's companions in travel."
 - b. Acts 20:4 — "Sopater the Berean, son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus" (Acts 20:4)
 - 2. In addition to this traveling companion of Paul, we find also a certain resident of Corinth who came to believe the gospel under Paul's ministry there, and who played host, not only to Paul, but to the entire church
 - a. We learn of this man's conversion by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:14 — "I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius"

- b. And as for hosting both Paul and the church in his own home, we read in Romans (which Paul wrote from Corinth), “Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you” (Rom. 16:23)
 - B. For several reasons, however, it is unlikely that the Gaius who is mentioned in Third John is either one of these two
 - 1. John speaks of Gaius as one of his children, **vv. 2-4**
 - a. He is *not* speaking literally; instead, he is speaking about the teacher/disciple relationship
- II. John writes to Gaius in order to commend him for the hospitality he showed to certain brothers whom John had sent out to do the work of the ministry, **vv. 5-8**
 - A. Remember what we said last week about the importance of hospitality in the ancient world
 - B. This was regarded as one of the chief virtues even among the pagans
 - 1. Zeus is called the friend of strangers
 - 2. In the story of Odysseus...
 - C. The virtue of hospitality was regarded with even greater esteem in Israel, and the obligation to practice it rested on even higher grounds
 - 1. **Deut. 10:17-19**; etc.
 - 2. God is the host
 - D. This act of loving-kindness is extolled many, many times in Scripture

1. Abraham (**Gen. 18:1-8**)
 2. Lot (**Gen. 19:1-11**; cf. Ezek. 16:49)
 3. A man of Gibeah showed hospitality to a traveling Levite and his concubine (Judges 19:11-21)
 4. Widow of Zarephath plays host to Elijah (1 Ki. 17:8-24)
 5. Elisha is hosted by the Shunammite woman (**2 Ki. 8:8-17**)
 6. Job appeals to God and pleads his own righteousness by saying (among other things), "The sojourner has not lodged in the street; I have opened my doors to the traveler" (Job 31:32)
 7. Missionary labor
 - a. Jesus' ministry, from a human standpoint, *depended* upon hospitality. "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Matt. 8:20); Mary and Martha...
 - b. When he sent out the twelve (**Matt. 10:5-15, 40-42**)
 - c. Paul (**Acts 16:13-15**)
- E. Failure to show hospitality was far more than simply a breach of etiquette; it was regarded to be a very grievous sin
1. Ammonites and Moabites (Deut. 23:3-4)
 2. **Matt. 25:31-35, 41-43a**
- F. Hospitality can be abused, as we have seen
1. Although John here commends Gaius for showing hospitality to the true ministers of the gospel, remember that in 2 John, he instructed "the elect lady and her children" *not* to show hospitality to those who preached a false gospel, those who

“did not abide in the teaching of Christ” (2 Jn. 9), because so doing would involve her in the evil deeds of the false teacher: “whoever greets him [gives him hospitality to help him on his way] takes part in his wicked works” (2 Jn. 10)

2. We also find instructions in these matters from one of the earliest Christian documents outside the NT, a document called the *Didache* 11-12

III. The example of Gaius in providing hospitality to the messengers that came from John stands in stark contrast to Diotrephes (vv. **9-10**)

A. Diotrephes must have been the leader of one of the churches, but he was full of himself

1. “He likes to put himself first” (but cf. **Matt. 20:35ff.**)
 - a. No one who likes to put himself first is fit for any type of leadership, in the church, or anywhere else
 - b. The first shall be last and the last first
2. “Does not acknowledge our authority”
 - a. The very height of presumption! Refusing the authority of an apostle of Christ!
 - b. Yet how like many leaders in the church today, who discount the teaching of the apostles with a wholesale defection from the faith
3. “talking wicked nonsense against us”
4. “And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.” On top of all the rest, he does this: he refuses

to show hospitality to the messengers we send, and brings up charges against those who do show them hospitality

IV. Next, in contrast to Diotrephes, he commends Demetrius (vv. **11-12**)

Finis

