

Synthetic Bible Studies

Containing an outline study of every book of the Bible
with suggestions for Sermons, Addresses and
Bible Expositions

By

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LESSON TWENTY-FOUR

II AND III JOHN

It is generally assumed by the church that the second and third Epistles of John were written by the author of the first Epistle bearing that name, who was as well the author of the fourth Gospel and the book of the Revelation. There have been hints of some other John known as the "presbyter" of the second century, but his existence cannot be proven. Moreover, there are strong corroborative indications of an internal character going to show identity of authorship between these two Epistles and the first of the same name. But these questions of criticism, as we have said all along, hardly belong to the scope of our present work. (See the author's work, *Primers of the Faith* (Fleming H. Revell Company).

- the second Epistle is addressed to whom? The word "lady" in the Greek is "*Kuria*," which may be translated as a proper name as well as impersonally, and perhaps in this case it should be so understood.

"*Kuria*" was a common name among the Greeks and refers here, it may be, to some notable saint in the church or among the churches of Asia, in the neighborhood of Ephesus, to which John especially ministered in this his old age.

The letter is a brief one, for the writer is soon to make a visit to this sister in CHRIST and to speak with her face to face (v. 12).

1. The Salutation (vv. 1-4) is interesting for three or four things:

(1) The deep humility of the writer. He who might have called himself not only an apostle, but the last of the apostles, and even the apostle whom JESUS loved, is content to describe himself as "**the elder**."

(2) The tender regard for the sister in CHRIST to whom he writes; but it is as a sister in CHRIST that he addresses her, whom he loves in the truth, i. e., in CHRIST. A love, spiritual, holy, eternal.

(3) The solicitude for the honor and majesty of JESUS CHRIST.

The mercy and peace which come to us are not only from GOD the Father, so to speak, but the second person of the Godhead as well, JESUS the CHRIST. And He is the Son of the Father. Not a Son but The Son. How like this is to John's emphasis on the same truth in his first Epistle!

(4) The insight into the spiritual conditions of this sister's household. He had come across, in his travels, certain of her children who were walking in the truth, i. e., knowing the truth, and living in the power of it. Were all of her children doing this?

2. The burden or real message of the letter follows next (vv. 5-11).

This burden is the old one of John, the message he reiterates - love. But love in the New Testament means, as we have seen, not a passion, not an emotion, a life. An abiding and controlling principle of being influencing for righteousness, this is love, Christian love. Is not that what John says again and again in his first Epistle, and is it not what he says here (v. 6)?

And see how the idea is emphasized in verse 7. Not to love is not to hold to the truth in doctrine and to practice it in life. False teachers do not love.

They may be amiable and kindly in their family and social relations, but they have not love, this Gospel love. They are deceivers, wittingly or unwittingly, and love and deceit do not go together. And mark, too, what is the central fact of that truth which constitutes love - the confession that JESUS CHRIST is come in the flesh. This strikes at the Jew's denial of JESUS, certainly, but how can Christian Science, for example, which denies the material body confess this?

But we see that they are the deceivers and the Antichrist in spirit who fail to confess that He "**is come in the flesh**."

It is CHRIST's second coming John has in mind as truly as His first coming. How more and more important this doctrine, this hope of the church, seems to become as we advance in the study of the New Testament!

In the light of the above consider now the warning in verse 8.

There is danger of Christian believers losing something which belongs to them. That something is "**a full reward**." Compare Luke 19:15-27; I Corinthians 3:11-15.; II Peter 1:5-11.

But when does this reward come to them? See Matthew 16:27; Revelation 22:12. Does not the comparison of these passages bear out the thought of John in verse 7? - is not that false teaching which denies the coming of JESUS again in the flesh? And will not they who are deceived by it fail of their full reward when He comes? And should they not look to themselves, guard this point, in their faith?

What is it to transgress as given in verse 9?

By the "**doctrine of Christ**" there is not meant merely the things He taught with His own lips while here in the flesh, but the whole doctrine or teachings concerning Him, i. e., the whole of the Old and New Testaments. To deny the truth concerning CHRIST is to deny His first and His second coming in the flesh, and He who denies this "**hath not God.**" He may speak much of the "Father," but he only has the Father who has the Son. To have the One you must have the Other (v. 9).

And observe how strenuous we should be in maintaining this doctrine (v. 10). I think the command there "**receive him not into your house,**" is not absolute but relative. I do not think it means that we are to deny him meat and shelter altogether, if he be in need of them, but only that we are not to fellowship him as a brother. Even our personal enemies we are commanded to bless and to pray for, if they hunger we are to feed them and if they thirst give them drink. But those who are the enemies of GOD by being enemies of His truth, we are to have nothing to do with in the capacity of fellow-Christians we must not aid them in their plans or bid them GOD speed.

How would such a course on our part involve us (v. 11)?

The apostle closes this Epistle with that allusion to his visit already referred to, and a greeting from Kuria's elect sister. Did this mean her sister in the flesh or only in the faith? And in this last case was it the apostle's wife?

III JOHN

To whom is the third Epistle of John addressed? Gaius is a name frequently alluded to by Paul as you must have observed, but whether this were the same individual as that or any of those mentioned by him, is problematical. In any event he seems to have been a convert of John (v. 4). Another form of the name is Caius and this was a very common name indeed.

What distinction in spiritual things is ascribed to Gaius (v. 2)?

His soul was prospering even if his bodily health and his business were not, and how much more important this was. But it is of value to note that the inspired apostle is interested in other things as well. The Christian should be careful of his health, and it is perfectly compatible with a deep spiritual life that he should have a successful business.

Christian Character of Gaius

After this salutation in verses 1 and 2, the next division of the Epistle deals with the Christian character of Gaius, and enlarges upon the directions in which his soul's prosperity displayed itself (vv. 3-8).

Here are three particulars named:

- (1) He possessed the truth (v. 3).
- (2) He walked in the truth, i. e., his life and conduct measured up to the light he had received from GOD, (vv. 3, 4).
- (3) As walking in the truth he was "**careful to maintain good works**," especially in the distribution of his means (vv. 5,6).

It is noticeable that his "faithfulness" in this regard is mentioned. It was not a spasmodic or impetuous thing on his part, but a steady flow of grace through him. His breadth of disposition is also mentioned, which indeed illustrated his faithfulness from another point of view, since his giving was not limited to those he knew but extended to those he did not know (v. 5).

Some particular recipients of his bounty are referred to in verse 6, and a journey is mentioned toward the expense of which he was contributing. All this is very realistic, and seems to bring the life of the church in the first century "up to date" as we sometimes say.

One or two facts, however, are given concerning the recipients of Gaius' gifts equally honoring to them (v. 7).

Look at the motive of their journey, "**His name's sake**," and look at the spirit actuating them "**taking nothing of the Gentiles**," i. e., the heathen.

Whatever the journey was, they might have been assisted in it pecuniarily by those who were not actuated by a love for and fidelity to His Name, but their conscience would not permit them to receive such aid. How valuable the instruction of this example. And what a close relationship it bears to the teaching of the second Epistle about fellowshiping with heretics. How should such loyal and self-denying workers as these be treated in the church, and why (v. 8)?

Worldly Character of Diotrephes

The third division of the Epistle deals with another type of the professing Christian and sets before us the worldly character of Diotrephes (vv.9-11).

- what seems to have been his besetting sin (v. 9)?
- what boldness on his part to have withstood even an apostle in such a way.
- how does this experience of John recall that of Paul in connection with the churches of Corinth, Galatia and Thessalonica?
- in what manner did John intend to deal with him (v. 10)?
- does this also recall anything similar in the exercise of apostolic authority on Paul's part?
- how does verse 10 further reveal the worldliness and insincerity of Diotrephes?
- what an awfully disagreeable, overbearing, autocratic, unholy man he must have been! How did he get into the church?

- what advice is given Gaius in verse 11?
- how does this verse testify to the relation between a living faith and good works?
- what opposite kind of example is set before him in verse 12?
- how many kinds of witnesses testify to the Christian character of Demetrius?

One cannot help wondering if this were the Demetrius of Acts 19. Such trophies of grace are by no means unusual, Paul was such an one.

Note the similarities in the conclusions of this Epistle and the one previously considered (vv. 13, 14), suggesting that they may have been penned at the same time.

~ end of Lesson 24 ~
