

Article of the Month – September 2013

Missiological Observations in the NT (18) – 2 & 3 John

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John exhorts his readers to approach each other with love and truth, of which he himself is an example.¹ Christ's love is a missionary's quality proof that He has sent him or her.²

The church which John addressed had probably been around for years, yet it was necessary to stress Christ's deity³ and to warn against those denying it.⁴ With this main theme John wants to stop false teaching. Even in well-disciplined churches heresy can creep in. As long as missionaries have influence in churches they planted, they should warn against the sowers of weeds,⁵ and their teaching.

John was positive and glad about 'some ... walking in the truth',⁶ implying that others in that church were not. He warns the straying sheep in general terms.⁷ He has no mercy on false teachers, whom he calls deceivers and antichrists.⁸ His radical language reminds us of the terms Jesus used against the Pharisees.⁹

John repeats his earlier call for obedience.¹⁰ He says: 'you will not be obedient unless you are convinced of its necessity. That only happens if you take personal responsibility, which is a characteristic of disciples who do not just 'hire' Christ as Savior but truly submit to Him as their Lord. Whoever falls short of this falls away when persecution hits.¹¹

John attacks the 'once-saved-always saved' teaching:¹² 'anyone who does not *continue* in the teaching of Christ does not have God'. It is possible to neglect that teaching by indifference or choice and lose your salvation. Early Gnosticism taught licentiousness and immorality, and that there is no reward for holy living because salvation cannot be lost. But salvation is for whoever stands firm to the end.¹³ Therefore, we should not conduct evangelism campaigns and then leave new believers to their own devices, because they are 'saved once and for all'. Such people may backslide when discipleship training lacks, and no longer believe.

¹ 2 John:1

² John 13:35 'By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another'

³ 2 John:3

⁴ :7-11

⁵ Matt. 13:24-30,36-43

⁶ 2 John :4

⁷ :8,9a,11

⁸ :7

⁹ Matt. 12:34; 15:7-9; 22:18;23

¹⁰ 2 John:6, compare with 1 John 2:3-6; 3:22,24; 5:3

¹¹ Matt. 13:5-7,20-22

¹² 2 John:9 (italics mine)

¹³ Matt. 10:22; 24:13

John is not saying that we should abandon normal courtesy towards people who claim to be Christians but who err in doctrine.¹⁴ When he says to not ‘take them into your house’ he means ‘don’t give them access to your church members’. This is in line with other verses.¹⁵ ‘Welcoming’ a false teacher means: agreeing with his teaching. Leaders who do not take a stand against false teachers become their accomplices.¹⁶

One of the joys of missionary work is the privilege to travel and meet people.¹⁷ According to John, oral contact is more effective for good relationships, than mere writing is.¹⁸

In his last letter we see some aspects of *missionary partnership*.¹⁹ The brothers John speaks about were sent out from his church in Ephesus and visited Gaius and his church on their way, thus keeping contact between both churches. These missionaries reported positively about Gaius’ spiritual life and how he had helped them. This help seems to have consisted of hospitality and facilitation in travel, whether financial, practical or both.²⁰

Although these laborers were strangers to Gaius, he didn’t feel they took him for a ride. On the contrary, he felt privileged to care for them. John’s words ‘you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers’²¹ indicates a reliable habit. Whether hospitality was Gaius’ *gift* we don’t know, but it was his *choice*. John encourages him to continue in it.²²

These missionaries had gone out to preach Jesus among Gentiles, from whom they received no help. Therefore they depended on help from God’s people.²³ John does not state that missionaries should refuse gifts from unbelievers. There are ‘sheep’ among them who will want to help missionaries,²⁴ with no strings attached. Such gifts can be received with gratitude and should be refused only when the giver tries to manipulate God’s workers by it. Of course certain gifts can be *designated* for specific purposes.

Speaking about partnership development in the wider Body of Christ, he uses the word ‘we’. *We* are supposed to work together for the truth.²⁵ This includes the missionaries, John’s church as sender and Gaius’ church as local facilitator. If all three parties contribute what they can, true missionary partnership has developed.

Unfortunately some churches have a ‘Diotrephes’ in their midst: someone who resists missionary work.²⁶ Diotrephes’ resistance had a very hostile nature. He ‘loved to be first, would have nothing to do with us, gossiped maliciously and refused to welcome the brothers’. His enmity and aggression was so big toward those who accommodated missionaries, that he

¹⁴ 2 John:10

¹⁵ :1,13

¹⁶ :11

¹⁷ :12

¹⁸ See also 3 John:14

¹⁹ :3-8

²⁰ :3,5,6a,7a,6,8a

²¹ :5

²² :6b

²³ :7,8

²⁴ Matt. 25:32-40

²⁵ 3 John:8

²⁶ :9,10

excommunicated them. John decided to visit and not let this ulcer rot deeper, so that further damage to the church could be avoided.