

25.1 The Pastoral Letters of John, discussion

1A. The pastoral orientation of the three letters

1 John has no typical letter like opening; it begins in this way: 'That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands...³we proclaim also to you.

Still, it is clearly a pastoral letter to a particular church (or churches) because of the personal (2.14, I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one) and historical references (2.19, They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us).

2 John has no personal references, but John clearly directs the letter to a particular church: The elder to the elect lady and her children (2 Jn. 1.1); The children of your elect sister greet you (2 Jn. 1.13). He addresses the church as a lady (the elect lady) and he sends greetings to her from her sister (her elect sister). The elect people of God are children of God within sister churches; this is similar to Israel as a woman and the church as a bride. The contents of the letter deal with community/congregational issues not individual/family matters.

3 John has personal references: he writes to Gaius (1.1) regarding the wrongs of Diotrephes (1.9) and the good example of Demetrius (1.12).

Conclusion: these writings are *letters* from the apostle as *pastor* (the elder).

Q: What lesson does this language (elect, lady, sister, and children) give us? *The church is a family of brothers and sisters, both locally and intra-locally.*

2A. The pastoral concern of the three letters

There is a hard fact that each letter addresses: it is the fact that church life of God's elect people (people who live in fellowship with God) has many difficulties and challenges to face; the church is a mixed bag; church business can be messy business.

At the core, the hard fact indicated in each book is the presence (not only the existence) of false teachers, bad theology (heretical, damnable theology), and arrogant leadership (power corrupts; *sinful people* corrupt even the authority God ordains for church leadership).

Q: What important lesson (or lessons) should we draw from the hard fact of these difficulties and challenges? *Expect difficulties: the walk of Christians together as the church is not a bed of roses. We are to be on the alert against sins in theology and leadership. This is a call to learn the gospel, to know Christ better, and to test what we hear (cf. the qualifications of those in leadership and how those qualifications are put into the hands of the members).*

3A. The pastoral warnings of the three letters

3 John warns of those who love to be first. What is the specific antidote?

2 John warns of those who deny the incarnation. What is the specific antidote (4-11) rooted in what (6)?

1 John warns of those who profess but do not possess the truth (2.19). To separate believers from the world (of unbelievers), John offers three tests; they are belief in the incarnation, righteousness of life, and love.

Q: What is the value of taking these cautions by these tests to heart for ourselves rather than applying them to the other guy? *Schilder, Christ on Trial, 183, makes this comment: "He is that devil who refers the standards of law to others and not to himself."*