

The Dangerous Way Many Believers Misinterpret 3 John

In the context of current American politics, the short New Testament epistles of 2 and 3 John could almost be seen as “leaked memos” to the early Christian church. Consider these comparisons found in 3 John:

- The short epistle was like a “classified memo” written by an unnamed author, who commended certain church leaders but bluntly criticized another.
- Its brief 14 verses never indicate they were to be read to or by anyone other than the single-named recipient.
- Certain verses have been “cherry picked” and appropriated out of context by some modern-day teachers to underscore their own theological agendas.

One modern-day teacher seems to ignore hermeneutical principles of biblical interpretation when he quotes from the King James Version and mistakenly states:

“God says, ‘Beloved I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth’ (3 John 2). This is God’s ‘big wish’ for us—His children—that we may prosper and be in health, even as our souls prosper!”

He then misappropriates the “straw man” argument he has created by urging that we speak and claim a special mantra, “Daily speak it boldly: ‘God gives me wealth and health!’”

These teachers misapply the simple, gracious greeting by the unnamed author to a single individual, named Gaius, whom the author says he truly loved. To this “beloved” one, the memo’s writer wishes good health and general well-being, as was a common practice and greeting in written communication.

The Greek word used here for “health” is *hugiano* (Strong’s

#5198), which is a root word for “hygiene” and “hygienic” and means “to be sound in body and in good health.” It is used metaphorically elsewhere in the epistles to relate to sound doctrine and soundness in the faith.

Pastor Jack Hayford says verse 2 was a model of intercession giving us “a warrant for praying for the physical, the material and the spiritual well-being of others.” But, it is not a universal promise of God for the wealth and health of all believers and at all times.

It is not to be understood, as many “prosperity-gospel-preachers” proclaim, that “God wants His children to prosper.” Instead, the writer of 3 John is praying for the temporal prosperity and physical health of his beloved friend, Gaius.

In verses 5-8, Gaius was commended for his generosity and hospitality to itinerant gospel workers. In this way, he showed his love for the mission of the church, beyond his own local setting. He received these traveling missionaries and sent them “along on their journey in a manner worthy of God” (v. 6). His partnership with these ministers enabled them to avoid any appearance of impropriety or unworthy motives.

To twist the loving affirmation of “the Elder,” who was writing this short “memo” to his friend Gaius, to become an unbalanced, selfish quest for personal prosperity and perpetual health is unbecoming to any true believer.

Even the apostle Paul said “... I have learned in whatever state I am to be content. I know both how to face humble circumstances and how to have abundance. Everywhere and in all things I have learned the secret, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things because of Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:11-13).