

3 JOHN

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I. **3 Jn. 1** – *The elder, to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.*

A. 3 John is written by the Apostle John to a dear friend of his named Gaius. Gaius was a common name in the Greco-Roman world. Reference is made elsewhere in the New Testament to a Gaius who was a Macedonian (Acts 19:29), a Gaius from the town of Derbe (Acts 20:4), and a Gaius who lived in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:14; Rom. 16:23). There is no way to know if the Gaius to whom John wrote was one of those mentioned elsewhere.

B. John loves him "in truth," meaning as one who continues in the truth of Jesus Christ as preached from the beginning. Gaius is holding firm to the apostolic doctrine and living accordingly.

II. **3 Jn. 2-4** - *Beloved, I pray that you may get along well in everything and be in good health, just as your soul is getting along well. ³For I rejoiced greatly at the coming of the brothers and their testifying to your truth, [namely] how you are walking in the truth. ⁴I do not have greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.*

A. John's affection for Gaius is emphasized by his again referring to him as "beloved" (and yet again in vv. 5 and 11). He prays for God's blessings in Gaius's life generally, in everything, and for Gaius's physical health. We readily pray such prayers for those we love, those to whom we feel especially close. We ask God to protect them, to bring good things into their lives, and to see them through all circumstances in a way that strengthens and blesses them.

B. He acknowledges Gaius's faithfulness and spiritual health by saying he's praying that his circumstances and *physical* health may go as well as his spiritual life is going. And then he immediately explains how he knows that Gaius is doing so well spiritually. He knows because some brothers had visited him and had testified to the truth about Gaius, which is that he is "walking in the truth."

C. As I said last week, "walking in the truth" meaning living in the light of the truth that Jesus is Lord. Gaius is abiding in the gospel of Christ and living the implications of that faith, living consistently with the truth he professes. In Paul's words in Phil. 1:27, Gaius was conducting himself in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

D. John says he rejoiced *greatly* over this news. It was no doubt especially sweet to hear because of the threats to faith that were circulating in John's area. Then as now there are forces at work to pull believers from the truth, to lure them into abandoning what they once believed, so it is such a great thing to hear that a beloved brother or sister from your past is still "keepin' on keepin' on."

E. And that joy is multiplied when it is someone you have had a hand in leading to Christ or with whom you have some special relationship in terms of their spiritual welfare, someone you relate to as your spiritual child. John says he has no greater joy than to receive this kind of news. Implicit in this is John's desire for Gaius to continue to give him joy by continuing to walk in the truth regarding the request he is about to make.

III. 3 Jn. 5-8 – *Beloved, you act faithfully in whatever you do for the brothers, even though they are strangers. ⁶They testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. ⁷For they went out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the pagans. ⁸Therefore, we ought to support such men so that we may be co-workers in the truth.*

A. John praises Gaius for having on previous occasions shown hospitality to missionaries from John's community. Even though they were strangers, people unknown to Gaius, he took them in.

1. In the ancient Mediterranean world, extending hospitality involved not only providing food and housing but also becoming a guarantor of the visitors to the rest of the community. By receiving them as your guests you vouched for them to the community, so there was a significant risk to one's own standing and reputation. That is why letters of recommendation were so important.

2. This kind of hospitality was crucial in the spread of the gospel. Inns were unpleasant and dangerous places to stay, so Christians depended on the hospitality of fellow Christians as they went about preaching the gospel.

B. The prior recipients of Gaius's hospitality had testified to it "before the church," which may suggest it was done during a congregational assembly. And note that the act of showing hospitality to the missionaries is described as Gaius's "love." In doing this for them he had loved them, he had risked and sacrificed for their welfare and blessing.

C. At v. 6b the focus shifts from praising Gaius for the past hospitality he had shown to the brothers to requesting that he continue in that same vein by showing hospitality to the stranger Demetrius (and whoever else accompanied him) who had now arrived at his place with this letter. This shift in focus is marked by the change to the future tense ("You *will do* well to send them on their way").

D. The expression "to send them on their way" uses a verb that functioned as a technical term for missionary support in the early church (Acts 15:3; Rom. 15:24; 1 Cor. 16:6, 11; 2 Cor. 1:16; and Tit. 3:13). John requests that he do so ("you will do well" often served as an idiom that meant something comparable to our "please") in "a manner worthy of God." This means in a way that God would approve, a way that respects and validates the dedication of these brothers to the cause of Christ.

E. He explains in v. 7 that they should be supported that way because they went out for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ, to preach his name, the truth of who he is, and to bring people

to faith. In doing so, they had no help from pagans, non-Christians, and thus were completely dependent on the Christian community, people like Gaius, for hospitality. John is describing who these brothers are who have arrived at Gaius's door.

F. Given the greatness of the work in which these men are engaging, John says in v. 9 that we as Christians ought to support them, provide the necessary hospitality for them, so that we may be co-workers with them in the truth of Christ. Just as providing hospitality to a heretic makes one a sharer in his wicked work (2 Jn. 11), so providing hospitality to faithful missionaries makes one a sharer in his glorious work. As Christians, we ought to get in on this Christ-honoring work.

IV. 3 Jn. 9-10 – *I wrote something to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be the boss among them, does not pay attention to us. ¹⁰So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, spreading evil words against us. And not being content with those things, he also does not welcome the brothers and forbids those who want to do so and puts them out of the church.*

A. John had written earlier to a church near the Christian community to which Gaius belonged. In that congregation was a man named Diotrephes who apparently had some sort of leadership role in the group. He rejected John's authority, refusing to pay attention to what John had written. Perhaps he was a casualty of the theological confusion being sown by the false teachers, but the reason for his rejection of John's authority is not specified.

B. And to make matters worse, when missionaries from John's community sought hospitality in Diotrephes's congregation, Diotrephes treated them like heretics! The fact they no doubt were accompanied by an introductory letter similar to 3 John did not matter because Diotrephes did not accept John as a reliable source of testimony.

C. Diotrephes not only refused to welcome the missionaries himself, but he forbid anyone else from doing so and even put out of the church those who *wanted* to do so, presumably by claiming they were thereby offering support to heresy. So it looks like Diotrephes was doing to the true and faithful Christians what John had instructed the Christians in 2 John to do to heretics.

D. But this is not a case of what is good for the goose is good for the gander, a situation in which every claim is as good or as valid as another. There is a truth, and the fact of the matter is that John is standing with God and Diotrephes is not. So John is a courageous champion of truth, whereas Diotrephes is an arrogant or confused churchman with delusions of apostolic grandeur.

E. Now we sometimes analogize a bossy elder, preacher, or church member to Diotrephes, but that's fair only to a point. Yes, Diotrephes "loved to be first" or as I have translated it "loved to be the boss," but the real problem with Diotrephes is that his bossy spirit was employed in the rejection of apostolic authority. He opposed the truth of God, no doubt thinking he was not, tried to rally people to his erroneous viewpoint by slandering John, and imposed his error on those he failed to persuade. So it's a bigger and deeper problem than simply

insisting on his own way. Truth cannot be taken out of the analysis, a point which goes down hard in our post-modern world.

F. John says that if he comes he will confront Diotrephes about his trashing of him and those who are faithful to the gospel he preaches. Love speaks the truth, and John will not remain silent in service to some false notion that confronting people is unloving.

V. Jn. 3:11-12 – *Beloved, do not imitate the evil but the good. The one who does good is from God; the one who does evil has not seen God.* ¹²*Demetrius has been favorably testified to by everyone, even by the truth itself; and we also testify, and you know that our testimony is true.*

A. John warns his dear friend Gaius not to imitate the evil being done by Diotrephes but rather to imitate the good, which in this context probably refers to continuing to be John's ally and welcoming those sent out by him, specifically Demetrius. Perhaps John is concerned that Gaius may "go wobbly" under the force of Diotrephes's influence and personality.

B. Doing good is a character trait of those born of God; it flows from that relationship. Conversely, the one who does evil has not seen God, meaning he has no knowledge, awareness, or understanding of him. This is a not so veiled reference to Diotrephes who probably rejects John's authority in God's name when in truth he is clueless regarding God.

C. This puts the stakes in John's appeal on a different level. More is involved than simply refusing hospitality.

D. In v. 12 John introduces and recommends Demetrius, who is almost certainly carrying the letter. He says everyone speaks well of Demetrius, and adds that he is spoken well of even by the truth itself. That probably means that the truth of the gospel, both its propositions and its ethical implications, speaks favorably of Demetrius by virtue of his conformity to it. In other words, that objective truth stands as a witness to the kind of man he is.

E. John adds to the commendation that he and those in his immediate circle also vouch for Demetrius's commitment and character. And regarding their testimony, he says Gaius knows they speak the truth.

VI. Jn. 3:13-14 – *I had many things to write to you, but I do not want to write to you by means of ink and pen.* ¹⁴*Rather, I hope to see you very soon, and we will speak face to face. Peace to you. The friends here greet you. Greet the friends there by name.*

A. John hopes to visit Gaius soon, but that will depend, of course, on whether Gaius remains loyal and receives Demetrius and whoever else may be with him. That may be why he says in v. 10 "if I come."

B. The friends of Gaius who are with John send their greetings to him, and John asks Gaius to pass on his greetings to John's friends who are near Gaius. So they clearly have a number of mutual friends.