

Notes on Third John

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Notes from e-Sword Bible Program

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Introduction

3rd JOHN

Third John

The third letter, like the other two, deals with their love for the Lord, His Word, and their love for one another from a very practical point of view. All of John's epistles draw a sharp line of distinction between truth and error, light and darkness, and love and hatred.

Recipient of 3rd John: This is a very personal letter addressed to "Gaius, the beloved whom I love in the truth" (v.1). We do not know which Gaius this may be (cf. [Acts 19:29](#); [Acts 20:4](#); [Romans 16:23](#); [1 Corinthians 1:14](#)). Some early writers mention a Gaius, not referred to in the scriptures, who had been ordained a "bishop" of Pergamos by John but we do not know that such is reliable.

Message: The letter focuses on showing hospitality and giving support to those traveling evangelists who were faithfully preaching the truth. Gaius had received them with hospitality while Diotrephes, a self-assertive leader in one of the churches, had refused to receive them. Whether Gaius and Diotrephes were members of the same congregation or sister congregations is unknown.

Traveling preachers, perhaps sent by John, had visited the church and a leader there named Diotrephes had spoken against the Apostle John and had stood against those who had received them.

The only reason given for his conduct was that he "loved to have the preeminence." John condemned this haughty and selfish ambition and the envy and jealousy it stirred up in his heart as reflected in his wicked treatment of both John and other brethren.

Rejection of Apostolic authority and instruction is a destructive attitude and alienates a man from God ([1 John 4:6](#)).

Outline of the Book:

John expresses his love for Gaius (1) and assures him of his prayers (2), tells him his joy over his standing for the truth (3-4), commends him for his hospitality and fellowship toward faithful brethren (5-6), encourages him to continue to do so in spite of Diotrephes (7-9).

John informs Gaius of his intended visit to deal with Diotrephes (9-10), commends Demetrius to him (11-12), and gives assurance that he intends to visit him and talk with him face to face and tell him many things he could not write (13-14).

This third letter, as John's other epistles, was evidently written toward the end of John's ministry in the area of Asia Minor in the decade of the 60's or 70's. It gives us a view of life in a congregation of that period.

LESSONS:

1. These two epistles together serve to warn us against fellowshiping false teachers and supporting them in their error.

2. They also encourage us to extend hospitality and support to those who preach the truth.

3. There is a sever warning for leaders who let their position go to their head and seek the "preeminence" instead of supporting faithful preachers preaching the truth.

3rd John Overview

1–4 Like Second John, Third John follows the conventions of ancient letter writing. However, the situations reflected in the two books differ slightly. John is writing to the same community, but in 3 John he addresses matters of hospitality rather than false teaching (compare note on 2 John 1–4). John greets and blesses Gaius, whom he petitions for hospitality on behalf of fellow laborers for the gospel.

5–8 In this section, John elicits support from Gaius for missionaries traveling to him—encouraging Gaius to help further the mission of Jesus’ gospel.

9–12 In this section, John notes Diotrephes’ refusal to help missionaries on an earlier visit. John also promises to deal with Diotrephes when he comes to the community.

13–15 In this closing section, John mentions his travel plans and offers a benediction (see 2 John 12–13 and note).

3Jn 1:1

3John 1:1 The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.

vs 1-4 Address and Commendation

This Epistle, like the Second, and most others in N.T., has a definite address, but of a very short and simple kind: (compare. [James 1:1](#).) It has no proper greeting, and the prayer expressed in [3 John 1:2](#) taking its place.

3 John he addresses matters of hospitality rather than false teaching. John greets and blesses Gaius, whom he petitions for hospitality on behalf of fellow laborers for the gospel.

elder --

1) Term used as a title for the Apostles. In the 1st and 2nd centuries, i.e., "The ancient ones." EGT p.160 "The second generation of Christians used it of their predecessors "the men of early day."

Papias uses it this way of Apostles in the 2nd century where we would say "the Apostle John" he said "the elder John."

2) Used in Jesus; day for city officials.

3) Used for synagogue rulers.

4) Used in the N.T. for overseers, bishops, of the church, indicating they were older men.

Gaius -- One of the most common names in all of the Roman Empire. Three in the N.T. 1) Gaius of Macedonia, [Acts 19:29](#); 2) Gaius of Derbe, [Acts 20:4](#); 3) Gaius of Corinth, [Romans 16:23](#), [1 Corinthians 1:14](#).

The name is so common this *Gaius* may be altogether a different one. Based on the context of the rest of the letter, it seems that he was known for his hospitality and support of the apostolic mission (3 John 3).

It is usually assumed that he was a member of a church somewhere in the Roman province of Asia while John was laboring in the vicinity of Ephesus.

well beloved -- "The beloved" gives a common sentiment respecting Gaius: this clause expresses the Apostle's own feeling.

"Beloved" is repeated often in this Epistle, indicating strong affection ([3 John 1:1-2](#), [3 John 1:5](#), [3 John 1:11](#)).

I -- ἐγὼ emphatic in the Greek.

in truth -- It means "in all Christian sincerity" as opposed to a hypocritical expression of love.

3 John 1:2

3John 1:2 Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul.

3 John 1:2 2–4. Personal Good Wishes and Sentiments

I pray concerning all things -- This serves as John's greeting as he expresses concern for John's health.

prosper -- **G2137**. The word occurs only here and in [Romans 1:10](#) and [1 Corinthians 16:2](#), but frequently in the LXX. Originally the word meant to have "a prosperous [successful] journey" as in [Romans 1:10](#), but came to speak of one's success in daily life.

This is a typical opening prayer in the Greco-Roman world of the first century. It was never meant to be a proof-text for "health, wealth, and prosperity" preachers. - Utley

and be in health -- Bodily health is considered a chief element in all prosperity: [Luke 7:10](#); [Luke 15:27](#); cf.. [Luke 5:31](#). However, we should not conclude from these good wishes that Gaius had been ailing.

Much like today, asking about one's health is a common greeting.

even as it goes well with your soul -- This indicates that John knew this man well to equate his physical health with his spiritual health. The wording of the statement indicate Gaius is faithful to the truth of the gospel.

3 John 1:3

3 John 1:3 For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth.

when brothers came and testified -- Repeatedly, not on one particular occasion. "The itinerant brethren were always at work, going out from Ephesus on their missions and returning with their reports." [EGT](#).

The phrase indicates that Christians continually praised Gaius' exemplary obedience to the fundamentals of the faith. His spiritual reputation was well known. - MSB

Behind this verse we see the flow of Christians between the early churches. There was obviously a lively flow of persons between the church where Gaius was a member and the elder's community. Moreover, these men appear to be reporting to the elder as a normal and expected activity. They tell him about Gaius's faithfulness to Christian truth as well as about his sincerity and faithfulness in his daily living. In [3 John 1:5-8](#) the elder specifies the conduct he has in mind. Nowhere in this letter, however, does he refer to the theological issue before the church.

walking in the truth -- The author commends Gaius for his commitment to the truth of the gospel and for showing hospitality (see [3 John 1:5-6](#)).

Gaius' walk matched his talk. His reputation for practicing what he preached was exemplary ([2 John 1:4](#)). John's commendation of him is one of the greatest given in the NT, since the commendation centers not only in the fact that he knew the truth but that he faithfully practiced it. Gaius' actions were in stark contrast to Diotrephes' negative reputation ([3 John 1:10](#)). - MSB

Question: What is meant by "walking" in truth? Answer: They were guiding their lives and living according to God's Word.

3 John 1:4

3 John 1:4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

no greater joy -- In the Greek '*greater*' is put first for emphasis, and this is worth preserving; *Greater joy have I none than this*.

joy -- G5479, John seems to have a personal affection for Gaius which is magnified from his personal conduct ([Luke 6:46](#)).

my children -- Often a reference to one's converts, and may implication that Gaius was one of John's converts. However, this is a common designation in John's letters (cf. [1 John 2:12-13](#); [1 John 2:18](#); [1 John 2:28](#); [1 John 3:7](#); [1 John 3:18](#); [1 John 4:4](#); [1 John 5:21](#)).

The word "**my**" is emphatic in the original. John's heart delighted in the proper conduct of his spiritual children in the faith. He had strong fatherly affection for them (cf. [1 Corinthians 4:14-16](#); [1 Thessalonians 2:11](#); [1 Thessalonians 3:1-10](#)).

children -- τέκνα G5043. We do not know if Gaius was John's child physically, spiritually (his convert), or metaphorically. The last usage of this word is the most common one in the New Testament. In this case he could have been a disciple of John or simply a younger believer (cf. [2 John 1:4](#); [1 Timothy 1:2](#)).

walking in the truth -- There is no more important news he can receive, no greater joy he can experience, than that his own "children" (i.e., his own converts to the faith) are living in faithfulness "to the truth."

3 John 1:5

3 John 1:5 Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are,

Beloved -- The affectionate address marks a new section, vs. 5-8.

The good report, which caused the Apostle such joy, testified in particular to the Christian hospitality of Gaius.

faithful (thing) -- The *elder* now speaks more particularly of Gaius' acts of generous hospitality, and says that he had fully conducted himself as a Christian ought. Gaius was constant and untiring in his *efforts*.

efforts -- The same verb is rendered *work* in [2 John 1:8](#).

for these brothers, [and unto] strangers as they are -- The *brothers* were Christians who were well known to him. The *strangers* were probably Christians who bore only a letter of commendation from the elder. Compare the [Romans 12:13](#) and [Hebrews 13:2](#). The reference concerns especially itinerant gospel preachers that Gaius aided on their journeys.

Likely Gaius's actions were in contrast to what others in his church did, and he may have incurred their displeasure. Although hospitality was required of all Christians ([Matthew 10:10](#); [Romans 12:13](#); [1 Timothy 3:2](#); [1 Timothy 5:10](#); [Hebrews 13:2](#)), it was sometimes necessary to refuse it ([2 John 1:10](#)).

Question: What did Gaius do for brethren and strangers?

What is the difference between the "brethren" and the "strangers"? ["brethren" a reference to Christians, is "strangers" to non-Christians, or outsiders.]

3 John 1:6

3 John 1:6 who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God.

who testified to your love -- Gaius' reputation for hospitality and kindness (as well as obedience— [3 John 1:3](#)) was also well known throughout the churches in the region.

Before appealing to Gaius for support, John praises the reputation that Gaius has made for himself by being hospitable and showing good will to traveling missionaries.

before the church -- Some traveling brothers had reported to the church of their engagement with Gaius and how he has entertained them, perhaps risking his standing in his local church community. On returning, their testimony before the whole church, had increased the elder's pride in "his son in the faith."

the church here -- was most likely in Ephesus, where John was probably staying. Ephesus was an important port city in the province of Asia, and the fourth-largest city in the Roman empire. It became an important city for the Christian community ([Acts 18:19 – 19:41](#); [1 Timothy 1:3](#); [1 Peter 1:1](#); [Revelation 2:1-7](#)) - NLTSE

you will do well -- John encouraged Gaius to keep practicing hospitality, especially because of the actions of Diotrephes who conducted a heavy-handed campaign against it ([3 John 1:10](#)).

send them on their journey -- Refers to giving missionaries support and meeting their needs, possibly including lodging, sustenance, and monetary support.

send them on their way -- A technical term for providing material support (cf. [Romans 15:24](#); [1 Corinthians 16:6](#), [1 Corinthians 16:11](#); [2 Corinthians 1:16](#); [Titus 3:13](#)).

It seems that these brothers had again returned to Gaius, perhaps carrying letters from the elder; and they again needed Christian hospitality. The admonition to send them on their way "in a manner worthy of God" shows the supreme importance assigned to hospitality. The phrase probably means that the traveling brothers were to be recognized as servants of God and supported as such. In such instances, Christians were to provide hospitality as if the Lord himself were being welcomed (cf. [John 13:20](#); [Galatians 4:1-15](#); [Hebrews 13:2](#)). - EBCNT

in a manner worthy of God -- Cf. [Colossians 1:10](#); [1 Thessalonians 2:12](#). The phrase has the connotation of treating people as God would treat them (see [Matthew 10:40](#)), and becomes the key manner in which hospitality should be practiced ([Matthew 25:40-45](#)).

3 John 1:7

3 John 1:7 For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles.

for they have gone out -- The traveling brothers went preaching and teaching the gospel of Christ. They were doing "missionary" work without begging for support from non-Christians.

They were sent out by either the church where the elder was or a church known to the elder and Gaius.

his names sake -- Refers to the name of Christ ([Acts 5:41](#); [1 John 2:12](#); [1 John 3:23](#); [1 John 5:13](#)). This is a mark of what they represent and identifies them with the Christian evangelistic movement of the first century.

accepting nothing from the Gentiles -- The first-century believers desired for missionary efforts to be funded solely by the Christian community, so that missionaries did not have to request support from the unreached people they were sharing the gospel with.

the Gentiles -- Those who didn't know God or Christ.

3 John 1:8

3 John 1:8 Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.

Therefore -- Paul give several reasons why Christians ought to support missionaries.

we ought to support people like these -- John aligns himself with missionaries and gives 3 reasons why Gaius should do the same.

- (1) These preachers had gone out "for the sake of the Name" (v. 7).
- (2) These preachers depended on the Christian community for hospitality because they received no help from the pagans (v. 7).
- (3) By so doing Gaius will be working together with these preachers for the truth of the gospel.

such -- These journeying preachers.

that we may be fellow workers -- By assisting missionaries, Christians become part of the larger effort of the gospel reaching the world.

for the truth -- John gives several grounds for practicing hospitality in a "manner worthy of God."

First, one must show hospitality to those who have pure motives. These itinerant missionaries went out "for the sake of the name" (v. 7; cf. [Romans 1:5](#)). They must be doing their ministry for God's glory not their own.

Second, one must show hospitality to those who are not in ministry for money. Since the missionaries were "taking nothing from the Gentiles" (v. 7), the church was their only means of support. They were free from avarice ([2 Corinthians 2:17](#); [1 Timothy 5:17-18](#)).

Third, those who show hospitality participate in the ministries of those to whom hospitality is shown (v. 8). Verse 8 gives the same reason to demonstrate hospitality to genuine teachers as does [2 John 1:10](#) in forbidding hospitality toward false teachers, i.e., that those who extend hospitality share in the deeds (i.e., good or bad) of those receiving it. - MSB

■ 3 John 1:9

3 John 1:9 I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority.

I have written [wrote] -- Probably with a request that the church receive and help these men on their journey.

to the church -- John apparently had written a previous letter to the church, perhaps on the subject of hospitality, but such letter has not been preserved. Perhaps Diotrephes never read it to the church because he rejected John's appeal (cf. [3 John 1:9-10](#)).

but Diotrephes -- Diotrephes apparently ignored this writing (see the final clause in this verse; compare [3 John 1:10](#)).

who like to put himself first -- Diotrephes was apparently a usurper of authority. John may also be describing Diotrephes' concern for his own needs—he did not want to share his resources with others.

loves to have the preeminence - [G5383](#); The word “preeminence” has the idea of “desiring to be first.” It conveys the idea of someone who is selfish, self-centered, and self-seeking. The language suggests a self-promoting demagogue, who served no one, but wanted all to serve only him. Diotrephes' actions directly contradict Jesus' and the NT's teaching on servant-leadership in the church (cf. [Matthew 20:20-28](#); [Philippians 2:5-11](#); [1 Timothy 3:3](#); [1 Peter 5:3](#)). - MSB

does not acknowledge our authority -- Literally, *"is not receiving us,"* [ἐπιδεχεται](#) [G1926](#). Diotrephes showed the opposite of kindness and hospitality to God's servants that Gaius had showed. The tense indicates he is not receptive to the missionaries who had John's endorsement.

For translators to use the term "authority" here tends to give the idea that John's church (probably at Ephesus) had a diocese or position of authority over the churches in the Asia area.

■ 3 John 1:10

3 John 1:10 So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.

So if I come -- "Wherefore" The "if" clause means potential action, without assurance of the yes or no. But the last verse [3 John 1:14](#) he express his hope to see Gaius soon.

I will bring up what he is doing -- "I will call attention to his deeds"

John wants to clearly delineate this man's motives (cf. v. 9) and actions (cf. v. 10):

1. **NASB** - "unjustly accusing us with wicked words"
NKJV - "prating against us with malicious words"
NRSV - "spreading false charges against us"

ESV - "talking wicked nonsense against us"

TEV - "the terrible things he says about us and the lies he tells"

NJB - "the wicked accusations he has been circulating against us"

2. "he himself does not receive the brethren"
 3. "he forbids those who desire to do so"
 4. "he puts *them* out of the church"
- (- Uteley)

talking wicked nonsense -- λ γοις πονηρο ς φλυαρ ν ἡμ ς·

λογις [G3056] words, speech, discourse;

πονηροις [G4190] with maliciousness, wicked, evil

φλυαρων [G5396] prating against [Thayer: 1) to utter nonsense, talk idly, prate; 2) to bring forward idle accusations, make empty charges; 3) to accuse one falsely with malicious words]

ημας us;

The NKJV seems to render the phrase more literally and accurately while the NASB gives a good translations also.

disparaging us with evil words -- the nature of these evil words is unknown. Diotrephes is apparently undermining John's apostolic authority and perhaps also that of other elders. - FSB

not content with that -- Not satisfied with just speaking against the missionaries, he went further than just failing to show hospitality himself.

he refuses to welcome the brothers -- Apparently he was asked to do so on an earlier trip. Diotrephes showed no hospitality or Christian love.

and stops those who want to -- Not only did he not show hospitality but he did what he could to prevent others from showing hospitality or helping the missionaries who came to them with John's approval.

and puts them out of the church -- The exact meaning of this is uncertain, as we have not sufficient knowledge of the circumstances. The natural meaning is that Diotrephes had sufficient influence in the congregation there to keep it from receiving brethren of whom he did not approve.

Diotrephes may have been using John's words against false teachers in 2 John against the missionaries and John himself (see [2 John 1:10](#) and note; [2 John 1:11](#) and note).

The Greek doesn't indicate he succeeded, but certainly he tried to exclude from the fellowship of the church, either the missionaries or those who would extend hospitality to them. ("If this ancient "church-boss" did not succeed in expelling John's adherents from the church, he certainly tried to do it." - RWP)

"The verb *ekballei*, in the present tense again (literally, 'he throws out'), need not imply formal excommunication from the Church, as this became known later. Cf [Mat 18:17](#); [Luke 6:22](#); [John 9:34-35](#); [1 Corinthians 5:2](#). On the other hand, it seems as if Diotrephes had already arrogated to himself the task of 'expulsion,' and was actually driving people out of the congregation (as he had refused to welcome the brothers) rather than merely desiring to do so . . ." (Smalley, p. 358)

See *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* for a fuller treatment of the "Complaints Against Diotrephes"

3 John 1:11

3 John 1:11 Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God.

Beloved, -- The address again marks transition to a new subject, but without any abrupt change. The behavior of Diotrephes will at least serve as a warning.

do not imitate evil but imitate good. -- The word for *'evil'* is not that used in the previous verse (*πονηρός*), but a word which is the most common in the Greek language to express the idea of 'bad,' but is rarely used by the apostle John (*κακός*).

imitate -- For *'imitate'* compare [2 Thessalonians 3:7](#); [2 Thessalonians 3:9](#); [Hebrews 13:7](#) : the word occurs nowhere else in N.T.

Whoever does good is from God -- He shows that he resembles God, for God continually does good. See the sentiment explained in the notes at [1 John 3:7](#).

whoever does evil has not seen God. -- The false teachers claimed to know God intimately but lived godless and loveless lives.

Consider [1 John 3:6](#). Of course doing good and doing evil are to be understood in a wide sense: the particular cases of granting and refusing hospitality to missionary brethren are no longer specially in question.

3 John 1:12

3 John 1:12 Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself. We also add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true.

Demetrius -- As with Gaius, Demetrius was a very common name in the Roman world ([Acts 19:24](#)). Nothing is known of him apart from this epistle.

1) He may have been one of the traveling preachers John wrote about, 2) or Demetrius may have been the bearer of this letter to Gaus, and either way, John speaks to his good character.

Whether he is one of the other men with the same name is the scriptures is not certain, but probably not.

A few have thought that Demetrius is Demas mentioned by Paul in [Colossians 4:14](#), [Philemon 1:24](#) and [2 Timothy 4:10](#). Demas is a shortened form of Demetrius. Again, if this be true, the witness would certainly be necessary after what Paul had written about him.

has received a good testimony [witness] from everyone, -- Whoever this Demetrius was the whole church knew of him and bore a good testimony to him.

and from the truth itself. -- It seems likely that the term is meant to refer to the truth of the Gospel as opposed to the error of gnosticism. Demetrius' stand for the truth in the face of his falsehood would indeed mark him as a genuine Christian.

We also add our testimony [witness], -- John is the third witness on Demetrius' behalf. The apostle expects Gaius to take his word for Demetrius' character. It is to be hoped that now as well as then, the word of an inspired apostle is enough for any on

and you know that our testimony [witness] is true. -- This is in the manner of John, who always spoke of himself as having such character for truth that no one who knew him would call it in question. Every Christian should have such a character; every man might if he would. cf/ [John 19:35](#); [John 21:24](#).

3 John 1:13

3 John 1:13 I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink.

I had much to write to you, -- 'I had' is imperfect: at the time of my writing there were many things which I had to communicate to you.

This Epistle closes, as the second does, with a statement that he had many things to say, but that he preferred waiting until he should see him rather than put them on paper.

but I would rather not -- "I wish not ... to write." He wishes instead to talk with Gaius "face to face." ([3 John 1:14](#)).

write with pen and ink. -- See [2 John 1:12](#).

In the Second Epistle we had '*with paper and ink.*' The word for 'pen' (κάλαμος) occurs in this sense nowhere else in N. T. It signifies the reed, *calamus*, commonly used for the purpose. In LXX. of [Psalms 44:2](#), 'My tongue is the pen of a ready writer', the same word is used; so also in [Matthew 11:7](#) and [Revelation 11:1](#), but in the sense of reed, not of pen.

3 John 1:14

3 John 1:14 I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. 1:15 Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends, every one of them.

I hope [trust] to see you soon [shortly] --

shortly see thee -- From verse 10, The third-class condition (ἐὰν ἔλθω, *ean elthō*) seems to be used by the author to indicate real uncertainty on his part as to whether he will visit Diotrephes' church or not. But it may be that Gaius would himself be traveling to meet with the writer at some location.

face to face -- Literally "mouth to mouth." (Used for speaking face to face ([2 John 1:12](#); [3 John 1:14](#); Sept. [Numbers 12:8](#) [cf. [Jeremiah 32:4](#)]).

[A few translations put the following comment into a new verse, verse 15.]

Peace be to you -- This is obviously a reference to the Hebraic idiom *shalom* (cf. [Luke 10:5](#)). It can mean "hello" or "good-bye."

Greet the friends -- Or, "Our friends greet you."

friends -- A title seldom used in the New Testament.

every one one them -- "Greet the friends by name."

The Greek may well be translated, "our friends [here] greet you, greet our friends [there] by name."

