

The Third Epistle of John

John's third letter is written to a man called **Gaius** (meaning 'on earth' or 'land-holder'). Certain **brethren** had been sent by John on missionary journeys to propagate the truth and Gaius is encouraged to continue in his work of hospitality towards them (v.5). **Demetrius** was one such teacher, and the bearer of the letter, who is highly commended (v.12). It would seem that initially **John** wrote to the local church (of which Gaius was part) to commend these teachers and ask that they might be received but the letter (and brethren) were rejected by **Diotrephes**, a lover of pre-eminence (v.9).

Based on the original Greek text, *3 John* is the shortest book in the Bible containing only **219** words. This is followed by *2 John* (245 words), *Philemon* (355 words) and *Jude* (457 words).

3 John 1-4: Gaius (Walking in Truth)

3Jn 1:1 *The elder unto the wellbeloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth.*

There are a number of people called Gaius in Scripture. There is: (1) *Gaius of Corinth* who was baptised by Paul and hosted the apostle when writing Romans (Romans 16.23, 1 Corinthians 1.14); (2) *Gaius of Macedonia*, one of Paul's travelling companions seized at Ephesus (Acts 19.29); and (3) *Gaius of Derbe*, another of Paul's travelling companions (Acts 20.4). As Gaius was a very common name it is unlikely that the Gaius to whom this letter is addressed is to be identified with any of these. Gaius was 'wellbeloved' (*agapetos*, x4 in the epistle) by John and others in the sphere of the 'truth'. It was their common acceptance of the truth that bound them together in love.

3Jn 1:2 *Beloved, I wish (pray) ~~above~~ (that in) all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.*

John's *general* prayer for Gaius is that God (*passive voice*) might 'prosper' him in every aspect of life. The word 'prosper' literally means 'a good road' or 'journey' and was metaphorical for 'success' or 'blessing'. John's *specific* prayer is that Gaius' physical health might match his spiritual health. This does not necessarily imply that Gaius was sick, but certainly his 'soul' or 'inner heart-life' was strong and vibrant as vv.3-4 illustrate. If my physical health matched my spiritual strength would I be in desperate need of an immediate visit to A&E?

3Jn 1:3 *For I rejoiced greatly, when ~~the~~ brethren came and testified of ~~the~~ (thy) truth that is in thee, even as **thou** walkest in ~~the~~ truth. **3Jn 1:4** I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.*

The secret of soul prosperity is here revealed. '**The** truth' had become '**his** truth'! He held so tightly to the truth (as taught by the apostles since the beginning) that it had become part and parcel of the man himself. As a result he habitually 'walked in the truth', i.e. he ordered his life in accordance with the word of God. *Psalm 119.11: Thy word have I hid in mine heart (thy truth in thee), that I might not sin against thee (walk in truth)*. John had heard regular glowing testimonies from brethren who were visiting and enjoying the hospitality of Gaius on their missionary journeys. The truth was evident in his heart and actions and this brought great joy to John. **v.4:** The reference to Gaius as John's 'own child' may suggest that he was brought to a saving knowledge of Christ through the apostle himself. Alternatively John often uses this term to describe those who are under his spiritual care and for whom he feels a fatherly concern, affection and responsibility (cf. 1 John 2.1).

3 John 5-8: Brethren (Witnesses to the Truth)

3Jn 1:5 *Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and ~~to~~ (that) strangers;*

It was likely that two groups of 'missionaries' were moving around the churches. One group was false teachers and must be guarded against (2 John); the other group was true heralds of Christ (v.7) and should be received and supported. Gaius was faithfully involved in this service even though these brethren were 'strangers' to him. His service was 'continual', 'diligent', 'labour intensive' (suggested by the words 'doest') and 'faithful'. Not only was he trustworthy and reliable in the service of hospitality but it was an expression of the faith (and love, cf. v.6) that characterised him. It should be noted that hospitality in these days was more than merely offering food and a place to sleep. It was to act as a commendation of one's guests to the rest of the community.

3Jn 1:6 *Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou ~~bring~~ (set) forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well:*

These travelling brethren had reported positively before the church (see Acts 14.26-27) at Ephesus about Gaius' practical expression of love (*agape*). *In John's writings, love is never mere sentiment or words, but action*. John now politely requests that when these brethren come again Gaius might continue in the 'noble' or 'beautiful' course he has already adopted. After supplying their needs he was to 'set them forward' on their journey in a manner that was

'worthy of God', i.e. remember whose they are and who they serve and treat them accordingly (cf. Ephesians 4.1, 1 Thessalonians 2.12).

3Jn 1:7 *Because that for his (the) Name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. 3Jn 1:8* *We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellowhelpers ~~to~~ (with) the truth.*

There are three reasons why Gaius should support the travelling brethren. **First**, they went out into missionary service for the cause of 'the Name', i.e. the Name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 5.41, 9.16, 15.26, 21.13). The Name speaks of all He is in Person and character. His Name inspires our service. To support the brethren is to support the cause of Christ. **Second**, these brethren did not 'appeal' for hospitality or financial support from the Gentiles. Not only would this have called their motives into question (many travelling philosophers solicited funds from their audiences), but also God's ability to support His own. *Leckie: Whom the Lord sends, He supports. v.8:* There is therefore an on-going moral obligation to 'receive' or 'undertake' materially for such brethren. **Third**, by so doing we become 'co-workers with the truth' thus furthering its cause. We may not feel like we can preach or teach but we can financially support those who do and therefore join together with them in the propagation of the truth.

3 John 9-11: Diotrephes (Without the Truth)

3Jn 1:9 *I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not.*

3Jn 1:10 *Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church.*

It would seem that John had already written a letter to the local assembly, possibly to introduce and commend visiting brethren. The letter was apparently dismissed by Diotrephes (meaning 'nourished' or 'nursed by Zeus') and resulted in him 'not receiving' or 'acknowledging' the brethren (v.10). This was a plain denial of fellowship with the truth and indeed a rejection of the apostle himself (see John 5.23, 13.20). Why did he act in this way? He had a 'love of first place'; a heart that was set on 'pre-eminence' and no doubt felt the receiving of such brethren would threaten his position. **v.10:** He was also 'bubbling-up with talk', 'gossiping' and making 'false accusations' which were 'vicious' and 'injurious' about John and the brethren. Not satisfied with merely refusing the brethren he also enforced his will on the believers 'forbidding' them to show any hospitality, even ex-communicating from the local assembly those who would. John had resolved to personally visit 'very soon' (v.14) and publically call the assembly's attention to Diotrephes' deeds.

3Jn 1:11 *Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is (out) of God: ~~but~~ he that doeth evil hath not seen God.*

John now presents the lesson to be learned from the unhappy circumstances of vv.9-10. This is written as a command in the *imperative* form. Gaius must not 'follow', 'imitate' or 'model his actions' on 'evil' (Diotrephes) but rather on 'good' (Demetrius, v.12). The one who is characterised by good is 'born out of God'; they have divine life. The one who is characterised by evil and immorality has 'not seen God'; they are blind as to His true character as revealed in Christ; they are unregenerate.

3 John 12: Demetrius (Well Reported of the Truth)

3Jn 1:12 *Demetrius hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself: yea, and we also bear record; and ~~ye~~ (you) know that our record is true.*

Demetrius (meaning 'of mother earth' or 'belonging to Ceres', goddess of agriculture) is not to be identified with the silversmith of Acts 19.24. He was likely one of the brethren sent from John and the bearer of the letter to Gaius. His commendation is **threefold**: (1) He was 'well-spoken of' by 'everyone', especially the Christian community in Ephesus; (2) 'Even the truth itself' witnessed to Demetrius having been expressed in his actions; (3) John and the visiting brethren also witnessed to his character. Would we have a similar commendation to Demetrius? What would the truth say of us?

3 John 13-14

3Jn 1:13 *I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee: 3Jn 1:14* *But I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be to thee. ~~Our~~ (The) friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name.*

John encourages Gaius by assuring him that he plans to visit 'very soon' to deal with the matter in person. In the meantime John pronounces the 'peace' of God upon him that he might know tranquillity of soul in such a difficult time. The friends (cf. John 15.13-14) with John in Ephesus sent their greetings to Gaius. John also desired that his greetings would be communicated to the believers with Gaius 'by name', that is individually (cf. John 10.3).