

**Study Notes: 3 John**  
**November 15, 2020: “Don’t be a Diotrephes!”**  
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**Background:** The Exegetical Evangelical Commentary provides a nice background on 3 John, “Welcome to the shortest book of the Bible! Though it has been assigned fifteen verses (as opposed to 2 John’s thirteen), it has only 219 words while the next shortest book, 2 John, has 245. Both could easily fit on a single papyrus sheet, and most likely did. Additionally, this is the only New Testament book not to have either ‘Jesus’ or ‘Christ’ in it, though He is not absent, much like we see of God in Esther. By God’s design, a personal letter between an apostle and a beloved friend was included in the canon of Scripture. Through it we are granted a glimpse into the life of the church and some of its struggles. We are reminded that the first-century church was little different than what we see today in terms of people’s personalities and the problems that often creates in a local congregation. We are also granted another peek into the personality and heart’s passion of John as a person, and permitted to see how he handles problems, much like we learn of Paul through his epistles.”

***The elder, To my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth.***

- John’s third letter was a personal letter written to Gaius. Once again, John identified himself as the elder (see 2 John and notes). Little is known about Gaius, except what was contained in this epistle. From this title, we learn that Gaius was respected and loved by John. Later in the letter, we also learn that Gaius was a good friend to John who supported John’s ministry and showed hospitality to others. His faithfulness to the truth and obedience to God was well-known, and John heard a good report about Gaius from other believers.

***Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well. It gave me great joy when some believers came and testified about your faithfulness to the truth, telling how you continue to walk in it. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.***

- John prayed a blessing for good health both spiritually and physically for Gaius, then shared that it brought him great joy to hear that Gaius walked in the truth. Indeed, as in John’s other letters, it is clear that the obedience and faithfulness of believers gave John the greatest joy in his life and ministry.

***Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers and sisters, even though they are strangers to you. They have told the church about your love. Please send them on their way in a manner that honors God. It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. We ought therefore to show hospitality to such people so that we may work together for the truth.***

- John commended Gaius for his faithfulness in showing hospitality to other believers, even though Gaius did not know them. Gaius’s love had been reported to the church that these believers came from, so John encouraged Gaius to bless these people as they left. He reminded Gaius that they had gone out “for the sake of the Name,” which is a reference to Jesus Christ and His teaching. John’s encouragement is that all believers should practice hospitality, and work together for the sake of the Kingdom of God and the truth that is found in His word.

- The Faithlife Study Bible explains in detail what John meant when he called Gaius to “...send them on their way in a manner that honors God”, “This refers to giving missionaries support and meeting their needs, possibly including lodging, sustenance, and monetary support.”
- The Greek word for “hospitality” means to “receive.” In John’s time, it was crucial that the church would receive and care for other Christians as they traveled to different areas, for the pagans (unbelievers) would not provide for them or help them meet their needs. As believers did this, they engaged in partnership with the missionaries.

***I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will not welcome us. So when I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, spreading malicious nonsense about us. Not satisfied with that, he even refuses to welcome other believers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church.***

- After commending Gaius, John mentioned another member of the church, Diotrephes. Though little is known of Diotrephes, scholars believe that he was a Greek believer who held some position of leadership within the church. John said that Diotrephes “liked to be first” and refused to welcome John or other believers. John offered a strong rebuke, and said that when he arrived in person, he would set things straight.
- The website, [www.gotquestions.org](http://www.gotquestions.org), summarizes what we know about Diotrephes from these verses, “In only two verses, we have the following statements made about Diotrephes: 1) he loves to be first; 2) he refuses to welcome the apostles into the church; 3) he maliciously spreads gossip about men of God; 4) he withholds hospitality from other believers; 5) he requires others to follow his poor example; and 6) he excommunicates anyone who crosses him.”

***Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God. Demetrius is well spoken of by everyone — and even by the truth itself. We also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true.***

- John’s statements about Diotrephes were given as a warning to Gaius. Truly, Gaius should not imitate this man, but instead seek to do what was right and be obedient to God. John’s contrasting statements about those who do good and evil are in the style of his first letter, showing that the actions of people will reveal what is in their hearts and what they believe.
- In contrast to Diotrephes, Demetrius was commended by John because his actions were in keeping with the truth of God’s word. John may have offered this as a way to commend Demetrius to Gaius, so Gaius could see he was someone he could trust and rely on (unlike Diotrephes). It was quite possible that Demetrius was either carrying this letter to Gaius from John, or was coming as a missionary to be received.

***I have much to write you, but I do not want to do so with pen and ink. I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. Peace to you. The friends here send their greetings. Greet the friends there by name.***

- Like his second letter, John longed to be with Gaius and to share more with him when they met together in person. He wished Gaius peace and encouraged Gaius to greet members of his church in a personal way, sharing love and peace from John.