

3 John Chapter 1

3 John 1:1 "The elder unto the well-beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth."

Again, "The elder" is the aged apostle John, who, according to ancient tradition, lived into his nineties. "Whom" is plural. To "Love in the truth" means

- (1) Truly, really to love, and
- (2) To love in a fashion consonant with the Christian meaning of that word.

"The truth" which John and others "Have known", is a combination of factual knowledge regarding the Word of God and personal knowledge of Jesus Christ.

John uses the same term for himself as he did (in 2 John 1). The term probably has reference to his age, his apostolic eyewitness status of Jesus' life, and also that he had an official position of authority in the church.

"Well-beloved": The term is only used of Christians in the New Testament (Col. 3:12; Philemon 1, 2; 2 Peter 3:14; 1 John 4:1).

We find this letter to be a personal letter written by John to his friend Gaius. Notice, he is a friend that John loves very much. The reason that John thinks so much of him, is because he also is a student of truth. To be in the truth, it would have to be part of you.

"Gaius": Nothing is known of Gaius beyond the mention of his name in the salutation. The name was one of 18 common names from which Roman parents usually chose a name for one of their sons, making any specific identification doubtful. John, his fellow believers, and even strangers to whom Gaius extended hospitality, held him in great esteem for his Christian walk and conduct (verses 1-6).

John conveyed his own appreciation for Gaius by calling him "well-beloved" four times in this letter (verses 1, 2, 5, 11). He probably was a member of a church somewhere in Asia Minor that was under John's sphere of influence. The apostle planned to visit him sometime soon (verse 13).

3 John 1:2 "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth."

"I wish": John's prayer for Gaius is significant. Gaius' spiritual state was so excellent that John prayed that his physical health would match his spiritual vigor. To ask about one's health was standard custom in ancient letters, but John adapted this convention in a unique manner to highlight Gaius' vibrant spiritual state.

"Above all things" is better translated "in all respects." Gaius was clearly a dear friend of John. His physical health is as important to John as his spiritual health.

John's wish for Gaius to prosper has a condition on it. He knows that his soul is prospering, and John wants him blessed to that extent. Good clean living brings good health many times. Some of the diseases that we have, we bring on ourselves with the type of life we live. This is not always the case, but is true many times.

For instance, look at the problems the doctors have discovered that smoking cigarettes has brought. Another good example is the disease A.I.D.S. Not all cases are brought about by drug use and by homosexual activity, but by far most of the cases are. At least we can cut down our chances for these diseases by good clean living.

3 John 1:3 "For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth."

“When brethren came and testified”: The phrase indicates that Christians continually praised Gaius’ exemplary obedience to the fundamentals of the faith. His spiritual reputation was well known.

“As thou walkest in the truth”: Gaius’ walk matched his talk. His reputation for practicing what he preached was exemplary (2 John 4). John’s commendation of him is one of the greatest given in the New Testament, 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 (verse 10).

John looks back to a time prior to writing this letter when he heard of Gaius’s steadfastness and rejoiced as a result.

It seems that John has received a glowing report of Gaius walking true to the gospel message every day. We see from this that Gaius, indeed, is prospering in his soul. His daily walk bears out his faith in the truth.

3 John 1:4 "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."

“I have no greater joy”: John’s personal affection for Gaius radiated especially from his personal conduct (Luke 6:46).

“My children”: The word “my” is emphatic in the original. John’s heart delighted in the proper conduct of his spiritual children in the faith. Those who walk (conduct), in the truth (belief), have integrity; there is no dichotomy between professing and living. He had strong fatherly affection for them (1 Cor. 4:14-16; 1 Thess. 2:11; 3:1-10).

“Children” here refers to those whom John has in some way helped lead to Christ.

This does not mean that this is the physical son of John. It more probably is someone who John has led to Christ. He is a spiritual son of John. I can testify that there is no greater joy than to know someone you have led to the Lord is walking in the salvation they received.

3 John 1:5 "Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers;"

“Thou doest faithfully”: Genuine faith always produces genuine good works (James 2:14-17).

“Brethren and ... strangers”: Gaius practiced hospitality not only toward those whom he knew but also to those whom he did not know. The reference concerns especially itinerant gospel preachers that Gaius aided on their journeys.

In 2 John, mention is made of hospitality to traveling Christian workers. This was of crucial importance in the early church (see Romans 12:13; 1 Tim. 3:2; 5:10; Titus 1:8; Hebrews 13:2; 1 Peter 4:9).

It seems that Gaius was filled with hospitality for all the Christian brothers, whether they were strangers to him, or not. He was faithfully carrying out the commandment to love God and his fellow man.

3 John 1:6 "Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well:"

“Have borne witness of thy charity before the church”: Gaius’ reputation for hospitality and kindness, as well as obedience (verse 3), was also well known throughout the churches in the region.

“Thou shalt do well”: John encouraged Gaius to keep practicing hospitality, especially because of the actions of Diotrephes who conducted a heavy-handed campaign against it (verse 10).

“After a godly sort” (Col. 1:10; 1 Thess. 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 (Matt. 24:40-45).

Some of those whom Gaius had helped along had evidently brought word back to John of Gaius’s exemplary labors. To “bring forward” would entail the full range of financial, travel, and other assistance necessary to host and then send along a visiting Christian leader whose only support was the generosity of other believers.

When Gaius stands before the Lord Jesus on judgment day, he will hear Him say, "Well done thy good and faithful servant". Jesus will remind Gaius that what he had done to the least of these he had done for Jesus also, because he did it in love of the brethren. This brother shared what he had with those less fortunate than himself.

Verses 7-8: John gives several grounds for practicing hospitality in a “manner worthy of God” (verse 6). First, one must show hospitality to those who have pure motives. These itinerant

missionaries went out “for the sake of the Name” (verse 7; 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 “accepting nothing from the Gentiles” (verse 7), the church was their only means of support. They were free from avarice (2 Cor. 2:17; 1 Tim. 5:17-18).

Third, those who show hospitality participate in the ministries of those to whom hospitality is shown (verse 8).

(Verse 8), gives the same reason to demonstrate hospitality to genuine teachers as does (2 John 10), in forbidding hospitality toward false teachers. Meaning that those who extend hospitality share in the deeds (either good or bad), of those receiving it.

3 John 1:7 "Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles."

Literally, “for the name they went out,” that is, the name of Jesus. They took nothing from the Gentiles (i.e. the unconverted), lest they appear to be hawking the gospel for personal gain (see Jesus’ command, Matthew 10:8 and Paul’s example, 1 Cor. 9:6-15).

Gaius had helped them and it was not necessary for them to live off those who were not believers. This must be speaking of missionaries that went to carry the gospel message to the lost world. It seems Gaius’ part in this was to furnish them with funds for food and care.

3 John 1:8 "We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellow helpers to the truth."

To help missionaries and similar workers to continue in their calling is to share in their work. Christians are obligated (“We ... ought”), to bear their share of the burden of such work.

The person who supplies the support for the missionary is just as involved in the missionary task, as the one who actually goes with the message. Gaius will get a missionary's reward.

The one who furnishes the funds is actually a fellow helper with the missionary.

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

“I wrote ... unto the church”: John apparently had written a previous letter to the church, perhaps on the subject of hospitality, but it was lost. Perhaps Diotrephes never read it to the church because he rejected John’s authority (verses 9-10).

“Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence”: In the second part of his epistle, John condemned the violation of hospitality toward faithful ministers of the Word. The word “first”, 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 New Testament's teaching on servant leadership in the church (Matt. 20: 20-28; Phil. 2:5-11; 1 Timothy 3:3; 1 Peter 5:3).

“Receiveth us not”: Diotrephes modeled the opposite of kindness and hospitality to God's servants, even denying John's apostolic authority over the local congregation. And as a result, denying the revelation of God that came through that authority. His pride endeavored to supplant the rule of Christ through John in the church. Diotrephes' character was the very opposite of the gentle and loving Gaius who readily showed hospitality.

The letter of which John speaks is lost, as it does not seem to have been (1 or 2 John). The church is probably the fellowship of which Gaius was a member. What the elder has written up to this point seems to serve as a prologue for his major concern, which he takes up now.

We see the opposite of Gaius in Diotrephes. He is a very selfish man, who wants all of the authority in the church. It is very difficult for me to believe that anyone would refuse John the privilege to come to their church. Ministers today, who have been refused the privilege to preach at a specific church, can take consolation in this.

3 John 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."

“Wherefore, if I come ... I will remember his deeds”: John's apostolic authority meant that Diotrephes had to answer for his behavior. The apostle did not overlook this usurping of Christ's place in the church. Verse 10 indicates that Diotrephes was guilty of 4 things:

- (1) “Prating against us”. The charges against John were completely unjustified;
- (2) “With malicious words”. Not only were Diotrephes' charges false, they were evil;
- (3) “Neither doth he himself receive the brethren”. He not only slandered John but also deliberately defied other believers; and
- (4) “Casteth them out of the church”. The original language indicates that Diotrephes' habit was to excommunicate those who resisted his authority.

“Neither doth he himself receive the brethren”: To accept John's authority (verse 9), as well as being hospitable to the traveling ministers, directly threatened the authority that Diotrephes coveted.

“To prate” is to indulge in idle or trivial chatter. John characterizes Diotrephes' talk as meaningless gossip. Diotrephes opposes John's teaching, either John's stress on Christ's nature or the need for Christians to demonstrate love at all times. He also opposes the exercise of hospitality such as earned high praise for Gaius from the elder.

It seems that this Diotrephes had some position of authority in the church, because he had thrown some members out of the church if they disagreed with him. He had idly babbled malicious things about John in the church.

It seemed he did not want the Christian brothers to come to the church, and he went so far as to throw the members out who welcomed other Christian brothers. This is pure jealousy, which has no place in the church. It seems John has talked to Diotrephes privately about his problem.

He has sent others to speak to him and since none of this worked. John will expose him to the whole church when he comes, and it may be his turn to be thrown out. John had great authority in the early church and this Diotrephes would have to listen to whatever reprimand John had for him.

3 John 1:11 "Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God."

“Follow not that which is evil, but that which is good”: The verse begins the introduction to the commendation of Demetrius (in verse 12). Gaius was to imitate Demetrius as the correct role model for his actions.

“He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God”: John’s statement indicates that Diotrephes’ actions proved that he was never a Christian. This is a practical application of the moral test.

This is John’s way of saying that faith which does not result in works is no faith at all. Salvation is not by works, but it does produce them (see Eph. 2:8-10).

John does not specifically mention Diotrephes, but that is probably who John says not to follow here. This is another explanation that men are what their daily lives are. If they live evil lives, they are not of God. If they live good wholesome lives, loving their neighbors and God, they are Christians.

3 John 1:12 "Demetrius hath good report of all [men], and of the truth itself: yea, and we [also] bear record; and ye know that our record is true."

“Demetrius”: As with Gaius, Demetrius was a very common name in the Roman world (Acts 19:24, 38). Nothing is known of him apart from this epistle. He may have delivered this letter, which also would serve to commend him to Gaius.

Gaius was known to the elder; perhaps he was one of the brethren whom Diotrephes had cast out (verse 10). The elder’s warm remarks would reassure Gaius that he could take Demetrius in and show him the favor he usually accorded visitors who were serving the truth.

“Demetrius hath good report of all men”: Like Gaius, Demetrius’ reputation was well known in the region.

“Of the truth itself”: Demetrius was an excellent role model preeminently because he practiced the truth of God’s Words in his life.

Demetrius had to be the one who brought this letter. He was a trusted Christian. He lived before other Christian in such a way that they all knew he was a Christian. John is standing good for Demetrius. John is giving him a good personal reference here.

Demetrius stood up for the truth. John reminds them of his own character here, when he tells them that his report is true.

Verses 13-14: John excuses the brevity of his remarks. He expects to visit Gaius soon. "Friends" are Christian brethren. Some texts and translations make the words beginning with "peace" into a fifteenth verse.

3 John 1:13 "I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee:"

John explains that there was no need to write more, because he was coming to see them, and he would tell them then.

3 John 1:14 "But I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace [be] to thee. [Our] friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name."

This is a typical closing to John's letter. He promises to come and see them real soon. When you have Jesus, you have the peace which passes understanding. He includes all the believers, when he speaks of friends in his greeting.

3 John Chapter 1 Questions

1. Who was this letter written to?
2. What was John's feelings toward them?
3. What kind of letter would this be classed as?
4. How could you be in the truth?
5. John wished that he would _____ and be in good _____.
6. He wanted him to prosper as his _____ prospered.
7. What are some diseases we bring upon ourselves?
8. What caused John to rejoice greatly?
9. Is Gaius John's real son?

10. It seems that Gaius was filled with _____ to the brothers in Christ.
11. What really good trait did verse 6 say he had?
12. What will Gaius hear Jesus say on judgment day?
13. Who did the missionaries not have to take help from, because of Gaius' generosity?
14. The person who supplies the funds for the missionary is a _____ with the missionary.
15. Who was the man causing the trouble in the church?
16. What was his problem?
17. What had Diotrephes done against John?
18. What will John do, about this situation when he comes?
19. He that doeth good is of _____.
20. Who brought this letter?
21. What kind of a person was Demetrius?
22. Who besides John, sent a greeting?