

3 John

Author - "The elder" -

1. "elder" is from the Greek "presbuteros" [pres **boo** the ros] literally meaning "older one."
2. Second John also has "the elder" as its author.
 - a. It can designate an elder of the church. (Acts 14:23; 1 Tim. 5:17; Tit. 1:5).
 - b. It can be used simply to designate an "older one."
 - c. John here is describing himself as an "older one"
 - d. He may have been an elder in an official sense, but this is speculation since the Bible is silent about it.
 - e. We do know the apostle Peter was also an "elder" in the church. (1 Pet. 5:1).

1 Pet 5:1 Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as {your} fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed,

2. Evidence favors the Johannine authorship of this epistle.
 - a. The vocabulary and manner of expression are very similar to the other writings of John.
 - b. Early church writings [in regard to the authorship of this epistle] support that John the apostle, the son of Zebedee and brother of James penned this letter.
3. It is one of five books written by John - Gospel of John, 1, 2, 3 John, Revelation.

Recipient - Gaius was a common Roman name

1. Gaius of Macedonia (Acts 19:29).
2. Gaius of Derbe (Acts 20:4).
3. Gaius of Corinth (Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 1:14).
4. The Gaius addressed in this epistle was a person of influence and called "beloved" (1, 2, 5, 11).
5. We do not know if he was one of the men named Gaius in the Bible or another Gaius.
6. There is not enough information to make a positive identification, or even a reasonable guess.

Purpose of Letter:

1. It was to praise and commend Gaius for his faithfulness, and to exhort him to even greater service.

2. This short letter indicates Gaius was an outstanding Christian who held to the truth.
3. He is commended for his conduct and how he treated missionaries [traveling preachers].
4. He aided missionaries [traveling preachers] even those he had strong opposition from Diotrephes who loved preeminence and insisted on his own way.

Place & Time

1. It may have been written late in John's life, but we cannot be sure.
 - a. Nothing in this epistle even hints at an exact date except John describes himself as an "older one."
 - b. This would seem to place the date in the latter half of the 1st century.
 - c. Assuming John was about the age of Christ when he was appointed as an apostle, he would have been older in the latter half of the 1st century.
 - d. There is nothing in the word "elder" to demand John was ancient [very old] when he penned what we know as second or third John.
2. The location of John (the writer) or of Gaius (the recipient) of this letter is not known. There is nothing in the letter that even hints of the location of either the writer or recipient.
3. Some guess Ephesus was the place of writing since tradition maintains John spent his last years there.

Salutation (1)

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

1. **"elder"** - (1) He may be used in sense of "older one" (2) John may have been an elder in the church as Peter was. (1 Pet. 5:2).
 - a. It is possible that it has both meanings.
 - b. McCord translate "The older one to the beloved Gaius."
 - c. As an apostle and as an older man [perhaps an elder in the church] he had the right and obligation to teach and correct.
2. **"Gaius"** - Identity unknown. There is no way of knowing.
3. "in truth" does not have the definite article, but it may be understood.
 - a. It may mean "whom I love in *the* truth."
 - b. It can also be understood to mean "whom I truly love."
 - c. Either understanding of the words "in truth" do not change the interpretation of this epistle about the importance of loving and standing for the truth.
 - d. It is certain John loved Gaius and it is certain that John stood for the truth and admonished others to stand for

the truth.

4. "Truth" is a dominant part of this letter and all the writings of John. (3 Jn. 1,3,4, 8, 12).

Prayer For Gaius' Prosperity (2-4)

3JO 1:2 Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers.

1. "Beloved" - This word is used 4 times in this short epistle.

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

3JO 1:2 Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers.

3JO 1:5 Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and especially when they are strangers;

3JO 1:11 Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. The one who does good is of God; the one who does evil has not seen God.

2. "in all respects" is literally "in all things" (Gr. **pan ton**)
3. "in good health" - He prays for the good health of Gaius.
 - a. This might suggest that Gaius was having some kind of health problem.
 - b. The words are used here in the sense of bodily health.
 - c. The words can be used for "sound or healthy in doctrine." (1 Tim. 1:10; 2 Tim. 4:3; Tit. 1:9; 2:1).
 - d. Luke used it of bodily health. (Lk. 5:31; 7:10; 15:27).
4. John pays Gaius a terrific compliment in praying that his physical health would match his spiritual health.
 - a. Gaius was a fine Christian man whom John greatly loved and respected.
 - b. We all strive to have good physical health.
 - c. We should give even more diligence to our spiritual health. (1 Tim. 4:8).

1 Tim 4:8 for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and {also} for the {life} to come.

- d. Spiritual health is much more important than physical health.

5. "soul" is from the Greek "psuche" [psoo **khay**] and refers to the immortal soul of Gaius. (Matt. 10:28; Jas. 1:21; 5:20). See also 1 Pet. 1:9.

3JO 1:3 For I was very glad when brethren came [to me] and bore witness to your truth, {that is,} how you are walking in truth.

- The Christians brothers who came to John are not identified.
- It may be those mentioned in verse 5.

1. “to your truth”
 - a. Gaius held to the truth of the gospel as his own possession.
 - b. He was a faithful servant of Christ.
2. “your truth” - It was his because he had learned it, embraced it, and was letting it shine forth in his life.
3. It did not literally belong to him, but “the truth” had come from the Holy Spirit. (Jn. 14:26; 15:26; 16:13).
4. Only truth saves. (Jn. 8:32).

3JO 1:4 I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.

1. What great joy it is to discover your converts and those you have influenced are faithful. See 2 Jn. 4.
- 2 John 1:4 I was very glad to find {some} of your children walking in truth, just as we have received commandment {to do} from the Father.
2. Gaius may have been a convert of John or had received instruction from him or both.
3. Timothy was called the “son” of Paul in a spiritual sense. (1 Tim. 1:18; 2 Tim. 1:2; 2:1).
 - a. Timothy’s father was a Greek. (Acts 16:3).
 - b. It is certainly not unreasonable that Gaius was a spiritual child of John.
 - c. This could mean John had converted him or had been a great influence on him or both.

Gaius Encouraged To Receive And Support Missionaries (5-8)

5 Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and especially {when they are} strangers;

- “strangers” denotes “brethren” he did not know.
- See 3 John 3 - “when brethren came [to me] and bore witness to your truth...”

1. Love must be expressed in deeds - not words only. (1 Jn. 3:17, 18).

1 John 3:17 But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?

1 John 3:18 Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

2. True faith must be expressed in deeds - not words only, (Jas. 2:14-17).

James 2:14 What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?

James 2:15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food,

James 2:16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for {their} body, what use is that?

James 2:17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, {being} by itself.

3. Hospitality is an important part of the Christian life. (Heb. 13:2; Rom. 12:13; 1 Pet. 4:9; 1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:8).
4. It was essential to the spread of the gospel. Christian teachers/preachers had limited funds, and needed the support from other Christians.
5. This was the Lord's plan for supporting those who proclaimed the word, but it did not exclude one supporting himself as Paul usually did working as a tentmaker. (Acts 18:3).
6. Some in the church there did not like and even opposed paying or aiding traveling missionaries.
7. There are some today who oppose helping missionaries believing there is a better use of church funds.
 - a. They fail to realize or deny that Christians are to proclaim the gospel to the whole world. (Matt. 28:19; Mk. 16:15)
 - b. This requires missionaries to go into the whole world to proclaim the gospel and to teach those converted to teach others.
8. It is sad many congregations set aside a very small portion of their budgets for mission work.

6 and they [faithful brethren and the strangers] bear witness to your love before the church [congregation]; and you will do well to send [help] them on their way in a manner worthy of God.

- “they” seems to refer to the “strangers” [missionaries] in verse 5 and faithful brethren in the church.
 - “church” is used only here in John's writings. See verses 6-10 where it is used 3 times. (2 Jn. 6, 9, 10).
1. “The brethren” spoke of Gaius’ “love before the church [assembly].”
 2. We should help faithful brethren on their journey with food, money, encouragement, etc.
 3. It should not be done in a shameful way, but in a “manner worthy of God.” RSV “as befits God's service”
 4. The church should give ministers a living support and not put them in a position where they must beg.

7 For they [Christian teachers] went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles [unconverted].

- “Gentiles” is from “ethnikos” [eth nee **kos**] meaning “Gentile, heathen.”
 - “Name” is a reference to Jesus. (Acts 9:16; 2 Cor. 4:5; Col. 1:24; Rev. 2:3).
1. They were not to depend on the Gentiles (unconverted) for support.
 2. Christians should support faithful men who proclaim the gospel. (1 Cor. 9:1-16).

8 Therefore we ought to support such men, that we may be fellow workers with the truth.

- “we” refers to Christians.
- “with the truth” may be locative, instrumental or dative.

- NASB has instrumental “with.” KJV has dative “to”. ASV and NIV have dative “for.” RSV and Marshall have locative “in”.
 - It is hard to be absolutely sure, but the meaning is very likely “fellow workers **for** the truth”
1. Two essential thoughts are presented here.
 2. Faithful men should be supported and this enables us to “be fellow workers for the truth.”
 3. We do the Lord’s work by working ourselves and by supporting others.

Diotrephes Warned (9, 10) Earlier Lost Letter (9)

9 I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say.

- John had written “the church” a letter earlier. We know nothing about this earlier letter. It appears to be a lost letter.
 - **The context suggests it was written to the church where Diotrephes worshiped, but it was rejected by him.**
 - **Diotrephes was a man who loved being pre-eminent and demanded it was his way or the high way.**
 - “church” - It is probably a local congregation to which Gaius and Diotrephes belonged.
1. John had possibly written a letter earlier to the church in that place and now one to Gaius.
 - a. It is not likely this letter was meant for Gaius only.
 - b. It is a letter that would be shared with the congregation.
 - c. Though not mentioned in this letter, it most likely created a ruckus in the congregation.
 2. Diotrephes loved to be “first” and demanded to be first.
 - a. He loved pre-eminence.
 - b. He was domineering and had to have his way.
 - c. He did not acknowledge authority of “the elder” or of anyone else
 - d. It was dangerous to oppose him, but courageous brethren needed to oppose this power loving man.
 3. Men like Diotrephes do great harm to the church, and the church must resist such men.
 - a. The church was never meant to be led by a man or a group of men who love pre-eminence.
 - b. It is to be led by men of faith who love the Lord and His truth.
 4. Christians must stand up to men like Diotrephes, and not let them destroy the congregation or brotherhood.

5. There have been and still are men like Diotrephes in the church.
6. Such men must be resisted because they greatly damage the work and influence of the congregation.
7. It regards courage to stand up to such a person or persons, but faithful Christians must stand up to them.

10 For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, neither does he himself receive the brethren, and he forbids those who desire {to do so,} and puts {them} out of the church.

1. He had “unjustly” accused John and other teachers “with wicked (evil) words.”
 - a. We do not know what he said about John and the others included in the words “unjustly accusing us.”
 - b. Whatever he was saying is described by John as “wicked words.”
2. He forbade others from receiving faithful brethren.
3. He expelled those who received the brothers from the church.
4. John wrote “puts *them* out of the church”
 - a. **This is language meaning to dis-fellowship.**
 - b. He was a Christian brother out of control who needed corrected.
5. John wrote “If I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does...”
6. John would expose this domineering brother when he came assuming his letter did not correct the problem.
7. It would seem John was not confident his letter alone would correct this brother who loved to be first.

Encouraged To Imitate Good (11)

11 Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. The one who does good is of God; the one who does evil has not seen God.

- “mimeomai” [mee **meh** ah mi] - “imitate, follow”
- It occurs 3 other times in the New Testament. (2 Thess. 3:7, 9; Heb. 13:7).
- John’s readers are commanded to “imitate” what is good rather than the evil.
- “seen God” means does not know God. No one has seen the invisible God. (1 Jn. 4:12; Col. 1:15).
- No one can see God, as He is, and live. (Exod. 33:20).

Ex 33:20 But He said, "You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!"

1. Paul gave a similar admonition in Romans 12:9.

Rom 12:9 {Let} love {be} without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.

2. John here gives a simple test of how one proves he/she is a Christian.
3. John is not talking about how one becomes a Christian, but how one manifests he/she is a Christian.
4. One becomes a Christian through the new birth. (Jn. 3:1-5). See Gal. 3:26, 27.
5. Galatians 5:19-23 is a good commentary of this passage.

GAL 5:19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality,

GAL 5:20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions,

GAL 5:21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

GAL 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

GAL 5:23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

- a. The Christian must not practice “the deeds of the flesh.” (Gal. 5:19-22).
- b. Those practicing such things will not “inherit the kingdom of God.” (Gal. 5:22).
 - 1) “The kingdom of God” is used here of heaven.

MAT 25:34 "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

1CO 6:9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals,

1CO 6:10 nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

1CO 15:50 Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

GAL 5:21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

- 2) Heaven’s doors are closed to those who pursue “the works of the flesh.” (Gal. 5:21).
- 3) Jesus taught “the pure in heart” will see God. (Matt. 5:8).
- c. Christians must “walk by the Spirit,” and practice “the fruit of the Spirit” in their lives. (Gal. 5:16, 22-23).
- d. The word “does evil” in the words “**the one who does evil has not seen God**” is present tense in Greek and describes continuous action.
 - 1) The one who practices evil “has not seen God.”
 - 2) It does not mean a Christian is sinless. (1 Jn. 1:8, 10).
 - 3) Christians must confess their own sins. (1 Jn. 1:7, 9).

Demetrius Commended

12 Demetrius has received a {good} testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself; and we also bear witness, and you know that our witness is true. 2 John 12

- “Good” is in italics, but it is implied.
 - Lit. “to Demetrius witness has been borne by all”
1. “we” - John would vouch for his reputation and trustworthiness. The “we” includes faithful brethren - not just John.
 2. **Demetrius may have been bearer of this letter.**
 - a. This seems to be the reason this good man is mentioned here.
 - b. John wants Gaius to receive the letter Demetrius is carrying and receive his true witness.
 3. Demetrius was likely one of the traveling preachers of the gospel whom Gaius is urged to receive.
 4. There are three forms of recommendation of Demetrius.
 - a. “has received a {good} testimony from everyone” - “Everyone” would include faithful brethren and perhaps those outside the church. See 1 Timothy 3:7.

1TI 3:7 **And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church**, so that he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

- b. “and from the truth itself” - He was a man who conformed his life to the truth.
- c. “we also bear witness” -
 - 1) Some believe “we” is a literary “we” meaning John himself.
 - 3) This certainly might be the case or it could include some who were with John who knew of the splendid character of Demetrius.
5. Some believe that Demetrius was perhaps the same person as “Demas,” but this is mere speculation in zealous attempt to identify Demetrius.
 - Demas was a companion of the apostle Paul. Paul called him his fellow worker in Philemon 24. He was with Paul during his first imprisonment at Rome. (Col. 4:14).
 - At a later period we find him mentioned as having deserted the apostle because he "loved this present world." (2 Tim. 4:10).
 - The language of 2 Timothy 4:10 does not necessarily mean he had apostatized from the faith, but it means he had abandoned Paul and failed to give Paul the help he needed because of a love of “this present world.”
 - Only Luke remained with him. (2 Tim. 4:11). It is speculated “Demas” is a shortened form of “Demetrius” and this brother had come back to the faith and was an outstanding servant of the Lord.
 - It is possible to understand 2 Timothy 4:10 to mean Demas left the faith.
 - There is no evidence he returned to the faith he may have left or that he regained his usefulness to the Lord.

- We cannot know what became of him. The only thing we know for sure is he deserted Paul because of his love of the world.

Conclusion (13-14)

13 I had many things to write to you, but I am not willing to write {them} to you with pen [reed] and ink;

- “them” is in italics, but it is implied and refers back to the “many things.”
 - See “paper and ink” - 2 John 12.
1. He writes this very brief letter to Gaius.
 2. He hopes to see Gaius shortly as expressed in verse 14.
 3. The words he was writing were no substitute for a face to face visit.
 4. There is no way of knowing if John was able to see Gaius again, but there is no reason to believe he did not.

14 but I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak face to face. Peace {be} to you. The friends greet you by name [individually]. Greet the friends by name [individually].

- The NIV reads “The friends **here** send their greetings. Greet the friends **there** by name.” This interpretation may express the meaning of the original text.
 - John shifts from the pronoun “I” used 3 times in verses 13-14 to “we” in verse 14.
 - It evidently refers to those traveling with John. They would speak to Gaius “face to face.”
 - All 5 uses of “you” [verses 13-14] are singular in the Greek, and refer to “Gaius.”
1. The “friends” the plural of the Gr. *philos* [**fee** los] are not identified.
 2. It seems, for sure, that they were also faithful brethren who were with John or who had contact with John.
 3. The second reference to “friends” may have been those with Gaius.
 4. They most likely were some who knew and loved Gaius.
 5. The church needs more men like Gaius today!
 6. The church will grow and shine when Christians stand for the truth and teach others to do the same.
 7. The church will grow and shine when it supports those who are willing to proclaim the soul-saving gospel at home and in the whole world.
 8. The church will grow and shine when it does not allow men like Diotrephes to control the church!

