

## THIRD JOHN

### CHAPTER XVIII

#### *A LETTER TO THE BELOVED GAIUS CONCERNING AN IMPENDING VISIT BY TEACHERS OF TRUTH*

#### III John

##### A. *Background*

##### 1. Who wrote III John?

III John is so obviously from the pen of the author of the other Johanine letters that no comment is required as to its authorship. What has been said for first and second John will suffice for third John also. The purpose of III John is a practical situation in which the previous teaching must be applied.

##### 2. To whom is it written?

There is no question that III John is written to an individual rather than to a congregation or a group of congregations.

There is some question concerning the identification of the individual, Gaius, to whom it is addressed. Three men of this name are mentioned in the New Testament: Gaius of Macedonia (Acts 19:29), Gaius of Derbe (Acts 20:4), and Gaius of Corinth (I Corinthians 1:14).

There is no conclusive evidence that the Gaius to whom John wrote is to be identified with any of the three. Some early writers chose to identify him with Gaius of Derbe.

We can be fairly certain that John wrote to a Gaius who was an elder in whatever congregation he served, for the matter of which he wrote was serious and would require overt action. In the New Testament church, such matters were settled by the elders.

##### 3. Construction of the book

Three individuals are mentioned by name in III John. For this reason, I have chosen, rather arbitrarily, to divide the outline into three major headings, beginning at the mention of Gaius, Diotrephes, and Demetrius respectively.

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### B. *The Text*

"The elder unto Gaius the beloved, whom I love in truth. (2) Beloved, I pray that in all things thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth. (3) For I rejoiced greatly, when brethren came and bare witness unto thy truth, even as thou walkest in truth. (4) Greater joy have I none than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth. (5) Beloved, thou doest a faithful work in whatsoever thou doest toward them that are brethren and strangers withal; (6) who bare witness to thy love before the church: whom thou wilt do well to set forward on their journey worthily of God: (7) because that for the sake of the Name they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. (8) We therefore ought to welcome such, that we may be fellow-workers for the truth. (9) I wrote somewhat unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. (10) Therefore, if I come, I will bring to remembrance his works which he doeth, prating against us with wicked words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and them that would he forbiddeth and casteth them out of the church. (11) Beloved, imitate not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: he that doeth evil hath not seen God. (12) Demetrius hath the witness of all men, and of the truth itself: yea, we also bear witness; and thou knowest that our witness is true. (13) I had many things to write unto thee, but I am unwilling to write them to thee with ink and pen: (14) but I hope shortly to see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be unto thee. The friends salute thee. Salute the friends by name."

### C. *Try to Discover*

1. What is the problem about which John writes to Gaius?
2. Is there any gnostic influence here as in I and II John?
3. What part does Diotrephes play in the problem?
4. Why is Demetrius mentioned?

### D. *Paraphrase*

"The elder to Gaius the beloved, whom I love in truth. (2) Beloved! concerning all things I pray thou mayest be prospering and be in

health, even as thy soul is prospering. (3) For I rejoiced exceedingly at brethren coming and bearing witness unto thy truth, even as thou in truth art walking. (4) I have no greater favour than these things, that I should be hearing that my own children in the truth are walking. (5) Beloved! a faithful thing art thou doing, whatsoever thou shalt accomplish for them that are brethren and with all strangers, (6) who have borne witness to thy love before the assembly: whom thou wilt do nobly to set forward worthily of God. (7) For in behalf of The Name have they gone forth, taking nothing from them of the nations. (8) We therefore ought to be sustaining such as these, that we may become fellowworkers with the truth. (9) I wrote something unto the assembly: but who is fond of taking the first place among them—Diotrephes doth not make us welcome. (10) For this cause if I come I will bring to remembrance his works which he is doing, with wicked words prating against us: and not content with these he neither himself maketh the brethren welcome, but them who are minded to do it he forbideth, and out of the assembly doth cast them. (11) Beloved! be not thou imitating what is bad but what is good. He that doeth good is of God: he that doeth what is bad hath not seen God. (12) Unto Demetrius hath witness been borne by all and by the truth itself; howbeit we also bear witness, and thou knowest that our witness is true. (13) Many things had I to write unto thee, but I am unwilling with ink and pen to be writing; I hope straightway to see thee, and mouth to mouth will we talk. Peace be unto thee. The friends salute thee. Salute the friends by name.”

#### E. *Translation and Comments*

##### 1. Gaius The Beloved . . . v.1-8

(1) “The old one to Gaius the beloved, whom I love in truth. (2) Beloved, concerning everything I pray (for) you to prosper and to be in good health, just as also your soul is prospering. (3) I rejoiced greatly when brethren came to me testifying to your truth just as you are walking in the truth. (4) Greater joy than this I do not have, that I may be hearing of my children walking in truth. (5) Beloved, you are doing faithful works in whatever you may do for the brothers, and strangers at that, (6) the ones bearing witness of your love before the assembly; you will be doing well sending them forward worthily of God. (7) For they went out for the sake of the Name, taking

nothing from the Gentiles (8) Therefore we ought to welcome such (men), in order that we may keep on becoming fellow workers with truth."

There is ample reason to believe that Gaius was a dear and intimate friend of John. He is four times referred to as "beloved." In addition, John expresses concern for his health as well as his stand for the truth.

Concerning Gaius' stand for truth, John has heard from mutual friends, and he rejoices. We know from both the Fourth Gospel and from John's first two letters that the chief concern of the Apostle's life is for truth as it is revealed in Christ. The gnostic influence in III John is indirect, but it is present. It is the spread of this false teaching which causes John to so greatly rejoice when he hears of those who are remaining faithful.

It is not unreasonable to suppose that Gaius was an elder in the congregation in which He served. The matter which John places before him is the matter of hospitality.

Hospitality is a matter nearly forgotten in our day of easy creature comfort, but it ought not so to be. When a Christian brother who, as in III John, is also a stranger, hospitality is the obligation of the church, and especially of the elders. They are to extend him the courtesy which is due one who labors in the truth. The Hebrew writer informs us that in this many have "entertained angels unawares." (Hebrews 13:2)

In verse five, John comes to the real purpose of his letter. Just as there were certain false teachers going about teaching error, there were also dedicated men going out in the name of Christ. Just as he would not have believers greet nor invite false teachers into their houses (II John 1:10), he is equally concerned that no opportunity to extend hospitality to faithful men be missed.

Not only is the apostle anxious that those who went out in Christ's name be treated with hospitality, but he would also have Gaius "send them forth worthily of God." "Sending forth" is frequently used in the New Testament to include financial support; the furnishing of the means of continuing the journey of service.

Visiting missionaries, since they are going out "for the sake of the Name," are to be treated as one would treat Christ Himself. It is in His name, for the sake of His purpose that they are leaving the security of established homes to teach the truth. There is nothing less worthy of

God than the niggardly treatment extended to such laborers by shortsighted church members, and even by those who share the eldership with Gaius.

The policy followed by Gaius' visitors (as well as by Paul—II Cor. 12:16-ff) of not taking money from those among whom they did missionary work, increases the necessity of hospitality and support. This policy is equally important on the mission field today. There is ever present danger that the missionary will be accused of doing what he does for the sake of monetary return. Therefore, it is required that Christians in established congregations furnish the missionary with his livelihood.

The responsibility of the church in the adequate direct support of those who give their full time to the preaching and teaching of the Word is a subject feared by too many modern preachers as well as their congregations. Paul, as John, makes no uncertain demands in this direction. (I Cor. 9:14)

The reward of financial support to Gospel preachers by those who render the support is that they thus become fellow workers with truth. Again Paul supports John's statement. In thanking the Philippians for their gift to himself, Paul expresses gratitude not only for the benefit their gift would bring him in his need, but that through their giving, they were permitted to share in his suffering for Christ's sake. (Phil. 4:10-20)

## 2. Diotrepes who loves pre-eminence . . . v.9-11

(9) "I wrote something to the congregation, but Diotrepes the one loving pre-eminence among them is not receiving us. (10) On account of this if I should come I will bring about his remembering the work which he is doing, unjustly accusing us with wicked words, and not satisfied with this neither is he receiving the brethren but is hindering those who want to, and casts them out of the congregation. (11) Beloved, do not mimic that which is evil but that which is good. The one doing good is from God; the one doing evil has not seen God."

Divine wrath is the reaction of divine love in the presence of sin. Here is a superb demonstration of this truth as the "Apostle of Love" severely castigates a self-assuming status seeker by the name of Diotrepes. Most scholarship is agreed that Diotrepes is, like Gaius, an elder in the same congregation. The situation which exists is not an unfamiliar one.

Diotrephes, the self-seeking, assertive overlord, dominates the congregation. He refuses to receive what the apostle has written, probably concerning the gnostic controversy, or to receive the travelling missionaries with the hospitality his eldership demands of him. Instead, for his own reasons, he has opposed those who would extend such hospitality and has even cast them out of the congregation.

Gaius, as is so often true of loving, sincere, Christian men, has given no apparent resistance to Diotrephes' self-assertion. John implores him not to mimic that which is evil by passively tolerating Diotrephes' un-Christian behavior. It is time for someone to stand up against the dictatorial demagogery of Diotrephes and to see to it that proper treatment is afforded the ministers of the Word!

All that is needed to make this letter one of the most relevant of the New Testament is to change the names of these two elders! Where is the congregation that has not been plagued by its own Diotrephes? There is an abundance of egoists holding office in local congregations. They will espouse whatever doctrine, false or otherwise, that will gain for them the most personal status. They will mistreat any member of the congregation who, though not outwardly opposing their grab for power, attempts to receive the truth in love and treats the ministers of the Word with Christian gentility.

To the honest, "beloved," service-seeking elders who serve with the modern kin of Diotrephes, John's plea is needful today. Such men gain power only when others, through failure to oppose, follow after their evil behavior. The dictators of history have all climbed to power on the backs of good people who simply did nothing to oppose them. To "go along" with such a man is, in effect, to mimic his conduct.

Self-agrandizement has no place in the kingdom. Jesus taught that he who would be great among us must be servant of all. Anytime a cousin of Diotrephes rises in any congregation, it is the duty of the kin of Gaius, the beloved, to actively oppose and put down such enemies of the faith.

The example here is John himself, the "Apostle of Love," who warns of stern action should it become necessary to visit the congregation in person to set the situation right. His warning is reminiscent of Paul's to the Corinthian congregation. (Cf. I Cor. 4:21, II Cor. 10:11, 13:1-3)

3. Demetrius, who has the witness of truth . . . v.12

(12) "It has been witnessed to Demetrius by all and by the truth itself and we also are bearing witness, and you know that our witness is true."

It has been suggested that Demetrius was the leader of the visiting delegation to whom John would have the congregation extend hospitality. Perhaps he was himself the bearer of the letter to Gaius.

It is not possible to identify him positively. Some have thought he might be Demetrius of Ephesus, the silversmith of Acts 19:21-ff. If this be true, the three-fold witness to his genuineness is necessary as was Barnabus' intercession on behalf of Saul of Tarsus just after his conversion.

Others have thought that Demetrius is Demas mentioned by Paul in Colossians 4:14, Philemon 24 and II 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.

There is no conclusive evidence that John's Demetrius is either of these.

Whoever Demetrius may have been, John is apprehensive lest the lack of aggressiveness in Gaius cause him to succumb to Diotrophes' forcefulness and turn Demetrius and his party away. Pursuant to this end, John lists three witnesses in behalf of Demetrius.

First, Demetrius had the witness of all who know him. If he was indeed either Demetrius of Ephesus or the second Demetrius, this is significant testimony. In the case of Demetrius of Ephesus, the whole church knew by this time that he had been the leader of the opposition to the Gospel in the very area to which he now came as a missionary! If he was, on the other hand, the Demas accused by Paul of having turned away from the faith because he loved the things of the world, the church also knew of him. Testimony to his repentance was needed.

In either case, or indeed if Demetrius is neither of these, John presents as evidence of his present genuineness the witness of those who know him *now*.

From the Christian view point it is a man's present genuineness that is to determine his relationship to the church, not his past behavior as either a heathen or a backslider!

The second witness to the genuineness of Demetrius is the truth. A. T. Robertson suggests that "the truth" here refers to the Holy Spirit Himself as in I John 5:6. It seems more likely that the term is meant rather 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.

John is the third witness on Demetrius' behalf. The apostle expects the elder 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 elder!

4. Final salutation . . . v.13-15

(13) "I had much to write you, but I do not wish to write through paper and ink; (14) I hope, rather, to see you and we shall speak mouth to mouth. (15) Peace to you. The friends are greeting you. Greet the friends by name."

The final salutation is much like that of II John. In controversy, John prefers to speak face to face rather than attempt to settle a personal matter through correspondence.

John's choice of the common greeting "peace to you" may be more than coincidental in light of the controversial atmosphere to which he wrote. In the midst of doctrinal as well as personal controversy, the Christian will be victorious who has within himself the peace that passeth all understanding.

F. *Questions for Review*

1. What significance do you attach to John's repeated referral to Gaius as "beloved?"
2. What position did Gaius probably hold in his home congregation?
3. What is the problem about which John writes Gaius?
4. Contrast the personality of Gaius and that of Diotrephes.
5. What treatment does John ask of Gaius for the visiting ministers?
6. What is the significance of the term "set forward on their journey?"
7. Why is the policy of not taking money from those to whom the Gospel is preached on a mission field a wise policy?
8. What is the reward promised by John to those who support the preachers of the Gospel?
9. What wrong had Diotrephes done?
10. What damage is possible to the church when an elder accuses a minister "with wicked words?"
11. How do genuine Christians often imitate evil men such as Diotrephes?
12. What two possible identifications have been suggested for Demetrius?
13. What three witnesses does John set forth as to the genuineness of Demetrius?



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