

## INTRODUCTION TO THE THIRD LETTER OF JOHN

The things said about the Second Letter of John apply here also. Traditional history makes Gaius the one who *wrote down* The Gospel of John, and identifies him as the Gaius of Corinth (*Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 1:14*). He was probably an evangelist (see note on *Eph. 4:11*), and probably a church elder as well (tradition places him in the church at Pergamum).

There was trouble in the congregation of which he was part. Diotrephes, who may have been a church elder also, refused to welcome some evangelists sent by John. This seems to imply that he rejected the authority of John, and this causes some to think Diotrephes was a "Paulite" (see *1 Cor. 1:12* and note). John writes this Letter to praise the action of Gaius (*verse 5-8*), and to show his intention to come personally to deal with the false teachers. If Pergamum is the church where Gaius receives this letter then Diotrephes is probably a Nicolaitan teacher (see *Rev. 2:14-15* and notes).

Both Paul and John operated "Schools of Preaching," in the sense that they took promising young men and trained them to do the work of an evangelist (compare *2 Tim. 4:5* and note). It is probable that all the apostles trained large numbers of such preachers and teachers to fill the needs of the Christian ministry.

John probably wrote from Ephesus to churches in the area, and the time is probably the last decade of the first century.

# THE THIRD LETTER OF JOHN

<sup>1</sup>From the Elder—

To my dear Gaius, whom I truly love,

<sup>2</sup>My dear friend, I pray that everything may go well with you, and that you may be in good health—as I know you are well in spirit. <sup>3</sup>I was so happy when some brothers arrived and told how faithful you are to the truth—just as you always live in the truth. <sup>4</sup>Nothing makes me happier than to hear that my children live in the truth.

## Gaius Is Praised

<sup>5</sup>My dear friend, you are so faithful in the work you do for the brothers, even when they are strangers. <sup>6</sup>They have spoken of your love to the church here. Please help them to continue their trip in a way that will please God. <sup>7</sup>For they set out on their trip in the service of Christ without

The elder, 1  
To my dear friend Gaius, 2  
whom I love in the truth.

Dear friend, I pray that 2  
you may enjoy good health 3  
and that all may go well with 4  
you, even as your soul is get- 5  
ting along well. It gave me 6  
great joy to have some 7  
brothers come and tell about 8  
your faithfulness to the truth 9  
and how you continue to live 10  
according to the truth. I 11  
have no greater joy than to 12  
hear that my children are 13  
living according to the truth. 14

Dear friend, you are faith- 15  
ful in what you are doing for 16  
the brothers, even though 17  
they are strangers to you. 18  
They have told the church 19  
about your love. You will do 20  
well to send them on their 21  
way in a manner worthy of 22  
God. It was for the sake of 23  
the Name that they went 24  
out, receiving no help from 25

1. **From the Elder.** See note on 2 *John 1*. **To my dear Gaius.** This is probably the Gaius of Corinth (*Rom. 16:23*).

2. **My dear friend.** The theme of this Letter is to praise Gaius for his good work and to urge hospitality. **In good health.** It was usual to *wish health* as a greeting. Here John wishes health, both physical and spiritual. [Some think this implies that Gaius' health was being drained by his problems with Diotrephes.]

3. **I was so happy.** "I know your spirit is in good health, because of the report some brothers brought back to me!" The Greek implies it was a *continuous good report* that was coming to John. These are brothers whom Gaius has helped.

4. **Nothing makes me happier.** It makes a preacher happy to know that someone he has helped to *grow in Christ* is being faithful to the truth.

5. **You are so faithful.** "The hospitality you show to the brothers is especially important! This is evidence of your faith!" John trained evangelists (see note on *Eph. 4:11*) and sent them out. They would depend upon the local churches for food and lodging. See Introduction to this Letter. **Strangers.** Gaius did not know many of these brothers personally. They were strangers to him, yet he showed his love for truth by his hospitality to them. [But contrast 2 *John 10-11*.]

6. **Spoken of your love.** "They all praise your good work and the hospitality you showed to them!" **Please help them.** "Since the work of ministry must continue, you will be called upon again and again to help. Since you are *God's friend*, help them in a generous way that will please God!"

7. **Any help from unbelievers.** "In their work of preaching the Good News, they do not ask any help from unbelievers. So they must depend upon people in the church like yourself, to support them." Compare 1 *Cor. 9:6-18; Phil. 4:14-19*.

accepting any help from unbelievers. <sup>8</sup>We Christians, then, must help these men, so that we may share in their work for the truth.

### Diotrephes and Demetrius

<sup>9</sup>I wrote a short letter to the church but Diotrephes, who loves to be their leader, will not pay any attention to what I say. <sup>10</sup>When I come, then, I will bring up everything he has done: the terrible things he says about us and the lies he tells! But that is not enough for him; he will not receive the brothers when they come, and even stops those who want to receive them and tries to drive them out of the church!

<sup>11</sup>My dear friend, do not imitate what is bad, but imitate what is good. Whoever does good belongs to God; whoever does what is bad has not seen God.

the pagans. We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth.

I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church.

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

8. **We Christians, then.** John is still urging Gaius to show hospitality to the brothers and strangers who come. "We Christians can all share in the work these brothers are doing by helping them!" We can sometimes fulfill our responsibility (at least part of it) by proxy. See *Luke 10:35*.

9. **I wrote.** As an apostle, John supervised the work of the church. He would write many such short letters to keep in touch with many local churches and individuals. **But Diotrephes.** We know nothing else about him. He is probably a church elder, and may be a Nicolaitan (See notes on *Rev. 2:14-15*). **Who loves to be their leader.** Diotrephes is a church boss. It may be that the glory of power is what motivates him, but we can only guess, since we have no details. There must have been many such as this man in the early church (See *1 Pet. 5:3* and note). **Will not.** He refused to listen to what John said. Some think this means he was a Paulite (*1 Cor. 1:12*) who rejected the authority of the other apostles.

10: **When I come.** John intends to come personally and use his authority as an apostle to deal with Diotrephes (see *Acts 13:10-12* and note). **Everything he has done.** Diotrephes: (1) would not pay attention to John's letter; (2) said terrible things about John (compare *Jude 15*) and told lies to cause trouble; (3) refused to receive the brothers and would give them no hospitality; (4) tries to drive out of the fellowship all who even admit they want to receive the brothers from John. [The present continuous implies that Diotrephes was trying to drive out those who wanted to receive the brothers. See *Expositor's Greek Testament*.]

11. **What is bad.** "Don't follow the bad example of such people as Diotrephes!" But even Diotrephes is a Christian, and we ought to listen to what Paul says in *2 Thess. 3:14-15* and notes. This does not conflict with *2 John 10-11* where the circumstances are not the same. **Whoever does.** Faith is made perfect through actions (*James 2:22*). Whether a man is good or bad will show up in the general pattern of his actions. One who makes a habit of sin does not know God!

<sup>12</sup>Everyone speaks well of Demetrius; truth itself speaks well of him. And we add our witness, and you know that what we say is true.

### Final Greetings

<sup>13</sup>I have so much to tell you, but I do not want to do it with pen and ink. <sup>14</sup>I hope to see you soon, and then we will talk personally.

<sup>15</sup>Peace be with you.

All your friends send greetings. Greet all our friends personally.

has not seen God. Demetrius <sup>12</sup> 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.

I have much to write you, <sup>13</sup> but I do not want to do so with pen and ink. I hope to <sup>14</sup> see you soon, and we will talk face to face.

Peace to you. The friends <sup>15</sup> here send their greetings. Greet the friends there by name.

12. **Demetrius.** We know nothing more about this man. *Roberts* thinks he was one of the brothers whom John sent out. But he may have been a church elder along with Diotrephes. He is an example of good. **Truth itself.** "The truth of God, which guides the lives of all believers, is a witness to the one who actually lives in truth!" **And we.** John is also a *witness* to the good character of Demetrius. [Letters of recommendation were used to identify true teachers to people who did not know them personally. See *Acts 18:27; 2 Cor. 3:1; Rom. 16:1; Col. 4:10.*]

13. **I have so much.** This Letter ends much the same as 2 John. John feels it best to write this short letter and deal with things in detail when he can be there in person.

14. **I hope.** John expects to visit Gaius soon. John may have made regular tours to the churches of the area.

15. **Peace be with you.** [Chapter and verse divisions date from the sixteenth century. Most Greek texts divide a 15th verse, as the TEV has done.] This is the Hebrew style of greeting (*1 Pet. 5:14*). **Friends.** This is a personal letter. This is why John says *friends* rather than *brothers*.