

3 John

Introduction and Thanksgiving

1:1 From¹ the elder,² to Gaius³ my dear brother, whom I love in truth.⁴ **1:2** Dear friend, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul.⁵ **1:3** For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, just as you are living according to the truth.⁶

¹ **tn** The word “From” is not in the Greek text, but has been supplied to indicate the sender of the letter.

² **tn** Or “presbyter.”

sn The author’s self-designation, *the elder*, is in keeping with the reticence of the author of the Gospel of John to identify himself. This is the same self-designation used by the author of 2 John.

³ **sn** Little reliable information is available concerning the identity of the person to whom 3 John is addressed. Because the name *Gaius* was very common in the Roman Empire, it is highly unlikely that the person named here is to be identified with any of the others of the same name associated with Paul (1 Cor 1:14, Rom 16:23 [these two references are probably to the same person]; Acts 19:29, Acts 20:4). A 4th century tradition recorded in the *Apostolic Constitutions* 7.46.9 (ca. A.D. 370) states that John the Apostle ordained Gaius as bishop of Pergamum, but this is questionable because of the relatively late date. The only certain information about this individual must be obtained from 3 John itself, and there is not a great deal there. It is obvious that this person is well known to the author, but it is not so certain whether they had met personally or not, because the report of Gaius’ conduct toward the brothers is received secondhand by the author (v. 3). Nor can it be determined with certainty whether Gaius belonged to the same local church as Diotrephes (v. 9), or was himself the leader of another local congregation. It is clear that the author regarded him as orthodox (v. 3) and a valuable ally in the controversy with the secessionist opponents and their false Christology discussed at length in 1 John.

⁴ **tn** The prepositional phrase ἐν ἀληθείᾳ (*en alētheia*) in 3 John 1 is similar to 2 John 1, although it is not qualified here as it is there (see 2 John 1). This is not merely the equivalent of an adverb (“truly”), but is a theological statement affirming the orthodoxy of Gaius, to whom the letter is addressed. “Truth” is the author’s way of alluding to theological orthodoxy in the face of the challenge by the opponents (see 1 John 3:19).

⁵ **tn** The noun ψυχή (*psuchē*) is used 10 times in the Gospel of John and 2 times in 1 John; of these 6 of the uses in John and both in 1 John refer to a person’s “life” (as something that can be laid down). In John 10:24 and 12:27 the ψυχή is that part of a person where emotions are experienced; one’s ψυχή is held in suspense or deeply troubled. This is, in other words, the immaterial part of a person as opposed to his physical existence. A close parallel is found in Philo, *Heir* 58 (285): “nourished with peace, he will depart, having gained a calm, unclouded life...welfare in the body, welfare in the soul (ψυχῆ)...health and strength...delight in virtues.”

sn Just as it is well with your soul. The equivalent contemporary idiom would be to speak of “spiritual” health as opposed to physical health. The author affirms that Gaius is indeed well off spiritually, and he prays that Gaius’ physical health would match his spiritual health, i.e., that Gaius would be as well off physically as he is spiritually. It is the spiritual health which is to be the standard by which one’s physical health is measured, not the other way round.

⁶ **sn** Living according to the truth (Grk “walking in [the]

1:4 I have no greater joy than this: to hear⁷ that my children are living according to the truth.⁸

The Charge to Gaius

1:5 Dear friend,⁹ you demonstrate faithfulness¹⁰ by whatever you do for the brothers (even though they are strangers). **1:6** They¹¹ have testified to your love before the church.¹² You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God.¹³ **1:7** For they have gone

truth”). The use of the Greek verb περιπατέω (*peripateō*) to refer to conduct or lifestyle is common in the NT (see 1 John 1:6, 2 John 4, as well as numerous times in Paul. Here the phrase refers to conduct that results when a person has “truth” residing within, and possibly alludes to the indwelling Spirit of Truth (see 2 John 2). In the specific context of 3 John the phrase refers to true Christians who are holding fast to an apostolic Christology in the face of the secessionist opponents’ challenge to orthodoxy.

⁷ **tn** Grk “that I hear”; the ἵνα (*hina*) clause indicates content. This is more smoothly expressed as an English infinitive.

⁸ **tn** Grk “walking in (the) truth” (see the note on the phrase “living according to the truth” in 3 John 3).

⁹ **tn** The author has already described Gaius as “dear friend” or “beloved” (τῷ ἀγαπητῷ, *tō agapētō*) in v. 1; he will address Gaius in the same way in vv. 5 and 11 (Ἀγαπητέ, *Agapēte*). This is a term of endearment and personal warmth, much as it is when used by the author as an address in 1 John 2:7.

¹⁰ **tn** BDAG 821 s.v. πιστός 1.b offers the translation “act loyally” for this context, a usage which is not common but does fit well here. Since the author is going to ask Gaius for additional help for these missionaries in the following verse, he begins here by commending Gaius for all that he has already done in this regard.

sn When the author tells Gaius “you demonstrate faithfulness by whatever you do” he is commending him for his faithful service to the traveling missionaries (*the brothers*). Gaius has assisted them, and they have now returned with a report of this to the author (3 John 3).

¹¹ **tn** Grk “who” (a relative pronoun that continues the sentence begun in 3 John 5).

¹² **sn** Which church does the author refer to here? The church where Gaius is, the church where the author is, a different local church where the “brothers” are, or the “universal” church, the church at large? Since the suggestion in 3 John 3 is that the “brothers” have come and testified in the author’s church about what Gaius has done for them, it seems most likely that the “church” mentioned here is also the author’s church, where he is currently located. Other possibilities cannot be ruled out, but seem unnecessarily complicated.

¹³ **sn** Now the author, after commending Gaius for his faithful service to the traveling missionaries in the past (see 3 John 5), now requests additional assistance at the present time (*send them on their way in a manner worthy of God*). Apparently the missionaries are on their way to visit the area where Gaius’ church is located a second time. They had been there once already and had returned with a good report of how Gaius had assisted them. It is entirely possible that they themselves carry with them the present letter as a letter of introduction. Along these lines it has been suggested that *Demetrius* (see 3 John 12) is one of these traveling missionaries, perhaps the leader of the delegation, and the author is formally introducing him to Gaius, since when he was there

forth¹ on behalf of “The Name,”² accepting nothing from the pagans.³ **1:8** Therefore we⁴ ought to support such people, so that we become coworkers in cooperation with the truth.⁵

Diotrephes the Troublemaker

1:9 I wrote something to the church,⁶ but Diotrephes,⁷ who loves to be first among them, does not acknowledge us.⁸ **1:10** Therefore, if I come,⁹ I will call attention to the deeds he is doing¹⁰ – the bringing of unjustified charges against us with evil words! And not being content with that, he not only refuses to welcome the brothers himself, but hinders the people who

the last time he was a *stranger* (v. 5) but Gaius assisted him anyway.

1 sn The verb *gone forth* (ἐξέρχομαι, *exerchomai*) almost certainly refers to some form of missionary activity. This verb is used of Paul’s travels in Acts 14:20, and of his setting out on his second missionary journey in Acts 15:40.

2 sn Three possibilities for the identification of “The Name” have been suggested: (1) the name of God, suggested by the unqualified noun with the Greek article. In Rabbinic literature “the Name” is a frequent substitute for the Tetragrammaton YHWH, the name of God, which was too sacred to be pronounced. This would make good logical sense in 3 John, because in the previous verse the author has instructed Gaius to send the missionaries on their way “in a manner worthy of God.” (2) Some have understood “the Name” as the self-designation of the Johannine community, or as a reference to the Christian cause at large, or as a way of designating Christians before the title “Christian” came into common usage. (3) The interpretation favored by most commentators is that this is a reference to Jesus’ name. Paul uses a similar phrase in Rom 1:5, and in 1 John 2:12 the author wrote, “your sins are forgiven on account of His (Christ’s) name.” John’s Gospel also makes reference to believing “in the name of Jesus” (John 1:12, 3:18).

3 tn The word ἔθνικός (*ethnikos*) occurs only 4 times in the NT (the other three are in Matt 5:47; 6:7; and 18:17). It is virtually synonymous here with the far more common ἔθνος (*ethnos*, used some 162 times in the NT). Both refer to the Gentiles (that is, pagans).

sn Since the issue here is support for the traveling missionaries, and there is no indication that the author would want to forbid receiving support from Gentile converts to Christianity, the word *pagans* must refer to Gentile unbelievers, i.e., pagans. The traveling missionaries sent out to combat the false teaching of the secessionist opponents have been accepting nothing by way of support from non-Christians.

4 sn Clearly the author does not refer to himself alone by the use of the first person plural pronoun *we* here, since the issue is support for the traveling missionaries. It stands in contrast to *the pagans* mentioned in the previous verse, and is thus to be understood as inclusive of *all true Christians*: the author, Gaius, and all true Christians. All true Christians ought to support the endeavors of these traveling missionaries in their efforts to counteract the heretical teaching of the opponents.

5 tn The ἵνα (*hina*) clause indicates the result of such support for the traveling missionaries: The Christian who helps to support them in their efforts thus becomes a coworker in cooperation with the truth. Although the dative τῇ ἀληθείᾳ (*tē alētheia*) is somewhat difficult to specify, it would appear (corresponding to the σύν- [*sun-*] prefix of the noun modified) to indicate a sense of cooperation with “the truth” which is at work through the missionaries. There is precedent in the Johannine literature for understanding “truth” as personified (John 8:32, “the truth will make you free”; possibly also 1 John 3:19). More explicitly, 1 John 4:6 identifies the Holy Spirit as “the Spirit of Truth,” a characterization repeated in 1 John 5:6. Thus it seems likely that the “truth” at work through the missionaries here is ultimately the Holy Spirit, who works through their efforts. The Christian who supports them thus becomes a coworker with the Spirit of God himself.

6 sn The *church* mentioned here, which the author says he may visit (3 John 10) is not the same as the one mentioned in 3 John 6, to which the author apparently belongs (or of which he is in charge). But what is the relationship of this church in v. 9 to Gaius, to whom the letter is addressed? It is sometimes suggested that Gaius belongs to this church, but that seems unlikely, because the author uses a third-person pronoun to refer to the other members of the church (*among them*). If Gaius were one of these it would have been much more natural to use a second-person pronoun: “Diotrephes, who loves to be first *among you*.” Thus it seems probable that Gaius belongs to (or is in charge of) one local church while Diotrephes is in another, a church known to Gaius but to which he does not belong.

7 sn *Diotrephes* appears to be an influential person (perhaps the leader) in a local church known to Gaius, but to which Gaius himself does not belong. The description of Diotrephes as one *who loves to be first* suggests he is arrogant, and his behavior displays this: He refuses to *acknowledge* the written communication mentioned by the author at the beginning of v. 9 (and thus did not recognize the author’s apostolic authority), and furthermore (v. 10) *refuses* to show any hospitality to the traveling missionaries (*welcome the brothers*) already mentioned by the author. It has been suggested that the description “loves to be first” only indicates that Diotrephes sought prominence or position in this church, and had not yet attained any real authority. But his actions here suggest otherwise: He is able to refuse or ignore the author’s previous written instructions (v. 9), and he is able to have other people put out of the church for showing hospitality to the traveling missionaries (v. 10).

8 tn Since the verb ἐπιδέχομαι (*epidechomai*) can mean “receive into one’s presence” (BDAG 370 s.v. 1; it is used with this meaning in the next verse) it has been suggested that the author himself attempted a previous visit to Diotrephes’ church but was turned away. There is nothing in the context to suggest an unsuccessful prior visit by the author, however; in 3 John 9 he explicitly indicates a prior *written* communication which Diotrephes apparently ignored or suppressed. The verb ἐπιδέχομαι can also mean “accept” in the sense of “acknowledge someone’s authority” (BDAG 370 s.v. 2) and such a meaning better fits the context here: Diotrephes has not accepted but instead rejected the authority of the author to intervene in the situation of the traveling missionaries (perhaps because Diotrephes believed the author had no local jurisdiction in the matter).

9 tn The third-class condition (ἐάν ἔλθω, *ean elthō*) seems to be used by the author to indicate real uncertainty on his part as to whether he will visit Diotrephes’ church or not.

10 sn Because Diotrephes did not recognize the authority of the author, the author will expose his behavior for what it is (*call attention to the deeds he is doing*) if he comes for a visit. These are the charges the author will make against Diotrephes before the church: (1) Diotrephes is engaged in spreading *unjustified charges* against the author with *evil words*; (2) Diotrephes refuses to *welcome the brothers* (the traveling missionaries) himself; (3) Diotrephes *hinders* the others in the church who wish to help the missionaries; and (4) Diotrephes expels from the church (*throws them out*) people who aid the missionaries. (Diotrephes himself may not have had supreme authority in the local church to expel these people, but may have been responsible for instigating collective action against them.)

want to do so and throws them out of the church!
1:11 Dear friend, do not imitate what is bad but what is good.¹ The one who does good is of God; the one who does what is bad has not seen God.²

Worthy Demetrius

1:12 Demetrius³ has been testified to by all, even by the truth itself. We also testify to him,⁴ and you know that our testimony is true.

Conclusion

1:13 I have many things to write to you, but I do not wish to write to you with⁵ pen and ink.⁶
1:14 But I hope to see you right away, and we will speak face to face.⁷ **1:15** Peace be with you.⁸ The friends here⁹ greet you. Greet the friends¹⁰ there¹¹ by name.

¹ **sn** The exhortation *do not imitate what is bad but what is good* is clearly a reference to Diotrephes' evil behavior. The author exhorts Gaius (whom he wishes to continue assisting the missionaries) not to follow the negative example of Diotrephes, but to do what is right. Implicitly there may be a contrast between the bad behavior of Diotrephes and the good reputation of Demetrius (mentioned in the following verse), but it seems more likely that Demetrius is himself one of the traveling missionaries (perhaps their leader), rather than the leader of a local congregation who, unlike Diotrephes, has supported the missionaries himself.

² **sn** The statement *The one who does what is bad has not seen God* is asyndetic; its abrupt introduction adds emphasis. The statement reiterates the common Johannine theme of behavior as an indication of genuine faith, found in 1 John in 3:6, 10; 4:7, 20; and in the Gospel of John in 3:17-21. By implication, the genuineness of Diotrephes' faith is called into question, because he has obviously done *what is bad* (v. 11b; cf. vv. 9-10). In John's terminology it is clear that the phrase *has not seen God* is equivalent to "is not a genuine Christian" (see John 3:17-21 and 1 John 3:6, 10; 4:7, 20).

³ **sn** *Demetrius* is apparently someone Gaius would have heard about, but whose character was not known to him. Thus the author is writing to Gaius to attest to Demetrius' good character. It appears that Demetrius is coming to Gaius' church and needs hospitality and assistance, so the author is writing to commend him to Gaius and vouch for him. It is difficult to know more about Demetrius with any certainty, but the author is willing to give him a powerful personal endorsement (*We testify to him too*). Demetrius may well have been the leader of a delegation of traveling missionaries, and may even have been the bearer of this letter to Gaius. The writing of letters of introduction to be carried along by representatives or missionaries in NT times is also attested in Paul's writings (1 Cor 16:3).

⁴ **tn** The words "to him" are not in the Greek text, but are implied.

⁵ **tn** Grk "by means of."

⁶ **tn** Grk "ink and pen." The more normal order in contemporary English is "pen and ink."

sn The figurative phrase *with pen and ink* is parallel to 2 John 12, suggesting that both letters may well have been written at approximately the same time and in similar situations. The author tells Gaius that he has more to say, but does not wish to do so in writing; he would rather talk in person (3 John 14). It appears that the author anticipates a personal visit to Gaius' church in the very near future. This may be the same visit mentioned in connection with Diotrephes in v. 10. Gaius' church and Diotrephes' church may have been in the same city, or in neighboring towns, so that the author anticipates visiting both on the same journey.

⁷ **tn** Grk "speak mouth to mouth," an idiom for which the contemporary English equivalent is "speak face to face."

⁸ **tn** Grk "peace to you."

⁹ **tn** The word "here" is not in the Greek text but is implied.

¹⁰ **sn** It is possible that the designation *friends* (φίλοι, *philoí*) indicates that these are personal friends of Gaius who send their greetings, but if this is the case it is somewhat surprising that their names are not mentioned, especially when the author instructs Gaius, *Greet the friends there by name*. More likely this is an alternative to "brothers" (ἀδελφοί, *adelphoí*) as an early Christian self-designation, especially within the Johannine community. It may have arisen in the Johannine community from Jesus' teaching in John 15:13-15, "you are my *friends* if you do what I command you."

¹¹ **tn** The word "there" is not in the Greek text but is implied.