

3 John

1

Summary: *Third John is a personal letter from 'the elder' to a beloved individual named Gaius. The elder commends Gaius for his faithfulness and especially for his hospitality to traveling missionaries, even those who were strangers to him (vv. 1-8). He then sharply condemns Diotrephes, a church leader who refuses to welcome the elder's representatives, speaks malicious nonsense against the elder, and excommunicates those who do offer hospitality (vv. 9-10). Demetrius is briefly commended as a trustworthy figure (vv. 11-12). The letter closes with a hope for a personal visit.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Third John provides a rare window into the internal power struggles of the early church. Diotrephes represents a local leader who has effectively seized control of a congregation, rejecting apostolic authority and punishing those who disagree. This is not a doctrinal dispute (unlike 2 John's concern about false teaching) but a conflict over authority and hospitality. The letter reveals that the apostolic church was not a utopian community but a human institution with real power dynamics. The contrast between Gaius (who gives) and Diotrephes (who controls) is the letter's central moral lesson.*

Translation Friction: *The identity of 'the elder' remains debated — he may be the apostle John, a distinct figure called John the Elder (mentioned by Papias), or another Johannine community leader. The nature of Diotrephes' offense is also debated: some see him as a proto-heretic, others as an ambitious leader who simply resisted outside authority. The text itself focuses on his behavior (refusing hospitality, slandering the elder, excommunicating supporters) rather than his theology. The letter's brevity makes many questions unanswerable from the text alone.*

Connections: *The hospitality theme connects to Romans 12:13, Hebrews 13:2, and the instructions in 2 John 10-11 (though 2 John restricts hospitality to false teachers, 3 John commends it for true ones). The 'walking in truth' language (vv. 3-4) parallels 2 John 4. The elder's self-designation matches 2 John 1. Diotrephes' love of 'being first' (philoprōteuōn) contrasts with Jesus's teaching that the first shall be last (Mark 10:43-44). Demetrius's commendation 'by the truth itself' (v. 12) echoes the Johannine emphasis on truth as a living reality.*

¶The elder, to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth. ¶Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul. ¶For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. ¶I have no deeper joy than knowing that my children live according to the truth. ¶Below

d, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for the brothers, especially those who are strangers. ⁶They have testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God, ⁷Indeed, because that for his name's sake they traveled forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. ⁸Therefore we ought to support people like these, so that we may be fellow workers for the truth. ⁹I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. ¹⁰So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking malicious nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers himself, and he also stops those who want to and expels them from the church. ¹¹Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God. ¹²Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself. We also add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true. ¹³I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with ink and pen. ¹⁴I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. ¹⁵Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends, each by name.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The self-designation *ho presbyteros* ('the elder') matches 2 John 1, linking the two letters to the same author. Gaius is called *agapētō* ('beloved') — a term of deep personal affection. The phrase *en alētheia* ('in truth') can mean 'truly, genuinely' or 'within the sphere of truth.' The name Gaius was extremely common in the Roman world; this is not necessarily the same Gaius mentioned in Acts 19:29, 20:4, Romans 16:23, or 1 Corinthians 1:14.
2. The prayer-wish follows standard Hellenistic letter conventions but is transformed by genuine pastoral concern. The verb *euodousthai* ('to prosper, to have a good journey, to go well') and *hygiainein* ('to be healthy') cover material and physical welfare. The comparison *kathōs euodoutai sou hē psychē* ('as your soul prospers') is a compliment — Gaius's spiritual health is the standard by which the elder measures his wish for physical health.
3. Traveling brothers (*adelphōn*) have brought reports to the elder about Gaius. The verb *martyrountōn* ('testifying, bearing witness') uses courtroom language for a solemn attestation. 'Your truth' (*sou tē alētheia*) means the truth that characterizes Gaius — his truthful way of living. The present tense *peripateis* ('you are walking') indicates an ongoing pattern of conduct, not a single event.
4. The superlative *meizoteran* ('greater') is intensified — literally 'more greater,' a double comparative found in colloquial Greek. The phrase *ta ema tekna* ('my children') reveals the elder's pastoral relationship to Gaius and others in his care. The greatest joy for a spiritual father is not institutional success but the faithful conduct of those he has nurtured.
5. The adjective *piston* ('faithful, trustworthy, reliable') characterizes Gaius's actions as consistent with his faith. The phrase *kai touto xenous* ('and this, strangers') adds emphasis — Gaius's hospitality extends not only to known believers but to traveling missionaries who are unknown to him personally. In the ancient world, hospitality to strangers was both a social virtue and a practical necessity, since public inns were often dangerous or disreputable.
6. The missionaries have publicly (*enōpion ekklēsiās*, 'before the church/assembly') testified to Gaius's love. The verb *propempsas* ('having sent forward, having provided for their journey') was a technical term for equipping travelers with provisions, money, and companions for the next stage of their journey (cf. Acts 15:3, Romans 15:24, 1 Corinthians 16:6). The standard is *axiōs tou theou* ('worthy of God') — the hospitality should reflect the God whom both host and guest serve.
7. The missionaries went out *hyper tou onomatōs* ('for the sake of the Name') — 'the Name' without further specification is Jesus Christ. This absolute use of 'the Name' reflects early Christian reverence (cf. Acts 5:41). They accept nothing from *ethnikōn* ('Gentiles, pagans, non-believers'), maintaining the principle that the gospel mission should be funded by believers, not by those who do not share the faith. This makes Christian hospitality essential to the church's mission.
8. The verb *hypolambanein* ('receive, support, take up') goes beyond mere welcome to active support. The theological motivation is striking: by supporting missionaries, believers become *synergoi* ('fellow workers, co-laborers') *tē alētheia* ('for the truth'). Hospitality is not charity but partnership in mission. Those who stay home and support those who go are equally engaged in the work of the gospel.
9. The transition is abrupt: a letter was sent to the church, but Diotrephes blocked it. The participle *philoprōteuōn* ('loving to be first, desiring preeminence') is a rare compound word found only here in the New Testament. It describes not a formal office but a personality — someone who craves control. The verb *epidechetai* ('receive, welcome, acknowledge') means Diotrephes refuses to accept the elder's authority or his representatives. The 'something' (*ti*) written to the church may be a lost letter, 2 John, or a general communication.
10. The elder lists Diotrephes' offenses in escalating severity: (1) *phylarōn hēmas* ('babbling malicious nonsense against us') — spreading slander with poisonous words; (2) *oute autos epidechetai tous adelphous* ('he himself does not receive the brothers') — personally refusing hospitality to traveling missionaries; (3) *tous boulomenous kōlyei* ('he prevents those who wish to') — blocking others from showing hospitality; (4) *ek tēs ekklēsiās ekballei* ('he throws them out of the church') — excommunicating those who defy his control. This is a portrait of authoritarian leadership: monopolizing communication, controlling access, and punishing dissent.
11. The imperative *mē mimou* ('do not imitate') uses the verb from which 'mimic' derives. The principle is stated in absolute Johannine terms: doing good (*agathopoiōn*) is evidence of being *ek tou theou* ('from God'), while doing evil (*kakopoiōn*) proves one *ouch heōraken ton theon* ('has not seen God'). This echoes 1 John 3:6 and 4:20. In context, the implicit contrast is between Gaius (good) and Diotrephes (evil), with Gaius urged to continue

his pattern despite Diotrephes' opposition.

12. Demetrius receives a threefold commendation: (1) *hypo pantōn* ('from everyone') — universal reputation; (2) *hypo autēs tēs alētheias* ('from the truth itself') — his life conforms to truth as an objective standard, so that truth itself bears witness to him; (3) *hēmeis de martyroumen* ('we also testify') — the elder's personal endorsement. The phrase 'you know that our testimony is true' (*oidate hoti hē martyria hēmōn alēthēs estin*) echoes John 21:24. Demetrius may be the bearer of this letter, which would explain why he needs an introduction and recommendation to Gaius.
13. The closing mirrors 2 John 12 almost exactly. The elder has more to say but prefers personal communication to written correspondence. The mention of *melanos* ('ink,' literally 'black') and *kalamou* ('reed pen') are the standard writing implements of the ancient world. The preference for face-to-face communication over written media is a recurring theme in the Johannine letters.
14. The phrase *stoma pros stoma* ('mouth to mouth') is more literally physical than the English idiom 'face to face.' It emphasizes the directness and intimacy of personal conversation over the limitations of written communication. The adverb *eutheōs* ('immediately, soon') conveys urgency — the situation with Diotrephes likely requires prompt personal intervention.
15. The farewell *eirēnē soi* ('peace to you') is the standard Semitic greeting-and-farewell (Hebrew *shalom lekha*), here placed at the close. The designation *hoi philoi* ('the friends') for fellow believers is distinctive — it appears as a group designation only here in the New Testament and echoes Jesus's words in John 15:14-15 ('I have called you friends'). The instruction *kat' onoma* ('by name, individually') insists on personal, not generic, greetings — each person matters individually. The letter that began with one beloved name (Gaius) ends with an insistence on naming each friend.