

THIRD JOHN

Chapter 1

Greeting

1 The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth. 2 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. 3 For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. 4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

Beloved. A favorite term of John. (CSB)

Gaius. A Christian in one of the churches of the province of Asia. Gaius was a common Roman name. (CSB)

Possibly a leader in John's congregation or a faithful layman who gave hospitality to teachers who shared Christ's truth. (TLSB)

Gaius is a Latin name. In Roman culture as in today's English-speaking culture, people were generally given three names by their parents. They had their personal name, the family name and a first name, which was usually abbreviated the way we abbreviate our middle names. (PBC)

There are three other men named Gaius in the NT, all associated in some way with the apostle Paul (Acts 19:29; Acts 20:4; 1 Cor. 1:14). There doesn't seem to be a strong case that any of these three Gaiuses is the man to whom John wrote this little note. All that can be surmised is that he was a good lay leader in his congregation, and that congregation was probably one of those that John was supervising in western Asia Minor. He had been offering his own home as a place for traveling teacher to stay. John says that he is a "dear friend" whom he loves. They must have known each other and worked together in the past in some way. (PBC)

truth. By this he probably means that what makes his relationship with Gaius so satisfying is that it is rooted in the work of spreading the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. They were bonded together by the truth of Christ, and they were joined in the work of evangelism by that same truth. (PBC)

2 that you may be in good health - Medical studies show that people live physically healthier lives when they are conscious of being loved, of being part of a positive human network, of enjoying the affection and support of other people. And what is true of people physically is also true spiritually. Expressing love and support for each other and praying for one another is one of the best things we can do to build one another up. It also is one of the secrets to building a healthy congregation. (PBC)

Christianity is not merely spiritual but is inclusive in its care for a person as a whole. John prayed that Gaius's physical health would be as strong as the spiritual health, which was very strong as witnessed by Gaius's walking in the truth. (TLSB)

3 brother - The term "brother" is sometimes used in the NT in the sense of "believer." In the three uses in this letter, though (verses 3, 5, 10), John intends "brother" to mean traveling representatives and messengers. Their function was to share instructions from John, to pass along information from other congregations, and also to do some teaching. They were part of the network of information and accountability that John and the other apostles were trying to set up. (PBC)

walking in the truth - The way Gaius conducted himself as a Christian; especially the love with which he treated all and the hospitality and support he showed for those who teach Christ purely. (TLSB)

4 *no greater joy* - They had brought John a great report about Gaius. John was delighted. He was old enough to know that the time of his death was not all that far off and that all his material possessions would soon pass to other. What brought him satisfaction was not in the accumulating money, power, or fame, but in seeing his “children,” his students, grow up in their faith and go to work for the Lord. These thoughts are reminiscent of John’s first letter, where he uses the affectionate term “children” nine times. (PBC)

my children. Perhaps John’s converts, or believers currently under his spiritual guidance. (CSB)

Christians were John’s children because, as an apostle of Jesus, he cared for them spiritually and was responsible for the safety of their faith, just as a father would look after his children. (TLSB)

1–4 The apostle prays that Gaius might be physically as healthy as he is spiritually healthy. Our heavenly Father is on our side at all times, no matter what suffering we face. He sent Jesus as our great physician to heal us from sin and the afflictions we experience in a sin-broken world. He grants faith that is active in love for our brethren and for the truth. • Heavenly Father, grant that we may walk by faith in Jesus and in the truth of Your Word. Grant us great faith and bodily strength to serve our brothers and sisters in Christ. Amen. (TLSB)

Support and Opposition

5 Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, 6 who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. 7 For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. 8 Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth. 9 I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. 10 So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church. 11 Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God. 12 Demetrius 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.

5 *do in all your efforts for these brothers.* The early church provided hospitality and support for missionaries. (CSB)

Gaius had never met these brothers personally before they came to him the first time. But he recognized them as brothers by supporting their work among all the churches. (TLSB)

Third John is the mirror image of 2 John. (PBC)

6 *church* - This must have been John’s home church, his base (Irenaeus of Lyons wrote in the second century that John was the bishop of Ephesus). The fact that these “brothers” had been reporting to John suggest that had also been sent by John. The men were strangers to Gaius, but he welcomed them because he trusted John. (PBC)

send them on their journey - Their travel to all the churches in Asia Minor and then back to Ephesus. (TLSB)

manner worthy - John expected Gaius to supply these teachers with food, money, or whatever they needed for their work and journey because they came not for their own benefit but to bring the Word of God to Gaius and his fellow Christians. Because these teachers are ambassadors of Christ, John is confident that Gaius will treat them with the honor that is due their Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. (TLSB)

7 *Name*. Today Orthodox Jews often address God by the title *Ha-Shem* ("The Name"). (CSB)

Jesus' name, in whose name these teachers came and whose Word they preached and taught. (TLSB)

Gentles - Here refers to unconverted people, non-Christians, from whom the teachers would accept no donations, lest any might think that money was their motivation for preaching. Their motivation is "for the sake of the name," the loved of Christ for all. (TLSB)

8 *support people* - This has been long God's policy for congregations: people who are receiving good things from being taught God's Word need to share good things with the teachers of God's Word (Gal. 6:6). "The worker deserves his wages" (1 Tim. 5:18). (PBC)

Since Christian teachers could not accept any monetary help from pagans, they had to receive all of their support from fellow Christians. When they supported those who taught the truth, Christians were working for the truth of the Gospel. (TLSB)

9 *I have written*. There may have been a previous letter of the apostle that is now lost. (CSB)

church. Some identify this church with the chosen lady (or church) of 2Jn 1, and 3Jn as here referring to 2Jn. (CSB)

The congregation where Diotrephes wanted to put himself first as supreme leader. (TLSB)

Diotrephes. A church leader who was exercising dictatorial power in the church. He must have had considerable influence since he was able to exclude people from the church fellowship (v. 10). (CSB)

An egotistical leader. It is unknown whether he was a layman or a pastor. He had enough influence in the congregation to control their gatherings and to expel those who refused to do as he said. Cf. 10. (TLSB)

likes to put himself first - It was a matter of control and power for Diotrephes, who wanted to be absolute leader. (TLSB)

acknowledge our authority - Diotrephes did not accept the apostolic authority of John or the ambassadorial authority of those teachers who were sent to preach the truth in Christ's name. (TLSB)

10 *if I come* - John intended to visit, but he always left the future in God's hands, even when making definite plans. (TLSB)

talking wicked nonsense - We do not know what excuses Diotrephes used for resisting John's God-given authority or what he may have told his congregation as a reason to refuse to receive John's emissaries; his charges were false and empty. (TLSB)

refuses to welcome - Apparently, Diotrephes did not want any of the brothers sent from John to teach in his congregation. Whether it was a disagreement over a specific point of doctrine or simply an issue of

control, Diotrephes's dictatorial actions were not God pleasing and caused harm in the congregation. (TLSB)

brothers. The teachers sent from John. (TLSB)

puts them out. Luther: "[A bishop] should listen and answer gently. He should advise prudently, he should not insist on his own way. He should use good common sense so that it will be a pleasure to behold it. He is not noisy. He is not rash. Everything is done with good common sense. (TLSB)

philoxenos, hospitable. He is a cheerful host to brothers who come from everywhere—from churches in other places. He gives them food and drink; he washes their feet. Indeed, the bishop's home should be open to foreign brethren, but not to just any vagrant. At the time of the Roman Empire this was not so, and the political community of the Jews in a very fine way wrote letters of recommendation for their brethren. We read about this in John's last epistle" (AE 28:285). (TLSB)

Instead of acting as a servant, in accordance with Jesus' teaching, he had become an abusive tyrant. John list five dreadful features of Diotrephes' leadership: (PBC)

1. He loved to be first.
2. He wanted nothing to do with John.
3. He was gossiping maliciously about John.
4. He refused to welcome the brothers.
5. He stopped others from welcoming the brothers and put them out of the church.

11 *do not imitate evil.* Christians were not to use their influence or position to gain personal power in the congregation. The Church already has a supreme head, Christ. Believers serve Him and follow Him (cf Lk 22:24–27) (TLSB)

does what is good. The continual practice of good, not merely doing occasional good deeds. (CSB)

Amazingly, in the face of the bleak scenario of verses 9 and 10, John has hopeful words:

1. Don't be sucked in and dragged down by Diotrphe. Don't play his games. Don't descend to his level.
2. The best way to fight tyranny and gossip is to imitate what is good. Find shelter in the truth instead of gossip. Counteract meanness and hatred with love.

good is from God. Cf Mk 10:18; Lk 18:19. (TLSB)

12 *Demetrius.* One of the teachers sent by John, probably the man entrusted to deliver this letter to Gaius. (TLSB)

Regardless of who Demetrius was, he was a source of encouragement and strength of Gaius. He had a great reputation with everyone, and he would prove a valuable ally in establishing a healthier congregational life. (PBC)

everyone. All the Christians with John, likely at Ephesus. (TLSB)

the truth itself. Demetrius's teaching and actions were in accord with the Word of God, so the truth itself testified that Demetrius was genuine and could be trusted. (TLSB)

We also add our testimony. There must be two or three witnesses for a testimony to stand (Dt 19:15; Mt 18:16; 2Co 13:1). The witnesses were (1) the church with John, (2) the truth of God's Word, and (3) the apostle John and his fellow elders. (TLSB)

5–12 Whatever flattery or intimidation people may use to get their way, there always comes a day when their works are brought into the open—when they will be shamed before God and His faithful. We need not fear the threats and plots of power mongers who conspire against us and would try to harm our reputations and have us cast out because we show love and support for God's ambassadors. God will bring their threats and accusations into the light. Trust the Lord to protect you when you support the truth. He will deliver you by His Son, who is “the way, and the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6). • Heavenly Father, fill us with such love for Your ambassadors that we welcome and support all who testify to the truth. Give us courage to stand up against the plots of those who would harm our congregation. We have only one head, and He is Your Son, Christ Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen. (TLSB)

Final Greetings

13 I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink. 14 I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. 15 Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends, each by name.

13–14 Almost identical to 2Jn 12. This letter to Gaius and 2Jn may have been written together or about the same time. (TLSB)

15 *Peace to you.* Not a prayer or wish but a benedictory pronouncement. (CSB)

Gaius's head and heart must have been spinning because of all the turmoil in his congregation. How his heart must have hurt when he would speak with his Christian friends who had been “disfellowshipped” by Diotrephes. It might have looked as though all he and the others had built up was slowly spinning down the drain. But John spoke to him in the same word that the risen Christ had spoken to a fearful John on Easter evening: “peace.” When God says “Peace,” then we really can relax. Satan really has been defeated. (PBC)

friends. Friends of Gaius in Ephesus Ephesus. (TLSB)

Greet the friends, every one of them. Lit, “Greet the friends by name.” For early Christians, their baptismal name bore a special remembrance of God's grace. Such personal greetings would remind them that they were brothers and children of God by Baptism into Christ. (TLSB)

13–15 John gives Christ's blessing of peace and extends the greetings of all of Gaius's friends in Ephesus. John withholds all that he might say about Diotrephes until he meets with Gaius face-to-face. Today, when called upon to tell the truth in any controversial situation, you should exercise similar care and discretion. The peace with which the apostle John blesses Gaius is a peace that none can take away; it is peace not as the world gives, but only as Christ gives. • Heavenly Father, You called each one of us by name through Baptism into Your Son. Grant us the peace that passes all understanding, which is beyond the reach of men who put themselves first. Keep us in Christ's peace until the day when we have no more need for the Word of God on paper and in ink—for then we shall see Christ the Word face-to-face. Amen. (TLSB)