

# 3 JOHN

## INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF 3 JOHN

This epistle was written by the Apostle John, who calls himself an “elder”, as in the preceding, and is inscribed to a friend of his, whom he mentions by name, and expresses a very great affection for, on account of his steady adherence to the truths of the Gospel, (~~600E~~-3 John 1:1); he wishes him bodily health equal to that prosperity of soul he was indulged with, (~~600D~~-3 John 1:2); congratulates him upon the testimony the brethren that came from him gave him of the truth being in him, and of his walking in it, and upon hearing that his children also trod in the same path, (~~600B~~-3 John 1:3,4); commends him for his hospitality and charity, of which testimonies were given before the church; and encourages him to go on doing the same acts of beneficence, since it was to such persons that went forth for the sake of Christ, and preaching in his name, and had nothing of the Gentiles for so doing; wherefore they ought to be received, and entertained by those of ability, that they might be fellow helpers to the truth with them, (~~600F~~-3 John 1:5-8). He complains of Diotrephes as a proud, haughty, and overbearing man in the church, where Gaius was a member, who would neither receive the letters the apostle sent, nor the brethren that came with them; nay, forbid them that would, and cast them out of the church for it, and prated against them with malicious words, whom he threatens to remember when he himself should come thither, (~~600D~~-3 John 1:9,10); wherefore he exhorts Gaius not to follow such an ill example, but that which is good in any person; since he that does good appears to be of God, and he that does evil, it looks as if he had never known him, (~~600E~~-3 John 1:11). And particularly he recommends Demetrius, who had a good report of all men, and of the truth itself, and had a testimony from the apostle, and those that were with him, which was known to be a true one, (~~600D~~-3 John 1:12). But though he had many things to say, both of one, and of the other, he determines to write no more at present, hoping he should shortly see him, and personally converse together; and closes the epistle with his own good wish, and with mutual salutations of friends, (~~600B~~-3 John 1:13,14).

**Ver. 1.** *The elder unto the well beloved Gaius*, etc] The elder is the writer of the epistle, the Apostle John, who so styles himself on account of his age, and office, as in the preceding epistle. The person to whom he writes is “the well beloved Gaius”; not that Gaius, who was the Apostle Paul's host, (~~61623~~ Romans 16:23), for though their characters agree, being both hospitable men, yet neither the place nor time in which they lived. The Apostle Paul's Gaius lived at Corinth, this is in some place near to Ephesus, for the apostle in his old age purposed to come and see him shortly; the other was contemporary with Paul, this with John; there were thirty or forty years difference between them: besides, the Corinthian Gaius was baptized by Paul, and was doubtless one of his spiritual children, or converts, whereas this Gaius was one of the Apostle John's spiritual children, (~~6004~~ 3 John 1:4); nor does he seem to be the same with Gaius of Macedonia, (~~44923~~ Acts 19:29), or with Gaius of Derbe, (~~3904~~ Acts 20:4), who seem to be two different persons by their country, though both companions in travel of the Apostle Paul; for which reason, as well as the time of their living, neither of them can be this Gaius, who was a settled housekeeper, and resided at some certain place. His name is a Roman name, and the same with Caius, though he seems to have been a Jew, as he might, it being usual with the Jews in other countries to take Gentile names. His character is, that he was “well beloved”; that is, of God, as it appears he was from the grace bestowed on him, from the prosperous estate of his soul, and from the truth that was in him, and his walking in it; and of the Lord Jesus Christ, for the same reasons; and also of all the brethren and saints that knew him; he being a person not only truly gracious, and of faithfulness and integrity, but of great liberality and beneficence, which must gain him much love and esteem among them; and he was well beloved by the Apostle John; and so the Syriac version renders it, “to my beloved Gaius”: though his love to him is expressed in the following clause,

*whom I love in the truth*; as being in it, or for the sake of it, or truly and sincerely; (see Gill on “~~6004~~ 2 John 1:1”).

**Ver. 2.** *Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper*, etc] Or succeed in all temporal affairs, in the business of life, in which he was; and as success of this sort depends upon the blessing of God, which maketh rich, it is to be wished and prayed for from him:

*and be in health*; that is, of body, which above all things above all outward mercies, is the most desirable; for without this, what are the richest

dainties, the largest possessions, or the best of friends? without this there can be no comfortable enjoyment of either of them; and therefore of this sort of mercies, it is in the first place, and above all others, to be wished for, and desired by one friend for another. The rule and measure of this wish is according to the prosperity of his soul,

*even as thy soul prospereth*: the soul is diseased with sin, and may be said to be in good health, when all its iniquities are forgiven; and may be said to prosper, when having a spiritual appetite for the Gospel, the sincere milk of the word, it feeds upon it, is nourished by it, and grows thereby; when it is in the lively exercise of faith, hope, and love; when spiritual knowledge is increased, or it grows in grace, and in the knowledge of Christ Jesus; when the inward man is renewed day by day with fresh strength; and when it enjoys communion with God, has the light of his countenance, and the joys of his salvation; and when it is fruitful in every good work.

**Ver. 3.** *For I rejoiced greatly when the brethren came*, etc] From the place where Gaius lived, to that where John now resided; these brethren seem to be preachers of the word, who travelled from place to place to spread the Gospel:

*and testified of the truth that is in thee*; either of Christ, who was formed in him; or of the Gospel, which had a place in his heart; or of the truth of grace that was in him, as well as of that faithfulness, integrity, and sincerity he appeared to be possessed of, being an Israelite indeed, and without guile:

*even as thou walkest in the truth*: in Christ, and in the Gospel, and as became it, and with all uprightness; (see ~~GOOD~~ 2 John 1:4); and this occasioned great joy in the apostle; as it is matter of joy to every one that truly loves Christ, and his Gospel; or has the true grace of charity in him, which envies not the gifts and graces of others, but rejoiceth in the truth, wherever it is found; and especially to the faithful ministers of the word, when they hear of the truth of grace in any souls, and that such continue walking in the truth of the Gospel, and particularly those who have been wrought upon under their ministry, as follows.

**Ver. 4.** *I have no greater joy*, etc] Nothing that causes greater joy. The Vulgate Latin version reads “grace” or “thanks”; and then the sense is, that he had nothing to be more thankful for:

*than to hear that my children walk in truth*; meaning his spiritual children, those whose conversion he had been the instrument of; and among these it seems Gaius was one.

**Ver. 5.** *Beloved, thou doest faithfully*, etc] Or a faithful thing, and as became a faithful man, a believer in Christ; in all his beneficence and charity he acted the upright part; he did not do it in an hypocritical way, to be seen of men, and gain applause from them, but from a principle of love, and with a view to the glory of God:

*whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers*; which may design either different persons; and by “brethren” may be meant the poor brethren of the church that Gaius belonged to, and others that were well known to him; and by “the strangers”, not unconverted persons, but such of the saints as came from foreign parts, and travelled about to spread the Gospel, and enlarge the interest of Christ: or else the same persons may be intended, for the words may be read, as they are in the Alexandrian copy, and some others, and in the Vulgate Latin version, “what thou doest to the brethren, and this to strangers”; that is, as the Arabic version renders it, “to strange brethren”; or, as the Syriac version, “to the brethren, [and] especially [them] that are strangers”; so that Gaius was a very hospitable man, one that entertained and lodged strangers, and used them very civilly and courteously, with great liberality, and with much integrity and sincerity.

**Ver. 6.** *Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church*, etc] At Ephesus, where John was; these brethren and strangers coming thither, and being greatly affected with Gaius's kindness and liberality to them, could not forbear speaking of it to his praise, in the presence of the members of the church, as well as acquainted the Apostle John with it; the Syriac version reads, “before the whole church”; they bore testimony of his liberality in a very public manner And this the apostle mentions to encourage Gaius to go on, and continue in his kindness to the same persons, since they retained such a grateful sense of past favours; and whereas they were now returning back, he desires that he would give them some further assistance:

*whom if thou bring forward on their journey*; the word here used signifies, to send on before, as in (<sup><415B></sup> Acts 15:3 <sup><418B></sup> 20:38 <sup><421B></sup> 21:5 <sup><615B></sup> Romans 15:24) (<sup><416B></sup> 1 Corinthians 16:6,11 <sup><4116B></sup> 2 Corinthians 1:16 <sup><518B></sup> Titus 3:13), and is used by the Septuagint in the same sense as here, and in the above places,



and entertain them cheerfully, while they continue, and supply them with all necessaries when they depart:

*that we might be fellow helpers to the truth*; that is, to the Gospel, and the propagation of it in the world: some are helpers to it, in preaching of it, by making use of the ministerial gifts bestowed upon them; and others are fellow helpers with them, to the same good work, by their purses, communicating freely to the support of those, who labor in the word and doctrine; and these latter have the honor to be co-workers, or fellow laborers with the former, as the word here used signifies. The Alexandrian copy reads, “fellow helpers to the church”, that so the whole burden of taking care of these ministers might not lie upon them. The Vulgate Latin, Arabic, and Ethiopic versions read, “fellow helpers of the truth”.

**Ver. 9.** *I wrote unto the church*, etc] Where Gaius was a member: those who take Gaius to be the same with Paul's host, and whom he baptized at Corinth, think the church at Corinth is here meant; but it seems rather to be meant of some church in Asia nearer Ephesus; nor is it likely that John's first epistle should be here intended, which makes no mention of relieving the brethren, the ministers of the Gospel, that came from Judea: and that this epistle should not be preserved, need not seem strange; for it cannot be thought that everything that was written by him to particular persons, or churches, should be continued. The Alexandrian copy and one of Stephens's read, “I wrote something to the church”; upon this head, concerning receiving and supporting ministers of the Gospel, and so prevents an objection that Gaius might make, why did he not write to the church about it? The Vulgate Latin version reads, “I should”, or “would have wrote”: and the Syriac version, “I desired”, or “wished to have wrote”; suggesting, that though he had not wrote, yet it was much upon his mind, he had a great desire to it:

*but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not*; which hindered him from writing, or was the reason why he wrote now to Gaius since Diotrephes gave no heed to what he had wrote, suppressed his letter, and would not suffer it to be read to the brethren. This Diotrephes, by his name, which signifies one “nourished”, or “brought up by Jupiter”, was a Gentile; there was one of this name, who was one of the kings of Athens<sup>f1</sup>; and what may confirm this is, his slighting and rejecting the brethren that came from Judea: it is very likely he was more than a private member in the church, and that he was an

officer, and it may be the pastor; and though there is a preeminence, which of right belongs to such an officer, as to preside over the church, to govern, guide, and direct, according to the laws of Christ, he being set over the church, as a ruler, governor, and guide; yet this may be carried too far, as it was by this man, who coveted more than was his due, and lorded it over God's heritage, ruled the flock with force and cruelty, and usurped a tyrannical power over them; whereas every thing in a church ought to be done, by pastor and people, in love, meekness, and with mutual consent. And it may be also, that he sought to have the preeminence over the rest of the elders of the church, for in those large churches there were oftentimes more elders and pastors than one; (see ~~407~~ Acts 20:17,28 ~~300~~ Philippians 1:1). This ambitious spirit prevailed and obtained among the false teachers, who set up themselves at the head of parties, and above the apostles of Christ, and paved the way for antichrist, who assumed the title of universal bishop, which has introduced all the errors and impieties of the Romish church. Now this man such an ambitious, lordly, and governing spirit, received not the Apostle John, and those that were with him; meaning not their persons, for as yet he and they were not in person where he was; but his letter, his orders, and instructions; these he paid no regard to, concealed them from the church, and would not admit them to be read: or else the apostle's sense is, that he received not the brethren that came from him, and were recommended by him, and whom he affectionately loved, and who were near and dear to him as himself; and therefore not receiving them is interpreted by him as not receiving himself.

**Ver. 10.** *Wherefore, if I come*, etc] Where both Gaius and Diotrephes lived, as he trusted he should shortly, (~~6014~~ 3 John 1:14);

*I will remember his deeds which he doth*; meaning, not only that he would tell him of them to his face, but make mention of them, and expose them to the whole church, and reprove him for them: and which are as follow,

*prating against us with malicious words*; it is a common thing for ministers of the Gospel to be prated against, not only by the men of the world, but by professors of religion, and by such who call themselves preachers also; nor need it be wondered at, since John, an apostle of Christ, the beloved disciple, who was so harmless and inoffensive in his conversation, so kind and loving in his disposition and temper, so meek and humble in his deportment, and now in such an advanced age, was prated against by a Diotrephes: and what is said against Christ's ministers is no other than

prating; silly, idle, trifling, and empty stuff, as the word used signifies; for want of greater things, they take up any little matter, and improve it against them; and this is often done with a malicious intent, to hurt their characters, spoil their usefulness, and render their ministry unprofitable.

*And not content herewith*; with prating against the Apostle John, and the ministers with him, in this wicked way:

*neither doth he himself receive the brethren*; the meaning is not, that he did not receive them into the church, for they were there, since afterwards mention is made of his casting them out from thence; but he did not receive them into his house, and entertain them as he ought to have done; for a minister of the Gospel, and a pastor of a church, ought to be hospitable, and given to hospitality, and entertain strangers, especially those who are brethren in Christ, and fellow ministers of the word: and the rather these were to be received, since they traveled about to spread the Gospel among the Gentiles, and took nothing of them. And this was not all, he not only did not receive them himself, and reject them, but was not willing that others should receive them:

*and forbiddeth them that would*; on such who had a heart, as well as ability, to receive and entertain these poor brethren, he laid his injunctions, and gave them strict orders, in his lordly and tyrannical way, not to show any respect unto them;

*and casteth [them] out of the church*; that is, he excommunicated them, either those that entertained them, or rather the brethren themselves; which was an abuse of the ordinance of excommunication, as that ordinance is abused, when any single person, a pastor, or any other, as here, assumes the power of doing it himself, and does it without the church; whereas it is a punishment or censure, to be inflicted by many, or to be done by the joint suffrage of the church; and when it is done in a wrong cause, for some small trifling matter, or none at all, and not in a case of heresy or immorality, obstinately persisted in; and when it is done from wrong principles, and with wrong ends, as to gratify the pride and passion of some; and not for the good of the person cast out, or to prevent others from falling into the same snare, or for the honour of religion, and the glory of God. The phrase seems to be taken from the Jews, who expressed their excommunication, or putting out of the synagogue, by a casting out; (see ~~John~~ John 9:34,35).

**Ver. 11.** *Beloved, follow not that which is evil*, etc] Follow not evil in general, it being hateful to God, contrary to his nature and will, and bad in itself, as well as pernicious in its consequences; and particularly follow not, or do not imitate the particular evil or evils in Diotrephes; as his pride, ambition, love of preeminence, and tyrannical government in the church, and especially his hard heartedness, cruelty, and inhospitality to the poor saints; and so the Arabic version reads, “do not imitate him in evil”; the examples of persons in office and authority have great influence, especially in cases of charity, when men can be excused thereby, and save their money, or be freed from an expense:

*but that which is good*; follow and imitate that, be a follower of God, imitate him in acts of kindness and beneficence, be merciful as he is; copy the deeds of Jesus Christ, who went about doing good, and declared it to be more blessed to give than to receive; and tread in the steps of those good men, who have shown love to the name of Christ, by ministering to his saints; for though the apostle may mean everything that is good, which is to be followed and imitated in any, yet he chiefly designs acts of kindness and beneficence to poor saints and ministers: to which he encourages by the following,

*he that doeth good is of God*; he is a child of God, he appears to be so, in that he is like to his heavenly Father, who is kind and merciful; he is born of God, he is passed from death to life, which his love to the brethren shows; he has the grace of God, and strength from Christ, and the assistance of the Spirit, without either of which he could not do that which is good:

*but he that doeth evil hath not seen God*; has had no spiritual saving sight of God in Christ; for if he had, he would abhor that which is evil, and, with Job, abhor himself for it, and reckon himself, with Isaiah, as undone, (~~Job~~ Job 42:6 ~~Isaiah~~ Isaiah 6:5), for such effects has the sight of God on the souls of men; such an one knows not God, nor what it is to have communion with him: for those who live in sin, in whom it is a governing principle, cannot have fellowship with God; nor has such an one ever felt the love of God in his soul, or been made a partaker of his grace, which would teach and constrain him to act otherwise. Compare this text with (~~1 John~~ 1 John 3:10), which shows the Apostle John to be the writer of this epistle. The Ethiopic version reads, “shall not see God”; that is, hereafter, in the world to come.

**Ver. 12.** *Demetrius hath good report of all [men]*, This man was of a quite different cast from Diotrephes, and therefore the apostle makes mention of him to Gaius, to be followed by him, and not the other; he was either the same with Demas, which is a contraction of this name, or the person that John sent from Ephesus with this letter: we read of an Ephesian of this name, (~~492A~~ Acts 19:24); though not the same person; or else one that also was a member of the same church with Gaius and Diotrephes; and he being kind and beneficent, obtained a good report of the generality of men, not only of the brethren, but of those that were without; for a liberal man is universally respected. The Syriac version adds, “and of the church itself”; as distinct from all men, or the generality of the men of the world:

*and of the truth itself*; that is, whoever speaks truth must give him a good character, for this cannot be understood with any propriety of the Gospel, nor of Jesus Christ:

*yea, and we also bear record*; or a testimony to the character of Demetrius; that is, I, John, the apostle, and the saints at Ephesus:

*and ye know that our record is true*; faithful, and to be depended upon. The Alexandrian copy, and several others, read, “thou knowest”, as does also the Vulgate Latin version, which seems most agreeable, since this epistle is directed to a single person; compare this with (~~608B~~ John 19:35); and it will give a further proof of this epistle being the Apostle John's.

**Ver. 13.** *I have many things to write*, etc] With regard to churches, and particular persons, and concerning hospitality to the poor brethren:

*but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee*; suggesting he should take another method of communicating his mind to him, which he next mentions.

**Ver. 14.** *But I trust I shall shortly see thee*, etc] Either at Ephesus, where John was, or rather at the place where Gaius lived, (see ~~600D~~ 3 John 1:10);

*and we shall speak face to face*; freely and familiarly converse together about these things, which were not thought proper to be committed to writing:

*peace [be] to thee*; which was the usual form of salutation with the Jews, and John was one; (see Gill on “~~600D~~ John 20:19”);

*[our] friends salute thee*; or send their Christian salutation to thee, wishing all health and prosperity in soul and body; meaning the members of the church at Ephesus: the Arabic version reads, “thy friends”; such at Ephesus as had a particular knowledge of him, and affection for him. The Vulgate Latin version reads, “the friends”: the members in general; and the Alexandrian copy reads, “the brethren”; and the Syriac version, our brethren: and then the epistle is closed thus,

*greet the friends by name*; meaning those that were where Gaius lived, to whom the apostle sends his salutation, and desires it might be delivered to each of them, as if they had been mentioned by name. This and the epistle of James are the only epistles which are concluded without the word “Amen”.

# FOOTNOTE

**Ft1** -- Vid. Fabricii Bibliograph. Antiqu. p. 211.