

Introduction

I have though, on occasion, that it must have been great to be in the early church—to have the apostles as your teachers, to experience first century koinonia, meeting daily in each other's homes, being in the exciting environment of a new thing taking off—being among the first to explain Christianity to the world. Perhaps all of us have thought something like that when reading the first few chapters of Acts. Fortunately, God also has a way of reminding us that not everything was perfect early on in Christianity. The little letter that we call Third John gives us a glimpse into early church life. In fourteen verses, we see good people, a not-so-good person, politics, relationships, pride, commendations, warnings and so on. Most importantly, we see ourselves.

The Apostle John wrote the Gospel of John (that we might **understand** salvation), First, Second and Third John (that we might know how to **behave** during our salvation) and Revelation (that we might know what will happen **after** salvation).

Third John is the shortest letter in the New Testament (**219** Greek words) and is about three men:

1. Gaius (a highly regarded, **delightful**, charitable and prosperous Christian leader)
2. Diotrephes (a highly resentful, **deceiving**, carnal and prominent Christian leader)
3. Demetrius (a highly respected, **dependable**, consistent and pleasant Christian leader)

Since Third John is a letter, remember back to fifth grade and the parts of a letter—a salutation, a body and a conclusion. Today, we will look at the salutation and the first part of the body.

Outline

I. **Salutation** (vv. 1-2)

II. **Body** (vv. 3-12)

A. **Positives** about Gaius (vv. 3-8)

1. **Gaius' Faithfulness** (vv. 3-4)
2. **Gaius' Hospitality** (vv. 5-8)

B. **Negatives** about Diotrephes (vv. 9-10)

C. **Positives** about Demetrius (vv. 11-12)

III. **Conclusion** (vv. 13-14)

Analysis

I. Salutation (vv. 1-2)

1 **The Elder** [John the Apostle], **To the beloved** [adjective form of *agape*] **Gaius**,

Pronounced GAY-us. There were at least three Gaius' mentioned in Scripture. Whenever you read the Scripture and you come across a familiar name, do not automatically associate a name with the same name found somewhere else. These Gaius' are different men in different places mentioned for different reasons: [David Guzik's Commentaries on the Bible: Gaius was perhaps the most common name in all of the Roman Empire.]

There are at least **three** Gaius' mentioned in the Bible:

- (1) Gaius of Macedonia, he went with Paul and & arrested with Paul in Ephesus in **Acts 19:29**
- (2) Gaius of Derbe, he went with Paul and Timothy to Asia in **Acts 20:4**
- (3) Gaius of Corinth, Paul baptized him in **1 Corinthians 1:14** & hosted Paul in **Romans 16:23**
- (4) Gaius of Third John

whom I love [present tense verb form of *agape*] **in truth** [certainly, in fact]:

2 **Beloved** [adjective form of *agape*], **I pray** [present tense verb meaning to pray or **wish**] **that you** [singular] **may prosper** [present tense verb meaning to grant a prosperous and expeditious **journey**, to lead by a direct and easy way, to cause to prosper, be successful]

in [some of your translations will say 'above all' and it really should be 'in all' because using 'above all' does not flow logically] **all** [Greek word *peri* meaning around] **things** [The New John Gill Exposition of the Entire Bible: Or succeed in . . . the business of life]

and be [present tense] **in health** [to be sound, to be well, to be in good health; metaphorically used of Christians whose opinions are free from any mixture of error of one who keeps the graces and is strong],

just as your [singular] **soul prospers** [present tense verb meaning to grant a prosperous and expeditious journey, to lead by a direct and easy way, to cause to prosper, be successful].

Barnes' Notes on the New Testament: The word for prosper includes success in business, happiness in domestic relations, or prosperity in any of the engagements and transactions in which a Christian might lawfully engage. It shows that it is right to wish that our friends may have success. This is the reverse of the wish which we are commonly express for our friends. [How marvelous] when we can, as the expression of our highest desire for the welfare of our friends, express the hope that they may be in all respects as much prospered as they are in their soul.

David Guzik's Commentaries on the Bible: What would we be like if our physical health was in the same state as our souls?

Soul prosperity is more important than **physical** prosperity.

II. Body (vv. 3-12)

A. Positives about Gaius (vv. 3-8)

1. Gaius' Faithfulness (vv. 3-4)

3 **For I rejoiced** [to rejoice exceedingly, be glad, to be well, to **thrive**] **greatly** [exceedingly beyond measure] **when brethren came and testified** [witnessed] **of the truth** [certainly, in fact] **that is in you** [singular],

just as you [singular] **walk** [present tense verb meaning to walk, to make one's way, progress; to make due use of opportunities; to regulate one's life, to conduct one's self, to pass one's life] **in the truth** [certainly, in fact].

4 **I have** [present tense verb meaning to **hold** or possess] **no** [no, not; in direct questions expecting an affirmative answer] **greater** [of these greater] **joy** [gladness]

than to hear [present active subjunctive, literally meaning to **keep on** finding out] **that my children walk** [present tense verb meaning to walk, to make one's way, progress; to make due use of opportunities; to regulate one's life, to conduct one's self, to pass one's life] **in truth** [certainly, in fact].

Barnes' Notes on the New Testament: The same thing may be said now of all the ministers of the gospel to whom they minister and of all Christian parents respecting their own children.

EasyEnglish Bible Version & Commentary: To live in the truth is more than to **agree with it. It [is] to allow the truth to affect every part of the life. The truth is that Jesus Christ is Lord. To live in truth is to **live** as God wants us to live.**

Now, Gaius sounds like a great person, does he not? However, in the next few weeks we will look at both the issues John wrote about and how Gaius faced those issues.

2. Gaius' Hospitality (vv. 5-8)

B. Negatives about Diotrephes (vv. 9-10)

C. Positives about Demetrius (vv. 11-12)

III. Conclusion (vv. 13-14)

Review of Last Week

Third John gives us a glimpse into early church life. In fourteen verses, we see good people, a not-so-good person, politics, pride, commendations, warnings and so on. Most importantly, we see ourselves.

I failed to mention last week why we are studying Third John. First, I have never studied it before. Second, it is providing good experience for us to do an in-depth, verse-by-verse study (the basic building block of Bible study). Third, the messages of Third John are simple and clear: commendation, correction and community.

As a reminder, Third John is a letter from the Apostle John about three men:

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2. **Diotrephes** (a highly resentful, deceiving, carnal and prominent Christian leader)
3. **Demetrius** (a highly respected, dependable, consistent and pleasant Christian leader)

Last week we looked at the salutation and Gaius' faithfulness. This week we will look at Gaius' hospitality. Next week we are scheduled to look at Diotrephes and the following week, we are scheduled to look at Demetrius and John's closing words.

Analysis

I. Salutation (vv. 1-2)

¹ The Elder,

To the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth:

² Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.

II. Body (vv. 3-12)

A. Positives about Gaius (vv. 3-8)

1. Gaius' Faithfulness (vv. 3-4)

³ For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth *that is in you, just as you walk in the truth* [This makes Gaius a mature Christian—the truth is in him and he is walking in the truth. **Matthew Henry: The best evidence of our having the truth is our walking in the truth.]. ⁴ I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.**

John is starting to get in to the purpose of the letter—because you never write a letter with no purpose. This letter’s purpose is more than just telling Gaius how great a person he is (that was last week’s lesson). John wants Gaius to **do** something. John is going to ask Gaius for help in verse 6, so he commends him again in verse 5.

2. Gaius’ Hospitality (vv. 5-8)

5 **Beloved** [adjective form of *agape* (and the **fourth** time John tells Gaius that he loves him)], **you do** [the normal Greek word meaning ‘to do’] **faithfully** [This word means trustworthily and in a manner that can be relied on. **Ray Stedman: One of the signs that a person has really been genuinely touched by God is that his pocketbook loosens up. His giving becomes generous, gracious, and cheerful, just as God loves. . . . This man is faithful (loyal) in his giving. . . . he is regular and systematic in his giving. He does not just give when his emotions are moved, but he plans his giving, and he carries it through.**] **whatever you do** [this word for ‘do’ means to work, **labor**, perform] **for the brethren and for strangers**, [foreigners or aliens] [John is commending Gaius for his **hospitality** to other believers that Gaius did not know. John knew Gaius would not get prideful about this commendation, but would rather continue doing what he should be doing.]

David Guzik’s Commentaries on the Bible: Hospitality . . . is a practical outworking of the essential command to love one another; it is love in **action.**

6 **who have borne witness of your love** [*agape* (the **fifth** time)] **before the church** [We do not know which church this was, but it makes sense that these travelers told John of Gaius’ hospitality in John’s church].

If you send them forward on their journey [This word means more than to just wave goodbye, it means to equip with the necessary things for a journey and even travel with those that are leaving a short ways as (it was customary at that time to travel a little of the journey with those that you were sending off—both for protection as well as companionship).] **in a manner worthy** [suitable] **of God** [In essence, John is saying that Gaius should treat these people as though he would treat God if he were seeing God off on a journey. On a personal note, this makes hospitality critical. The way in which we treat God is reflected in the way in which we treat people.], **you will do well** [‘You will do well’ is a Greek phrase which basically means, **‘please.’**],

7 **because they went forth for His name’s sake,**

taking [literally, taking with the hand (i.e., theft by taking as opposed to theft by deception)] **nothing from the Gentiles** [the Greek is *ethnos*, meaning people of the same customs; commonly used in the New Testament for **pagans** or Gentiles. The idea is that these Christian travelers were to rely only on the assistance of other Christians and were not to rely on the assistance of unbelievers or pagans. The reason for only

accepting Christian assistance is so that their ministry to non-Christians would not be eroded (people might think the missionaries were only after money). In addition, there were many traveling lecturers during this time and not seeking payment from the hearers would show the Christian messengers' real goal.].

Warren Wiersbe: This does not mean that God's servants should refuse a voluntary gift from an unconverted person, as long as the person understands that the gift will not purchase salvation. Even then, we must be very cautious. [In Genesis 14] The king of Sodom's offer was voluntary, but Abraham rejected it!

Ray Stedman: Not everyone goes [as a missionary]—that was true in the early church as it is today. There were some, such as Gaius, who were to stay to help support these men.

8 **We therefore ought** [owe or are in debt] **to receive** [present active infinitive form of this word, meaning it was habitually being done, the word literally means to take up under (it could be used for **protection**, **support** and/or **hospitality**—meaning it is our job today to assist when Christians need assistance)] **such** [this kind], **that we may become** [present active middle subjunctive, meaning 'that we may keep on becoming' as the idea is not that this is a one-time event, but rather a lifestyle] **fellow workers** [companions, the Greek is a compound word comprised of the word with and the word for work, business and employment] **for the truth** [supporters of those that do the work **share** in the work].

David Guzik's Commentaries on the Bible: 1 Samuel 30:21-25 shows this principle, where the spoils are distributed equally among those who fought and those who supported—and David declares that the supply lines are just as vital as the soldiers, and God will reward both soldiers and supporters properly. . . . This also explains why John would pray for the prosperity of Gaius: he was using his resources in a godly way, being a blessing to others. If God blessed him with more, more others would be blessed also.

The thought for the lesson: How am I like Gaius? How am I not like Gaius?

B. Negatives about Diotrephes (vv. 9-10)

C. Positives about Demetrius (vv. 11-12)

III. Conclusion (vv. 13-14)

Review of Previous Weeks

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II. Body (vv. 3-12)

A. Positives about Gaius (vv. 3-8)

1. Gaius' Faithfulness (vv. 3-4)

³ For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. ⁴ I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. [John is starting to get in to the purpose of the letter. John wants Gaius to do something.]

2. Gaius' Hospitality (vv. 5-8)

⁵ Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, [John is commending Gaius for his hospitality. **David Guzik: Hospitality . . . is love in action.**]

6 **who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey** [to equip with the necessary things for a journey and even travel with those that are leaving a short ways as] **in a manner worthy of God** [The way in which we treat God is reflected in the way in which we treat people], **you will do well,** 7 **because they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles.** 8 **We therefore ought** [owe] **to receive** [protect, support and show hospitality] **such, that we may become** ['that we may keep on becoming' (this is a lifestyle)] **fellow workers** [becoming one with the work] **for the truth** [supporters of those that do the work share in the work. **David Guzik's: This also explains why John would pray for the prosperity of Gaius: he was using his resources in a godly way, being a blessing to others.**].

B. Negatives about Diotrephes (vv. 9-10)

9 **I wrote** [some Greek manuscripts have 'would have written,' but the majority indicate that John had already written a letter] **to the church** [We do not know where this letter is as it is not saved for us], **but Diotrephes** [die-AH-trow-fees—the **only** time he is mentioned in Scripture],

who loves to have the preeminence [a compound Greek word from the adjective form of *philos* and *protos* meaning the **first** among friends—this word shows up nowhere else in the New Testament. Also, notice the contrast between Gaius' humble and serving heart and Diotrephes' proud and arrogant heart. John lists Diotrephes' most egregious sin first—**pride** **among them** [and we have no clue as to his position in the church—your study Bibles might indicate their preference, but we do not know for sure and all speculation is simply speculation],

does not receive [admit, be hospitable to] **us** [The idea is that Diotrephes did not recognize the prior letter from John and did not allow it to have it's intended effect].

10 **Therefore, if I come, I will call to** [his] **mind his deeds which he does** [present active indicative tense—literally, 'which he keeps on doing'; notice the difference in approach that John takes as contrasted with Diotrephes—John **rebukes**, Diotrephes expels (while we may think that cutting off communication is the best way out of a disagreement, it is rarely the right way)],

prating against us [the root word means '**bubble**' indicating the uselessness of his words—the word means to utter nonsense, talk idly, to make empty charges, to accuse falsely with malicious words; again, this word occurs nowhere else in the New Testament] **with malicious** [annoying, painful, hurtful] **words** [**Barnes' Notes on the New Testament: "words that were fitted to do injury."** **Matthew Henry: "Ambition will breed malice against those who oppose it."**].

And not content [satisfied] **with that, he himself does not receive** [admit, be **hospitable** to] **the brethren, and forbids** [hinders, prevents, withholds, denies, refuses] **those who wish to** [implying that there were some in the church that wanted to receive John and/or his words and/or his men], **putting them out** [cast out (the same word used in **John 2:15** of Jesus driving people out of the temple), driving out, sending out, depriving them, expelling them through language and not violence, commanding them—there is great debate whether or not the travelers or the church members are referred to here, but either interpretation is deserving of rebuke and correction] **of the church.** [Church discipline is supposed to be performed by the whole church and not just one member. The best word I can use to describe Diotrephes is a **bully**. **David Guzik: In rebuking an individual by name, the apostle of love is not acting outside of love . . . he is following the clear command of . . . Romans 16:17.**]

InterVarsity Press Commentary: The author's words about Diotrephes may seem harsh, especially when it is not clear that Diotrephes has done anything other than oppose [John] and his messengers. . . . Diotrephes' failure to support [John] is not just a personal affront; it is an assault against the unity of Christian **fellowship.**

Jonathan Wilson: Diotrephes was a man who wanted to be first. He wanted to have control over the church. So he cut off ties with John and the rest of the Christian world. John sent him a letter but Diotrephes refused to listen. Unfortunately this is not an isolated case. There have been many . . . who wanting more control over their congregations have broken off contact with others. This is what has happened with many of the cults. It starts with a teaching that is not really Christian. Then when other Christians try to talk to them about it, they cry out "persecution." They cut off contact. Soon they are thinking that all the other Christians are wrong and they are the true believers.

Ray Stedman: [Diotrephes] also puts people out of the church who would have taken these men in. He indulges in what we would call today "secondary separation." He not only objected to the men who came, but he objected to those who would have received them. . . . Because of this tendency to refuse fellowship to someone who likes someone you do not like, a wide divisiveness has come into the church, doing injury and harm beyond recall. Now let us see what John's counsel is in this situation. Notice that he does not advice Gaius to organize a split away from the church. Rather, he says, **Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. He who does good is of God; he who does evil has not seen God. . . . If you see somebody who is always jockeying for position in Christian relationships . . . do not **follow** him. He is following his own way and not that of God.**

C. Positives about Demetrius (vv. 11-12)

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B. Negatives about Diotrephes (vv. 9-10)

9 **I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence** [John lists Diotrephes' biggest problem first—**pride**] **among them, does not receive us.** 10 **Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does** [John rebukes and Diotrephes expels], **prating against us** [the root word means 'bubble' implying emptiness] **with malicious words.**

And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out [the same word used in [John 2:15](#)] **of the church.** [Diotrephes is a **bully**]

InterVarsity Press Commentary: Diotrephes' failure to support [John] is not just a personal affront; it is an assault against the unity of Christian fellowship.

C. Positives about Demetrius (vv. 11-12)

11 **Beloved** [the **fifth** time John says he loves Gaius], **do not imitate** [the root word is, *mimos*, where we get our word, 'mimic'; present middle imperative, meaning, 'do not be in the **habit** of imitating or mimicking'] **what is evil** [bad or not like it should be], **but what is good** [useful, pleasant, agreeable].

He who does good [he who **helps**, does a **favor**] **is of God, but he who does evil** [harm, wrong] **has not seen** [perceived] **God.** [**Dr. Constable: John was not accusing Diotrephes of being unsaved but of behaving as if he were unsaved.**]

12 **Demetrius** [duh-ME-tree-us; there is another Demetrius mentioned in Acts 19, but it appears unlikely they are the same person. Also, this could be the Demas that is mentioned in Scripture (as Demas is a shortened version of Demetrius), but that also appears unlikely.] **has a good testimony** [witness] **from all, and from the truth itself** [notice that John referred to **truth** when he wrote about Gaius and Demetrius, but not about Diotrephes. This commendation of Demetrius is not based on feeling, but based on **'the truth itself'**—Demetrius embodied truth].

And we also bear witness [same word as is translated 'testimony' in this verse], **and you know that our testimony** [the noun form of the same word for witness] **is true** [literally, **'not hidden'**—implying it is out in the open].

Many people feel that Demetrius was the one that carried the letter to Gaius because John gives him a warm commendation to ease Gaius' acceptance of him, but this seems awkward as Gaius was in the habit of welcoming and being hospitable.

III. Conclusion (vv. 13-14)

13 **I had many things to write, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and ink** [This is the same language used in 2 John 1:12-13. The Greek almost gives the impression that John started to write more, then changed his mind. I think this is a great example to learn from—not everything that you want to talk about should be **written** down—illustration: Vito Corleone speaking to his eldest son, Sonny when he says, “Never let anyone outside of the family know what you are thinking”]; 14 **but I hope to see you shortly** [immediately], **and we shall speak face to face** [literally ‘mouth to mouth’].

(15—some translations break verse 14 into two different verses, but this is more preference than anything else—chapters were introduced in the early 13th century and verses in the 16th) **Peace to you.** [David Guzik: **This is a letter about contention and conflict; yet John appropriately ends the letter with a desire and expectation for peace.**] **Our friends greet** [welcome, wish well] **you. Greet the friends** [usually, ‘**brothers**’ or ‘saints’ is used, but here, ‘friends’] **by name.** [John Gill: **This and the epistle of James are the only epistles which are concluded without the word, ‘Amen.’**]

See You Soon: Finding Peace in Conflicts, by Bob Hostetler

So let me briefly make four suggestions, drawn from what the Apostle John does in this letter that may just help you to find peace in the midst of conflict in your life. Now, I should mention, I’m not talking about how to resolve conflict . . . that’s another talk. I’m focusing instead on how to find peace in here [inside] in the midst of conflict.

- **Accentuate** the Positive (vv. 1-8)
- **Accept** what you can’t control, and **address** what you can control (This is at least John’s second attempt to address this particular problem. Three things John could control:
 1. He could write another letter, addressing it this time to Gaius (v. 1)
 2. He could make plans to visit and confront Diotrephes in person (v. 10)
 3. He could send Demetrius

John apparently had a firm grip on the distinction between what he could control and what he couldn’t; and that’s important for anyone going through a conflict. You can’t control what others say about you, for example, but you can control what you say about others. You can’t control others actions, but you can choose your response to those actions. You get the idea. Accept what you can’t control, and address what you can control.

- **Adhere** to godly principles (v. 11)
- **Attempt** not only to find peace within but to spread it abroad in your relationships (v. 14)