

Third Epistle of John

Author The Apostle John, "The Elder".

Date Cannot be nailed down with any certainty, but probably near the time of the writing of 1 John, probably in the 80s.

Background Third John is written to Gaius to both encourage him and his good ministry, as well as to deal with the problems that Diotrephes was causing in the local church.

Themes

- The responsibility of Christian hospitality.
- Dealing with a troublemaker in the church in 3 John.
- What constitutes the Biblical basis for fellowship- truth, and nothing else, not even love.
- The necessity of the practice of separation.

Place Written From

Unknown. Tradition places John as the pastor of the church at Ephesus in his latter years, so Ephesus is the best candidate. Ephesus would be a good candidate since it was the intellectual center of Asia Minor and would be an important city for such a church to be planted. Paul had prophesied earlier in Acts 20:28-31 that false teachers would arise in this church and that came true in John's day with the advent of the Gnostics in Ephesus and in Asia Minor.

There are no geographic references in the epistles that help us to identify an audience or a source of the epistles.

1. Introduction 1-4

1 The elder^a unto the wellbeloved Gaius,^b whom I love in the truth.^{c-d}

1a "The elder" The Apostle John, as this title is also used in 2 John 1. John, as the only surviving original apostle who would have been well advanced in years by this writing, would naturally have been looked upon as The Elder. His name would have not been necessary as everyone would have known who The Elder was in this day. In earlier days, Peter called himself an elder in 1 Peter 5:1.

1b We do not know exactly who this Gaius is, as this was a rather common name in this day. There are five men so named in the New Testament:

1. Romans 16:23, Paul mentions a Gaius who lived at Corinth, whom he calls his host, and the host of the whole Church.
2. In 1 Corinthians 1:14, Paul mentions a Gaius who lived at Corinth, whom he had baptized; but this is probably the same with the above.
3. In Acts 19:29, mention is made of a Gaius who was a native of Macedonia, who accompanied Paul, and spent some time with him at Ephesus. This is probably a different person from the preceding; for the description given of the Gaius who lived at Corinth, and was the host of the whole Church there, does not accord with the description of the Macedonian Gaius, who, in the very same year, traveled with Paul, and was with him at Ephesus.
4. In Acts 20:4, we meet a Gaius of Derbe, who was likewise a fellow traveler of Paul. This person cannot be the Corinthian Gaius, for the host of the Church at Corinth would hardly leave that city to travel into Asia: and he is clearly distinguishable from the Macedonian Gaius.
5. And lastly, there is the Gaius who is mentioned here, and who is thought by some critics to be different from all the above; for, in writing to him, John ranks him among his children, which seems, according to them, to intimate that he was converted by this apostle.

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2 Beloved, I wish above all things^a that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.^b

3 For I rejoiced greatly,^a when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth.

4 I have no greater joy^a than to hear that my children walk in truth.

1c This phrase is used in verses 3, 4 and 8. Christian love and fellowship must always be based upon the Truth as revealed and preserved within the Word of God. There is no other source of truth. Fellowship cannot be based on love or mutual goals or a desire for an unbiblical ecumenism. Evangelicals and Charismatics base their fellows on love instead of truth and end up with a magpie's nest of error. Such fellowships are Satanic since they are not Biblical. The only basis we have to fellowship with other believers and churches is if they are holding to the fundamental truths as revealed in Scripture. If they are not then we cannot fellowship with them.

2a John's two requests for Gaius:

1. That he prosper as his soul prospers. This deals with spiritual prosperity, a good heart with God.
2. That he would be "in health" or be healthy physically.

Both are wishes, something John desires. They are not stated as doctrinal truth.

2b Charismatics and Prosperity Preachers use this as a proof text to promote their heresy that "God wants all of His children healthy, wealthy and happy." It is obvious that the Charismatic is carnal and fleshly, for they care more for the body than they do the soul. God often times will honor His highest saints with suffering, yea, even physical suffering. This is simply a desire on the part of John for the wellbeing of Gaius. Friends use a similar greeting all the time, as we will wish someone health and prosperity. That doesn't mean that they are always going to get it but it is our desire that the Lord will bless them. John desires Gaius to be as physically healthy as he was spiritually healthy. Don't pray that for some Christians! Their situation is the opposite of Gaius'- they are strong as an ox physically and as weak as a mouse spiritually. It should be the other way around. You have little control over some areas of physical health but you have much more control over the health of your soul, which is far more important. You can go to heaven with a broken body but not with a diseased soul. The physical body must be cared for as it is the temple of the Holy Spirit, but its physical health has no bearing on your eternal destiny. Instead of spending hundreds of dollars on exercise machines and health club fees, why not put that money in building a library of Christian classics to feed your soul, and invest the rest into kingdom work? That will provide for the spiritual health of your soul.

The main reason why Christians still suffer poverty and illness is because we will not come into the full and absolute enjoyment of our salvation, and all the benefits that come from it, until we reach the Millennium and receive our new, sinless glorified bodies. Until then, we still live in a body that has already suffered the ravages of sin and we still live in a sinful, cursed world. As long as we are in such an environment and live in such a body, we can still expect doctor's bills and light bills. Our physical bodies were made from the dust of the ground that God cursed back in Genesis 3 because of sin.

3a A good report from a far country is like cold water to a thirsty soul (Proverbs 25:25). Such news about a brother and a church cannot but gladden the heart of any child of God, especially a preacher. And Gaius had a very good reputation among the brethren.

4a John's greatest joy was to know that his spiritual children were being faithful to the truth of God that he had delivered unto them. We would think then that John had led Gaius to a saving faith in Christ and was his spiritual father in the same way that Timothy and Titus were the spiritual children of Paul. What greater reason to rejoice than this? John's spiritual children love the truth and are walking in the truth. It

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2. Commendation for Gaius 5,6

5 Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers;^a

6 Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church:^a whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well:

3. Christian Hospitality 7,8

7 Because that for his name's sake^a they went forth,^b taking nothing of the Gentiles.^c

does good to the heart of a preacher and pastor, not to mention a missionary, to see other Christians, especially those whom he pointed to the Savior of those he ministered unto or disciplined, walking in truth. That makes our ministry and our efforts worthwhile, in a horizontal sense.

John's greatest joy was not in a growing church membership (numbers-wise) or hitting his goal on a "big day" or getting invited to the White House or being invited to open the legislature in prayer at the state capitol or any of these things. His greatest joy was that his spiritual children were faithful to the truth and were patterning their lives after the truth that he, and the other apostles and preachers had delivered to them. This would gladden the heart of any preacher.

5a John lets Gaius know that he has heard good things about him. John commends Gaius for his charity and Christian hospitality toward strangers. Such charity towards traveling Christians and evangelists was very important in this day. Since there were no hotels or motels as we know them today, traveling teachers were often lodged in private homes. There were inns but most of them were filthy and many of them nothing more than houses of ill-repute, certainly no place for a Christian. Traveling Christian evangelists and teachers were put up in the homes of Christians as they passed through or ministered in the area. But whenever traveling Christians passed through Gaius' town, he went out of his way to receive them into his home and provide them with as much hospitality as he could. For these efforts, John gave him gold stars with oak leaf clusters.

6a The "church" (local churches) in this day met in private homes. Here, the building is not meant so much as is the congregation that is the church.

7a "For his name's sake" These preachers went out in Jesus' name and thus, should be supported by Jesus' people since they are involved in Jesus' work. Such people are worthy of the support of the Church.

7b These travelling evangelists, because of the hospitality of Christians like Gaius, did not have to go and take any support from the unsaved Gentiles. They did not have to beg or to work a secular job or stay in an inn because Christians like Gaius made it their business to make sure they were well provided for and had what they needed. This certainly is a ministry of helps which is needed even in our own day.

7c We think about this today, of how churches, ministries and preachers are to be supported in their work. It certainly shouldn't be by "taking of the Gentiles" or from the world and unsaved people. We are not to be looking toward Washington or the unsaved to finance our kingdom activities. Churches that seek after and accept government money (taking of the Gentiles) wrap themselves in Caesar's web from which they may never escape. Nor are we to be using bond programs, car washes, selling candy door-to-door, oyster suppers, church bazaars and what not to finance the Church. Only by the giving of God's people and the divine provision of God is the Church financed. This is the only pure way to fund God's work. Woe to the Church that must go to the Gentiles for the money and support that they ought to be receiving from God's people!

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8 We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellowhelpers to the truth.^a

4. Condemnation for Diotrephes 9,10

9 I wrote unto the church:^a but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth middle us not.

10 Wherefore, if I come,^a I will remember his deeds^b which he doeth,^c prating against^d us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he^fhimself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth^gthem out of the church.

8a There is no reason why we cannot fulfill a similar type of ministry in our own day whenever missionaries, preachers, evangelists or fellow Christians are passing through our town. Are they not worthy of our hospitality? If we have the space in our homes, why not turn it into a "prophet's chamber"? This way, they would not have to spend \$200 a night for a motel room that pumps pornographic movies into the room. They can save that money and enjoy Christian fellowship instead. Every church ought to have such a "safe haven" for these traveling brethren. By undertaking such a ministry, we may also be fellowhelpers to the truth" and receive a share of their reward for assisting them in their ministry.

9a John wrote a letter to this church but it is probable that they never received it, because Diotrephes would have intercepted it and placed it in File 13 (or the "circular file)." We do not know what position in the church Diotrephes occupied but it seems to have been one of some authority. Unfortunately, men like Diotrephes are in many churches. They are characterized by the fact that the "love to have the preeminence". They have to be first. They have to be important. I don't think Diotrephes was the pastor, otherwise who would have been lusting after this preeminence. He may have been just a common member or possibly a deacon who thought that he was really the one running the church or that he could do a better job of it than the pastor. Whatever his reason, he took this authority upon himself to make such decisions, probably usurping it from the legitimate authority in the church. He would not recognize John nor the men whom John commended to the church. John would write to the church "Brother So-and-So is a worthy brother and a man of God and I recommend that your church take him on for support and extend to him Christian hospitality." Gaius would have obeyed such apostolic injunctions but not Diotrephes. He would have said "Who does John think he is? Just because he is an apostle, does he think he can boss us around? I run things around here and I will make the decisions who this church supports!" He was full of himself and thought that he deserved this sort of authority in the church. Diotrephes would have exerted his self-anointed authority over the divine apostolic authority of John. If Diotrephes could rule something, he would ruin it. If got no recognition for doing something, he would make sure no one else would, either.

10a John knew all about Diotrephes and says that if he did come to the church, he would deal with this man in a public fashion. Public sins need to be dealt with publicly. John would not tolerate such spiritual insubordination in the church. No doubt Diotrephes was causing much grief in the assembly and the church was not able to overcome his influence. But John would handle things with the full apostolic authority he possessed if he got the chance. This is the only recorded instance where John flexed his apostolic muscle.

10b Publicly.

10c What was some of the things Diotrephes was guilty of?

1. He said prating against John and his company with malicious words. He would talk about everyone and against everyone. He was a master blasphemer.
2. He did not receive the brethren. He would not extend Christian hospitality toward them and would reject any and all letters of commendation about them. "He himself" did not do this, showing it was a

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5. Separation Enjoined 11

11 Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good.^a e that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.^{a-b}

6. Demetrius' Good Report 12

12 Demetrius^a hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself: yea, and we^b also bear record; and ye know that our record is true.^c

deliberate and spiteful oversight on his part, not that he “forgot” or “was too busy” to do it.

3. He forbade them that would receive these brethren in the church. This opposition would have been directed against Gaius and others like him who were fulfilling their Christian obligations. Diotrephes had no intention of extending Christian hospitality and had no intention of allowing anyone else to do so.

4. He cast them out of the church. Diotrephes cast these travelling Christians out of the church or those who attempted to extend the hospitality that Diotrephes forbade? I find it hard that Diotrephes would have managed to amass such power that he alone could excommunicate church members for such "offenses" as not obeying his will or daring to cross him. He no doubt would have liked to do it if he could. I would interpret this to mean that he cast out these visitors to the church. Men like Gaius would say "Sure Brother, you can use our prophet's chamber!" As soon as Gaius would leave, Diotrephes would come in and throw all their stuff out into the street because no one consulted him as to if it would be okay to use the prophet's chamber.

5. He didn't love the brethren but he did love the preeminence. All men are in love with something. He was basically in love with himself and it showed in his personality and character.

10d To talk idly and at length; chatter, to utter idly or to little purpose, empty, foolish, or trivial talk; idle chatter. From the Middle English “praten”.

11b This verse would be applied to men like Diotrephes in the church. They must be cast out and excommunicated. Church discipline must be exercised against such men, lest the church and those within it are defiled from such a fellowship. Diotrephes was evil, therefore do not follow him nor fellowship him. This also means that Diotrephes was probably not saved, else he wouldn't have such a demonic attitude. Instead, put in a good man like Demetrius (verse 12) in his office and follow him instead.

11c “He that doeth evil...” This also applies to Diotrephes. He was evil and did evil, therefore he knew not God (probably was not saved) and therefore was spiritually unqualified for any leadership position, including ones he probably usurped, in the church. This would be another reason for his removal and excommunication if he did not repent.

12a “Demetrius” means “belonging to Demeter (Ceres, god of agriculture), which probably means he was a convert from paganism. He was a good man and was everything Diotrophes wasn't. He would receive the brethren and lodge them in his house at his own expense and he didn't care if anyone patted him on the back for that or not. He did not insist on having his own way in the church. If he was voted down on something, he took it in stride with Christian grace. He was a man who loved the truth and the brethren more than self and that also manifested itself in his character and service.

7. Conclusion 13,14

13 I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee:

14 But I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be to thee. Our friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name.^a

14a This and the epistle of James are the only epistles which are concluded without the word "Amen".

What is truth? (John 18:38)

1. God is a God of truth- Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 31:5
2. God must be served in truth- Joshua 24:14; 1 Samuel 12:24
 - a. We cannot serve God if we are in error, either deliberately or ignorantly
3. Hezekiah walked before God in truth- 2 Kings 20:3; Isaiah 38:3
4. Hezekiah did truth before God- 2 Chronicles 31:20
5. In Nehemiah 9:13, the marginal reading for the commandments of God is "laws of truth".
 - a. God's law is truth- Psalm 119:142,151
6. The upright man speaks truth in his heart- Psalm 15:2
7. The judgments of God are true- Psalm 19:9
8. All the paths of God are truth- Psalm 25:10
9. God wants truth in the inward parts- Psalm 51:6
10. God's truth is our shield and buckler- Psalm 91:4
11. God shall judge in truth- Psalm 96:13
12. The truth of God is eternal- Psalm 100:5
13. The way of truth is to be chosen- Psalm 119:30; 2 Peter 2:2
14. Calling upon God in truth- Psalm 145:18
15. The preacher should seek out words of truth- Ecclesiastes 12:10
16. Truth is fallen in the streets- Isaiah 59:14
 - a. The situation in our day
17. The Lord lives in truth- Jeremiah 4:2
18. Few seek after truth- Jeremiah 5:1
19. The scripture of truth- Daniel 10:21
20. "There is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land."- Hosea 4:1
21. In the Millennium, Jerusalem shall be called the City of Truth- Zechariah 8:3
22. Christ is full of truth- John 1:14
23. Truth came by Christ- John 1:17
24. God must be worshipped in truth- John 4:24
25. Truth can be known- John 8:32
26. Knowledge of the truth will make us free- John 8:32
27. The truth is not in Satan- John 8:44
28. Jesus is the truth- John 14:6
29. The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Truth- John 15:26; 16:13
30. Sanctification through truth- John 17:17,19; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:22
31. Sinners changing the truth of God- Romans 1:25
32. Love rejoices in truth- 1 Corinthians 13:6
33. We can do nothing against the truth- 2 Corinthians 13:8
34. Enemies for the truth's sake- Galatians 4:16
35. One of the fruit of the Spirit is truth- Ephesians 5:9
36. "Loins girt about with truth" – Ephesians 6:14
37. Damnation caused by a refusal to believe, or accept, the truth- 2 Thessalonians 2:10,12
38. God wants all men to come to a knowledge of the truth- 1 Timothy 2:4
39. The church is the "ground" of the truth- 1 Timothy 3:15

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40. The word of truth must be rightly divided- 2 Timothy 2:15
41. Some men are never able to come to a knowledge of the truth- 2 Timothy 3:7
42. The truth can be resisted- 2 Timothy 3:8
43. Love is based on truth- 1 John 3:18; 2 John 1; 3 John 1
44. Spirit of truth and spirit of error- 1 John 4:6
45. The Spirit is truth- 1 John 5:6
46. Preachers rejoice when their children walk in truth- 2 John 4; 3 John 4
47. Fellowhelpers to the truth- 3 John 8