

Outline of the Book of III John

Introduction:

A complete study of the apostle John and his authorship of this epistle is examined in the introduction of I John.

Chapter One

I. John addressed Gaius the beloved (1:1-4):

- A. *“The elder unto Gaius the beloved, whom I love in truth”* (1:1).
1. Comments over the issue of John being an *“elder”* are discussed in II Jn. 1.
 2. Who is Gaius? The name Gaius is used in Acts 19:29, 20:4; Rom. 16:23; and I Cor. 1:14. It seems very likely that the Gaius mentioned in each of these passages is the same man; however, to say that this is the same Gaius that John now addresses is to assume much. We cannot say exactly who this Gaius was except that he was loved of John.
 3. John loved Gaius *“in truth.”* To love in truth is to love as God loves (I Jn. 4:17). To love as God loves is to care for the souls (I Jn. 3:16, 4:10) and physical well being of brethren (I Jn. 3:17) and the lost of the world (Gal. 6:10).
- B. *“Beloved, I pray that in all things thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth”* (1:2).
1. To *“prosper”* (*euodoo*) is to “help on the way, to have a prosperous journey; used metaphorically to prosper, be successful” (LS 329).
 2. John prayed that Gaius would be successful *“in all things.”* The all things may be in Gaius’ endeavors to teach and preach to the lost and help brethren out of error. Again, the success prayed for may be for financial success.
 3. John’s love for Gaius is indicated here. John prayed for both the physical (health) and spiritual (soul) prosperity of this man.
- C. *“For I rejoiced greatly, when brethren came and bare witness unto thy truth, even as thou walkest in truth”* (1:3).
1. This verse is the key to understanding the makeup of III John. Apparently, John had received news of the faith of Gaius and now sent this third epistle to him.
 2. The idea of Christians bringing other Christians great joy by walking in truth and not giving in to the false doctrines and teachers around them continues to be brought out. It was the apostle Paul’s great concern for the Corinthian Christians that they would follow the doctrines of the devil (II Cor. 11:3-4).
 3. To *“bare witness”* is to give testimony at the mouth of two or more (cf. I Cor. 13:1). There was no gossip (sin) involved in the testimony given by these men to John regarding Gaius. If sin was involved in communicating the soul’s condition of others, then John would not have the joy he mentioned here. Paul testified as to the unfaithfulness of men such as *“Hymenaeus and Philetus; men who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already, and overthrow the faith of some”* to the young evangelist Timothy (II Tim. 2:17-18).
- D. *“Greater joy have I none than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth”* (1:4).
1. Likewise, John would say ‘greater sorrow have I none than this, to hear of my children teaching and following error.’
 2. As was mentioned at the end of II John, brethren were communicating with each other regarding the faithfulness of each other and the faithfulness of churches. Some news was joyous, other news was not (cf. Appendix #19; Church Autonomy).

3. To “*walk in the truth*” is to abide in the teachings of Jesus and to love each other (I Jn. 3:10). Gaius may have been a convert of John’s.
4. This indicates John’s connection with the church where Gaius worshipped. Generally the NT uses the phrase “my children” to illustrate the converts of one of the apostles (cf. I Cor. ; I Jn.).

II. The faithful work of Gaius (1:5-8):

- A. “*Beloved, thou doest a faithful work in whatsoever thou doest toward them that are brethren and strangers withal; who bare witness to thy love before the church: whom thou wilt do well to set forward on their journey worthily of God:*” (1:5-6).
 1. The faithful works of Gaius were apparently in the fact that he housed “*brethren and strangers*” while they went about preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. The brethren are obviously preachers that Gaius had previous knowledge of and the strangers were unknown preachers to Gaius.
 2. These brethren and strangers had brought back a report to the church where the apostle John worked and gave a favorable report regarding Gaius. Gaius was a man of Biblical love; i.e., he cared for the spiritual and physical well being of brethren.
 3. Another evangelistic trip was now in the workings. John admonished Gaius to continue his work of support for these gospel preachers. Such work would include housing, feeding, supporting monetarily and accompanying them as far as possible (cf. Acts 21:5, Rom. 15:24; Titus 3:13).
- B. “*Because that for the sake of the Name they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. We therefore ought to welcome such, that we may be fellow-workers for the truth*” (1:7-8).
 1. Here John clearly revealed that Gaius did not just support any stranger who came and said he loved Jesus and was preaching Jesus, but these brethren and strangers had a reputation of preaching the authority of Jesus Christ.
 2. As these preachers went forth preaching the gospel, they did not take support from the Gentiles lest the gospel be hindered in a similar way that Paul reasoned (I Cor. 9:12).
 3. Notice that as Gaius “*welcomed such*” this made him a “*fellow-worker for the truth.*” It may be that this sheds light on the interpretation of II John 11. If I give a place to stay, food and finances one who preaches false doctrines, I have now partaken in his evil works. He continues his work because of me.
 - a. To “*welcome*” (*apolambano*) is to “take or receive from another, to receive what is one’s due... to take of, take part of a thing... to hear or learn... to take back, get back, regain, recover... to take apart or aside..” (LS 101).
 - b. “*Fellow-workers*” (*sunergos*) = “working together, joining or helping in work... a fellow-workman, helpmate, coadjutor, accomplice... helping to make it... helping a person in a thing” (LS 774).
 - c. The meaning is that Gaius took part in the work of these preachers by providing housing, food, and financial support.

III. Problems with Diotrephes (1:9-10):

- A. “*I wrote somewhat unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not*” (1:9).
 1. It seems that John had earlier sent a letter to the church where both Gaius and Diotrephes worshipped. Diotrephes did not accept the apostle John nor the preachers sent out into his fellowship. We are not given reasons for this action on Diotrephes’ part, but the remaining comments by John gives us an idea.
 2. Diotrephes may have been an elder or local preacher at the church, again, the record does not state. He was a man who loved to have the “*preeminence*” among the brethren at the local church. The word “*preeminence*” (*philoproteuo*) is to “strive to be first” (LS 864). “Wish to be first, like to be leader” (“AG 860-861). “To be fond of being first, striving

after the first place” (Thayer 654). Diotrophes was more likely jealous of these visiting preachers and John because they took some of the attention away from him.

3. To not “*receive*” (*epidechomai*) is to not “admit besides or in addition: to allow of, admit of” (LS 290).
 4. Remember that III John is addressed to Gaius, and therefore John is writing a letter of warning regarding Diotrophes. Diotrophes desired the leadership role in the church to the point of eliminating any threats to his status in the minds of the local brethren. The apostle John and the preachers who now came posed such a threat. Diotrophes extended no right hand of fellowship to these men.
- B. “*Therefore, if I come, I will bring to remembrance his works which he doeth, prating against us with wicked words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and them that would he forbiddeth and casteth them out of the church*” (1:10).
1. “*Remembrance*” (*hupomimnesko*) is to “remind one of a person or thing... to put him in mind... To bring back to one’s mind, mention, suggest... to remind one of, to make mention of... to call to mind, remember... to make mention” (LS 845).
 2. Apparently John was saying that when he came to this church where Gaius and Diotrophes worshipped, he would expose the dark deeds of Diotrophes. Those deeds are:
 - a. “*Prating against us with wicked words.*” To “*prate*” (*phluareo*) against someone is to “talk nonsense, play the fool” (LS 867). Diotrophes was speaking words of foolishness and wickedness against John and the preachers that had come to them from the church where John worshipped.
 - b. Diotrophes did not “*receive the brethren.*” These brethren were no doubt the preachers mentioned in verse 5. The word receive was discussed in verse 9. It means “admit besides or in addition: to allow of, admit of” (LS 290). Diotrophes would not allow a place for these preachers of truth.
 - c. Anyone who does receive these preachers, Diotrophes “*forbiddeth and cast them out of the church.*” To “*forbid*” (*koluo*) is to “let, hinder, check, prevent: to hinder or prevent one from doing...” (LS 459).
 - 1c. Clearly, one in the church where Gaius worshipped who would provide for these visiting preachers would be prevented from doing so by Diotrophes.
 - 2c. Those who continued to house and support these preachers of truth would be cast out of the church. Diotrophes may have led the way in disciplinary action against those he viewed as dissenters.

IV. Demetrius set in contrast to Diotrophes (1:11-12):

- A. “*Beloved, imitate not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: he that doeth evil hath not seen God*” (1:11).
1. To do works of righteousness is to be “*of God*” (I Jn. 3:10).
 2. I John 3:6 states, “*Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither knoweth him*” (3:6). One who has not “*seen God*” is one who does not understand God’s word (cf. Matt. 13:15; Jn. 1:18; 6:46). Therefore when one proclaims, “we cannot all understand truth alike,” he is proclaiming that he does not have God (cf. Appendix # 3; of the I John study; Can we know Truth?).
- B. “*Demetrius hath the witness of all men, and the truth itself: yea, we also bear witness; and thou knowest that our witness is true*” (1:12).
1. It may have been that Demetrius is one of the preachers mentioned in verse 5.
 2. All faithful brethren knew of the faith of Demetrius.
 3. The truth itself bore witness to the faithfulness of Demetrius because he conducted himself in accordance with divine revelation.
 4. Diotrophes spoke evil of this man while other Christians, truth and the brethren where John was worshipping knew him to be very faithful.

V. **Concluding remarks (1:13-14):**

- A. *“I had many things to write unto thee, but I am unwilling to write them to thee with ink and pen:”*
- B. *“But I hope shortly to see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be unto thee. The friends salute thee. Salute the friends by name”* (1:14).
 - 1. II John 3 notes discuss the peace of God. Peace is tranquility and serenity of mind that can only come when one has the forgiveness of sins (Heb. 9:14).
 - 2. Again the word salute is used in II John 13 and is defined as “welcome kindly, bid welcome, greet...; as the common form on meeting” (LS 124).
 - 3. The words “peace” and “salute” indicate one’s standing in truth and fellowship with God and brethren. The “*friends*” would be those in fellowship with God and brethren and were thereby known of each other and encouraged each other.

Synopsis of III John

A picture of a working church

III John is an apparent exchange between Gaius and the apostle John. The church where Gaius attended was apparently begun through the work of the apostle John (1:4). This same church was now having difficulties with one named Diotrephes. The church where John worshipped had sent out preachers to evangelize the area (Gentiles included) (1:7). As these preachers went forth, they worshipped with the saints in the area on the first day of the week. One of these preachers may very well have been Demetrius (1:12). Diotrephes rejected the preaching of Demetrius and the preachers with him, hindered other brethren from helping them and even cast some out of the church that helped these travelers (1:10). The news of this evil work was brought before the church where the apostle John worshipped (1:6). As the preachers bore witness of their work, they not only exposed the work of Diotrephes but the good work of Gaius (1:3-6).

John now sent this third epistle to Gaius to encourage him to continue doing what he was doing in relation to housing and supporting the visiting preachers, even though Diotrophes was putting pressure on those who so did (1:6). The statement made by John in 1:3 helps us identify the timing of this letter. John said, *“For I rejoiced greatly, when brethren came and bare witness unto thy truth, even as thou walkest in truth.”* Clearly, the preachers had come to Gaius, returned to the church where John worked and worshipped and had now brought this third epistle. It was John’s desire to visit these brethren face to face and expose the dark deeds of Diotrephes (1:10, 14).