

A Window on First Century Church Life: With Many Important Lessons

3 John

Like Paul's epistle to Philemon, 3 John is a private letter (or semi-private; cf. v.15) that the apostle John (the "Elder") addressed to **Gaius**, a very special spiritual brother, who was a leading member in another congregation, one that is left unnamed (not included, like John's own name, most likely because of Rome's severe Christian persecution that occurred at this time; cf. also, v.7, "for the sake of *the Name*"). The name Gaius was a common Roman name. Paul mentioned this name Gaius as well; he was one of Paul's earliest converts in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:14; Rom. 16:23). Indeed, a group of believers met in his home. One early Christian tradition claims that Gaius became John's scribe. However, we do not know if he is the same Gaius as the one addressed in 3 John. One thing is certain: John truly loved him (vv.1,2,5,11). This Gaius is commended for his devotion to the **truth** and for showing genuine **love to traveling ministers of the Gospel** who depended on the generosity of other congregations and believers for their support, especially for their material needs. (*some of this adapted from "Key Word Bible Study, NASV*)

If Gaius is the Christian model to imitate, **Diotrephes** is the just the opposite (v.9). For Diotrephes is singled out as one who shames the Name of the Lord Jesus. It is especially grievous that Diotrephes appears to be the shepherd who leads this Christian congregation. Both his evil character as well as his evil deeds are clearly enumerated in John's brief letter (vv.9-11). In Gaius, John gives his readers a model to follow; in Diotrephes, he gives his readers a model to flee, both in their own personal lives and in the leadership of Christ's church.

There is third individual John names in his letter: **Demetrius**. Most likely, Demetrius is the bearer of John's letter, whom the church can safely receive; for he is truly one of them (John gives 3 witnesses who testify on Demetrius' behalf; v.12). Additionally, Demetrius may be on mission as well. If this is the case, John's earlier words to Gaius gave ample encouragement to him and to his fellow Christian workers to lightly regard any fear of Diotrephes; but rather, to send Demetrius on his way "in a manner worthy of God" – just as they had been doing.

John purposely kept his letter brief. His plan was to personally visit them soon (v.13,14; the time of his intended visit was unspecified, perhaps for concerns for his own safety). When he comes, he has much more to share with them; and, moreover, he will deal appropriately at that time in person with Diotrephes. Finally, John closes with another word that summarizes the Christian life, even in the midst of multiplied adversity; John closes with a spiritually calming word: **PEACE**. He concludes his letter with greeting from those with him; and then issues an imperative that Gaius greets for John the rest of the believers who he dearly loves (there may be several reasons for this mild-command: one reason may be that he wanted most, if not all, in the church to read his letter). Even in trying church circumstances, 3 John ends on a precious note of the love and peace that should knit together each local body of believers in Christ.