



## 3 John

### Author and Title

As with his second epistle, 3 John claims to have been written by the elder, almost certainly the apostle John. In NT times and into the post-apostolic era, elders, the Greek presbyteroi, could refer to the pastoral leaders of local congregations. The first use of this title appears in Acts 11:30 <<***This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul***>>, which speaks of church leaders, i.e. pastors and overseers, in the Jerusalem church during the mid-40s AD.

Paul and Barnabas appointed elders to be ministers in the churches they planted: <<***Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust***>> (Acts 14:23). Paul also instructed Titus to do the same on the island of Crete: <<***The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you***>> (Titus 1:5).

Elders presided at the Jerusalem Council, circa AD48-49, alongside the apostles, see Acts Chapter 15. Nearly a decade later Paul addressed the elders, apparently the pastors of churches at and probably around Ephesus: <<***From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church***>> (Acts 20:17).

Elders at Jerusalem were alongside the senior elder James when Paul reported back to the church at the end of his 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey: <<***The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present***>> (Acts 21:18).

This shows that the title elder for pastoral leaders at Ephesus had been in use 20 to 30 years by the time 2 and 3 John were written. It was widely employed in the early church, particularly around Jerusalem but also in distant areas like Ephesus.

The fact that Peter understood himself to be a fellow elder of church leaders across a wide geographical area makes it plausible for John to have referred to himself in the same manner. See the comments made on v.1.

## Date

John wrote this letter probably from Ephesus in the last 25 years of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD. See the comparative section in the Introduction to 1 John for more information on John being in Ephesus.

## Theme

The theme of 3 John is with regard to the need for disciples of Christ to remain resolute in the faith when faced with opposition, whether from inside or outside of the church. The recipient of the letter, his beloved Gaius, faces a troublemaker named Diotrephes. By: <<**walking in the truth**>> (vv.3-4), Christians can embrace and live out the apostolic message that John conveys in all his letters.

A key part of the message is the responsibility that believers have to support others on mission. They are to be shown hospitality that goes beyond just providing meals and accommodation but also to help with the material and financial needs of such evangelistic workers.

## Purpose of 3 John

It has been suggested that 2 and 3 John were originally preserved because they were part of a single packet containing all three Johannine letters. On this view, 3 John was a personal letter to Gaius commending the courier of the shipment, Demetrius (v.12); 2 John was to be read aloud to Gaius' church; and 1 John was a sermon for general distribution and not a letter in the strict sense. This scenario cannot be verified but is a useful hypothesis in envisioning how John's letters could have arisen and been preserved in early Christianity. Unfortunately, no other information about Gaius has survived.

The name Gaius does appear elsewhere in Scripture. There is one who lived in Corinth of whom Paul writes: <<**Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings**>> (Romans 16:23a), and: <<**I am thankful that I did not baptise any of you except Crispus and Gaius**>> (1 Corinthians 1:14); and Gaius from Derbe who was with Paul in Ephesus during the riots: <<**Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's travelling companions from Macedonia, and rushed as one man into the theatre**>> (Acts 19:29), and travelled with Paul to Jerusalem with the offerings from the churches in Achaia, Macedonia and probably Asia: <<**He was accompanied by Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy also, and Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of Asia**>> (Acts 20:4). The latter Gaius is put forward by some as the recipient of John's letter, which is possible but unlikely as John refers to him as one of: <<**my children**>> (v.4), which would not sit well with someone who had been either a disciple or colleague of Paul some twenty or so years earlier; it was a fairly common name in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD.

## Summary of Salvation History

Christians are to live in love, as Christ loved us. They are to endure suffering for the sake of Christ, looking back on Christ's sufferings and forward to the consummation of salvation at his Second Coming.

## Writing Style

Third John is a personal epistle, addressed to a friend of the author. The customary epistolary conventions are evident: an opening salutation, a body of instruction, and concluding greetings. Reinforcing the identity of this book as a personal letter is the way in which it is built around references to specific acquaintances from start to finish. Whereas 2 John was written to an unidentified church congregation, this letter is filled with references to specific people and situations. It speaks of the opposition to John by a local leader and the required hospitality to travelling Christians. The main motif is 'a home away from home', and accompanying that, the pattern of arrival and welcoming of guests.

## Key Themes

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Verses</u>
1. The support of travelling Christian workers is noble and needful.	5-8.
2. Church discipline can be necessary for healthy ministry to flourish.	9-10.
3. The integrity of faith is proven by actions.	11.

## The Setting of 3 John

It is thought that John was still in or near Ephesus at the time of writing this letter. As suggested earlier, it may be that this is a letter to a personal friend of John that is introducing the courier of the other letters, although there is no other evidence to support this theory.

## Outline

- I. Greeting: The Elder's Joy at Gaius's Faithfulness (1-4)
- II. Praise for Gaius's Support for Itinerant Christian Workers (5-8)
- III. Concern about Diotrephes (9-10)
- IV. Advice and Commendation of Demetrius (11-12)
- V. Closing with a Promise to Visit (13-14)

## Summary of 3 John

In this short letter, John congratulates his dear friend Gaius upon the prosperity of his soul (vv.1-2), upon the upright standing he held among other good Christians, a message that had been conveyed to him by some visiting brothers (vv.3-4), and upon his good work, hospitality, and the giving of material support to the servants of Christ (vv.5-6).

John goes on to denounce the contemptuous treatment by the self-seeking and ambitious Diotrephes, who is personally opposing John and whose behaviour is clearly not acceptable of one who would call himself a disciple of Christ let alone a Christian leader (vv.9-10).

John goes on to recommend Demetrius, who was probably the courier of the letter (v.12), and finally expresses his hope of visiting Gaius and the church at some point in the not too distant future (vv.13-14).

## I. 3 John 1-4 - Greeting: The Elder's Joy at Gaius' Faithfulness

As with 2 John, the author commences by addressing himself as the elder and marks this out as a personal letter to his friend Gaius. Although the letter does not open with a benediction, as does 2 John and many other NT writings, the overall tone of the letter is warm and affectionate, clearly being sent to a man whom John had much affection for. He also acknowledges the brothers who had either been sent out by John and returned, or who had visited him from Gaius' own church community.

<sup>1</sup> The elder,

To my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth.

### 3 John 1

The elder was a sufficient title for John to identify himself to his friend Gaius. It was clearly a title of honour for a man who could have called himself an apostle of Christ but preferred to be known more personally for the current office he held in the service of Christ. Although Peter identified himself as an apostle, he also held the office of elder in his church: <<*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ*>> (1 Peter 1:1a), and: <<*To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed*>> (1 Peter 5:1). See also comments made on 2 John 1 for further details on the history and office of elders at that time.

With regard to elders Paul held a strong opinion: <<*The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching*>> (1 Timothy 5:17), thus John would be worthy of such respect without having to identify himself as: <<*the disciple whom Jesus loved*>> (John 21:20b).

My dear friend, translated as beloved, Greek agapetos in several translations, is used again in v.2, v.5 and v.11. The use of this specific term links the letter to 2 John where the readers are often addressed in the same fashion, see 2 John 2:7, 3:21, 4:1 and 4:7. It conveys the truth that Christians are linked to each other by the love God has shown them in Christ, as John has himself commented on: <<*In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins*>> (1 John 4:9-10). Such affection is the God-given bond that unites true believers in Christ.

Gaius was a common name at that time and it appears several times in the NT as discussed in the Purpose of 3 John. Although the Gaius who served with Paul in Ephesus is a candidate that some commentators hold to, there is no further

information on this clearly dear friend of John's, other than he was a faithful servant of Christ, which is enough for most people to know.

Love in the truth could mean simply to truly love as a Christian brother, or more likely it could refer to the truth of the Gospel of Christ, in the service of which the lives of John and Gaius are closely and irrevocably intertwined. Their relationship is not just one of brotherly love, for it is glued by the truth that they share in common. It is right that disciples should show and express genuine love for one another but it should be done in sincerity, as is clearly the case here, and not just as a Christian catchphrase that is sometimes offered by people who barely know each other and take no time to become acquainted.

<sup>2</sup> Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.

### 3 John 2

I pray. Prayer for a man like John would have been as natural as breathing for he had witnessed how frequently his Lord was in communion with the Father in heaven and John too would have maintained that same communion with his Lord. The prophet Jonah prayed in his moment of deepest despair: *<<When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, Lord, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple>>* (Jonah 2:7), but John was more a man like Paul who would: *<<Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus>>* (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Offering wishes for good health were standard in the openings of ancient Greek letters, but John prays for Gaius' health and also expresses care for his soul, the Greek word *psyche*, which alludes to the whole being. This is the part of his being that Jesus would lay down as he uses the same word: *<<"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father">>* (John 10:14-18).

Although spiritual growth can come through sickness and affliction, which for some is a form of testing, a sentiment with which King David seemed to concur: *<<Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word. You are good, and what you do is good; teach me your decrees. Though the arrogant have smeared me with lies, I keep your precepts with all my heart. Their hearts are callous and unfeeling, but I delight in your law. It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees>>* (Psalm 119:67-71). Therefore, it is right to pray for good health, as Jesus' earthly healing ministry also demonstrated.

Even as your soul is getting along well indicates that Gaius was living his life as a faithful disciple of Christ. That is, he has made a full confession of Christ as his

Lord and lived in obedience to his commands. Prosperity of the soul must be one of the greatest blessings this side of eternity and is evidence of regeneration and transformation within a believer.

<sup>3</sup> It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth.

### 3 John 3

It gave me great joy is an expression of thanksgiving for the good news that John had received from the others. This is a typical response and is seen in other NT letters: <<*First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you*>> (Romans 1:8-9), <<*I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way – in all your speaking and in all your knowledge – because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you*>> (1 Corinthians 1:4-6), <<*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God*>> (2 Corinthians 1:3-4), and: <<*It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us*>> (2 John 4).

Some brothers come. Apparently John had either sent out some missionaries who had experienced Gaius' hospitality, and probably Diotrephes rejection, see v.10; or had been visited by Christians from Gaius' church, who told John of Gaius' faithful Christian life. This may have been a prompt for him to write his second epistle, if indeed it was to the same church, as he wanted to commend others who were walking in the truth, as was Gaius.

For many, hospitality may mean offering food and accommodation, which of course are included. However, the Christian way of life requires hospitality that goes beyond this and it is likely that Gaius offered the itinerant preachers financial aid and other material support to continue their work. It is a Christian responsibility to share the Word of God, and an act of Christian love and duty by those who offer support to those who undertake the work. By responding faithfully, Gaius was putting into practice John's admonition of 1 John 3:16-17 <<*This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?*>>. It is in response to this that John can feel such pleasure and writes: it gave me great joy.

Truth is fidelity to Christ and his commands, for he acknowledged himself to be the truth: <<*Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"*>> (John 14:6), and it was a primary reason for his earthly ministry: <<*"You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on*

*the side of truth listens to me”>> (John 18:37). Being obedient to his commands demonstrates that a disciple is a faithful servant of Christ.*

Continue to walk in the truth. Gaius was clearly living as a disciple of Christ should and John exhorts him to continue to do so, for it is such a good witness for the Gospel of Jesus as the Christ of God.

<sup>4</sup> I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

### 3 John 4

Joy is the hallmark of a Christian and should be a natural expression of their love and gratitude toward God not matter what state their own life is in. In fact, there is not greater witness than those disciples who can display genuine joy during times of hardship and suffering.

My children is a signature Johannine expression, for his readers are first of all children of God: <<*Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God*>> (John 1:12), and: <<*How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is*>> (1 John 3:1-2). John, as their spiritual overseer, could also view them as his own children too.

**Paul’s usage was similar:** <<*To Timothy my true son in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord*>> (1 Timothy 1:2), <<*To Titus, my true son in our common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Saviour*>> (Titus 1:4), and: <<*I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains*>> (Philemon 10).

**The Israelites too had been called the children of God:** <<*You are the children of the Lord your God. Do not cut yourselves or shave the front of your heads for the dead*>> (Deuteronomy 14:1), and: <<*He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one*>> (John 11:51-52).

## II. 3 John 5-8 - Praise for Gaius’ Support for Itinerant Christian Workers

John had warned of false teachers and stated that: <<*If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him*>> (2 John 10), where he warned of the dangers of supporting the wrong people. Here John affirms Gaius’ work on behalf of faithful labourers, even though they were strangers to him (v.5).

Gaius can be held up as a true disciple, the type of man that Jesus had spoken of: <<*You are the light of the world*>> (Matthew 5:14a), and is certainly a man to be imitated.

<sup>5</sup> Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you.

### 3 John 5

You are faithful in what you are doing. Gaius, as a true disciple of Christ, is putting his faith into action. His good works are evidence that he has the saving faith within him that comes by giving one's life to Christ.

John shows that it is important for believers to commend each other in order that disciples may be encouraged in the work they do. A man like John would only do it to someone who was genuine and also able to accept such commendation without becoming conceited or self oriented. It is always a danger in the church when people openly applaud the work of others, for it sometimes feeds a desire that is not of God. Discernment is called for at all times to determine what is appropriate encouragement and that which is fuelling an ego trip!

The brothers translates the Greek word adelphoi, which some translations have as brothers and sisters as it can be used for any believers in Christ. Here it refers to travelling Christian workers, whether dedicated evangelists or those sent out on a specific mission. The early church was centred on missionary outreach, otherwise it would not have survived and spread. Such people, from the time of Jesus onwards, had required the hospitality of those whom they visited, as Jesus had taught: *<<If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you. Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house. "When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you">>* (Luke 10:6-8). It is also instructed that: *<<Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it>>* (Hebrews 13:2).

<sup>6</sup> They have told the church about your love. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God.

### 3 John 6

Send them on their way translates the Greek propempō, to send forth. In contexts like this it carries the sense of sending with necessary material support, e.g. financial and other essential provisions. Paul uses the same word with this sense in the following passages: *<<I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to see you while passing through and that you will assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while>>* (Romans 15:24), *<<Perhaps I will stay with you for a while, or even spend the winter, so that you can help me on my journey, wherever I go>>* (1 Corinthians 16:6), *<<I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia, and then to let you send me on my way to Judæa>>* (2 Corinthians 1:16), and: *<<Do everything you can to help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way and see that they have everything they need>>* (Titus 3:13).

It was traditional in those times for someone to escort the outgoing workers along part of their journey, in order to support and encourage them. This was seen when Paul's apostolic group reached Tyre on their way to Jerusalem: <<*But when our time was up, we left and continued on our way. All the disciples and their wives and children accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to pray. After saying good-bye to each other, we went aboard the ship, and they returned home*>> (Acts 21:5-6). In similar vein, there were many from the church in Rome who travelled some considerable distance to meet Paul and travel the final part of the journey into the city: <<*And so we came to Rome. The brothers there had heard that we were coming, and they travelled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. At the sight of these men Paul thanked God and was encouraged*>> (Acts 28:14b-15).

Worthy of God. These men were labouring at large for the Gospel and were not working for their own gain but for the one who sent them: <<*“Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me”*>> (Mark 9:37). They should be sent in a manner that brings glory and honour to him.

<sup>7</sup> It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans.

### 3 John 7

The Name would normally indicate the very person of God himself, although here John may be referring to Christ, signifying his deity: <<*The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name*>> (Acts 5:41), and: <<*Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name*>> (Philippians 2:9).

It was common for someone to have authority to issue decrees in the name of another. For example: <<*Mordecai wrote in the name of King Xerxes, sealed the dispatches with the king's signet ring, and sent them by mounted couriers, who rode fast horses especially bred for the king*>> (Esther 8:10). But there is only one name that is of real importance and pre-eminence, and that is the name that all baptised believers have authority to work under: <<*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*>> (Matthew 28:19).

The workers commonly accepted nothing from the Gentiles, whom John refers to as the pagans, that is, the non-Christian populace. Just as Paul normally did not accept aid from those among whom he laboured: <<*In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel. But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me. I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of this boast. Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use*>>

*of my rights in preaching it>> (1 Corinthians 9:14-18), <<I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to serve you>> (2 Corinthians 11:8), and: <<Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you>> (1 Thessalonians 2:9), the workers did not want to be accused of hawking their message for personal gain.*

<sup>8</sup> We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth.

### 3 John 8

We ought therefore to show hospitality. In other translations it has support instead of hospitality, which can give a different interpretation, although both terms should be honoured for it is right to provide accommodation, food and fellowship when visitors are staying with a church and if their ministry is on behalf of the church, then it is right to support their work financially as well. Not everyone is called to go and minister elsewhere. But all of Christ's followers are called to play their part in this enterprise: *<<Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age>> (Matthew 28:19-20).*

Work together shows that there are some that go out on mission or run ministries, and others that support such work with prayer and financial support. However, giving support should not be used as an easy option or excuse for not doing the work God has called a disciple to do, for action is the outworking of faith.

The truth. Although this can be used to describe the Lord, here it is the Gospel message about him that is in view: *<<We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints – the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel>> (Colossians 1:3-5).*

### III. 3 John 9-10 - Concern about Diotrephes

Just as Jesus and Paul had their detractors, John and Gaius encountered people who worked against the progress of God's Kingdom in their sphere of operation. Diotrephes had clearly set himself in opposition to John and therefore to the truth of the Gospel. If Gaius was a man to be imitated, Diotrephes was a man to be avoided, and the type of whom it was said: *<<Men of perverse heart shall be far from me; I will have nothing to do with evil>> (Psalm 101:4), <<Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them>> (Ephesians 5:11), and: <<Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him>> (Titus 3:10).*

<sup>9</sup> I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us.

### 3 John 9

Evidently the Elder and Diotrephes were engaged in a struggle for authority in the congregation to which Diotrephes belongs. That John believes he has the right to challenge Diotrephes' power suggests that this congregation was founded by the Elder's efforts, either directly or indirectly. But it is not clear what Diotrephes' official role was in the local congregation. He may, for example, have been the designated or official leader of one house church. Or perhaps he was an influential lay-leader within that house church or among several house churches. He seemed to have sufficient influence and authority to prevent the church as a whole from welcoming the travelling missionaries.

The charge that Diotrephes loves to be first suggests that he had power and, from John's point of view, delighted in throwing his weight around. But it is not clear from the letter whether he had gained this power legitimately or had somehow usurped it. Whatever his role, Diotrephes rejected John's assertion of responsibility for the congregation, ignored his letters and rejected his messengers, even denying them access into the church meetings.

The author's words about Diotrephes may seem harsh, especially when it is not clear that Diotrephes had done anything other than oppose the apostle John and his messengers. And yet it must be noted that John did not speak of Diotrephes as the antichrist, as a false prophet/teacher, as failing to abide in the congregation, or even of failing to hold on to the truth, all of which were accusations levelled against the secessionists of 1 and 2 John.

It is possible that 3 John is an example of the author's response and warning to one whom he did not regard as being in the darkness, and yet whose actions needed to be conformed more closely to the sphere of light. Certainly John did not approve of Diotrephes' actions or way of dealing with people. For Diotrephes' failure to support John was not just a personal affront; it was an assault against the unity of Christian fellowship and a moral failure to obey God's commands. That John attacks such schismatic tendencies with the same vigour that he has warned against doctrinal error surely has a message of warning for independent-minded Christians today, especially those in leadership or with authority over others.

I wrote to the church. This indicates another apostolic letter that has been lost to history. A study of Paul's letters to the Corinthians indicates that he wrote on at least four occasions, only two of which are in the canon of Scripture. Paul also indicates that he may have written to the church in Laodicea: <<***After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea***>> (Colossians 4:16), although there are some commentators that think this means the Laodiceans wrote to Paul or to Colossæ.

Who loves to be first. It would seem that such people have been in the church throughout the ages. Sometimes it is just a case that they are overzealous in their leadership and interpretation of Scripture. At other times it is sadly a human failing when life becomes all about them and not at all about what the Christian life of service should be. Such people are full of pride, self worth and are

ambitious for all the wrong reasons. In the case of Diotrephes, he was also contemptuous of others, who most genuine disciples would consider to be far more worthy of office, for they were living out their faith. God has always held a dim view of those who are prideful: <<*The Lord has sworn by the Pride of Jacob: “I will never forget anything they have done”*>> (Amos 8:7), and: <<*On that day you will not be put to shame for all the wrongs you have done to me, because I will remove from this city those who rejoice in their pride. Never again will you be haughty on my holy hill*>> (Zephaniah 3:11). It is not surprising that men show contempt for other men when they are even prepared to show contempt toward God: <<*The Lord said to Moses, “How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them?”*>> (Numbers 14:11). The teaching of Paul could have been appropriately applied to this man and many like him: <<*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves*>> (Philippians 2:3).

Will have nothing to do with us. This shows a distinct lack of Christian Spirit within the man. It may also show an underlying fear that those who speak the truth will publically identify such a person for who they really are, in the hope that those who follow them will turn back to the truth and light.

<sup>10</sup> So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church.

### 3 John 10

So if I come indicates that it is John’s intention to travel to meet with the church, but like James he does not overlook that such plans are within the Lord’s will alone: <<*Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that”*>> (James 4:15). Luke writes how easy it is for the Spirit of God to change the plans that a man may have made, even a man like Paul: <<*Paul and his companions travelled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia*>> (Acts 16:6), and: <<*I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles*>> (Romans 1:13).

Gossiping maliciously about us. The problem of self-styled Christians who reject things taught by the apostles persists today. The purpose of gossiping about those who do portray the truth is to deflect attention away from their own falsehood. Paul was the victim of those who spread lies and rumours about him: <<*When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: “You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, so do what we tell you. There are four*

*men with us who have made a vow. Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everybody will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law>> (Acts 21:20-24), and: <<As the soldiers were about to take Paul into the barracks, he asked the commander, “May I say something to you?” “Do you speak Greek?” he replied. “Aren’t you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists out into the desert some time ago?” Paul answered, “I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city. Please let me speak to the people”>> (Acts 21:37-39).*

Not satisfied with that. Sinful personal ambition is never satisfied but seeks to expand. Such people are usually personal empire builders who may appear at times to be doing a good job for the church but are doing so for their own personal gratification.

Refuses to welcome the brothers. Such a person not only refuses to offer support to those on mission but also stands in the way of others who wish to support these travelling Christian workers, i.e. stops those who want to do so. It seems that some of these men at least were sent by John or with his authority thus the refusal by Diotrephes to receive them placed him in direct opposition to John and thus against true apostolic authority.

Puts them out of the church. This is without doubt the worst attribute of Diotrephes recorded in John’s letter. There is of course behaviour that is not acceptable in the church, including the false teaching that John addressed in his first and second epistles, but it should always be a last resort. Again, it would appear that this man was displaying his own authority but doing so in fear of being identified for who he really was. No doubt the gossiping mentioned would extend to this man’s lies about these genuine brothers, who have come to encourage the church with the truth of the Gospel message and then to take it out to the unsaved Gentiles in that region.

I will call attention to what he is doing. John plans to visit the church and when he does, he will address Diotrephes personally and alert the congregation to what type of man he really is. His advice to Diotrephes may well have been along the lines of the words that God had spoken through the prophet: <<***This is what the Lord Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways”***>> (Haggai 1:7). This would not be a pleasant task for John but one that he would see as his duty to deal with in faith, so that those who were truly of Christ would discern the truth and draw away from this man’s malignant influence, if indeed that is what it was. There are times when a rebuke should be done privately but for more serious matters that are affecting the whole church it is appropriate for it to be done publically, as Paul had demonstrated with Peter: <<***When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, “You are a Jew,***

*yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?>> (Galatians 2:11-14).*

#### **IV. 3 John 11-12 - Advice and Commendation of Demetrius**

As John prepares to end his letter, he issues terse remarks of guidance. He also gives a strong recommendation that Demetrius, probably the courier of this letter, be received graciously and warmly as a true brother.

<sup>11</sup> Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God.

##### **3 John 11**

**Do not imitate what is evil.** This recalls the cry of the psalmist: <<*Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it*>> (Psalm 34:14), and: <<*Turn from evil and do good; then you will dwell in the land forever*>> (Psalm 37:27). This is probably encouragement not to give in to Diotrephes or to descend to his level of self promotion and power seeking. Love for others demonstrates both love for God and the indwelling love of God flowing through that person. The call to **imitate what is good**, what **is from God**, will be heeded only by those who are also **from God**. For those who have not come into fellowship with God cannot live out the goodness that would naturally bring. Love and good are modelled by Christ and are seen in the outworking of a disciple: <<*This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother*>> (1 John 3:10), <<*Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God*>> (1 John 4:7), and: <<*If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen*>> (1 John 4:20).

**Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God.** This links back to the litmus tests that John had laid out in his first epistle to determine who the genuine believers were and who were bogus. This is illustrated in the Scriptures just read.

<sup>12</sup> Demetrius is well spoken of by everyone – and even by the truth itself. We also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true.

##### **3 John 12**

**Demetrius is well spoken of by everyone.** Here is a man that nothing else is known about in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century but had the type of reputation for being a good and faithful disciple that should be the hallmark of all followers of Jesus. Timothy too had such a reputation in his home town of Lystra and the surrounding area: <<*He came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him*>> (Acts 16:1-2).

Even by the truth itself could indicate that Demetrius has received a clear Spiritual revelation at some point or that his work is authenticated by the doctrine of the Gospel.

Our testimony is true. John had been an eyewitness of many things and had the reputation for his honesty and accuracy. This is reflected in the closing remarks of his Gospel, which is a useful link with these two documents: <<***This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true***>> (John 21:24).

There are many good disciples in each generation and it is certainly a blessing to have so many today. Even in a place like rural Lincolnshire there are people of the highest calibre, yet remain humble despite some of them having world-wide acclaim, such as those who frequent the One Event in Lincoln each year. People like these and Demetrius may be lost to us as their generation passes but their names are known in heaven, which is of the greatest importance: <<***The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven"***>> (Luke 10:17-20), and to whom it may one day be said: <<***But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel***>> (Hebrews 12:22-24).

Normal postal service, if indeed such a thing existed, was not to be entrusted with Christian correspondence like this letter and possibly the other letters from John as well, if indeed all three were sent together. So someone like Demetrius served as a courier. Phoebe probably served in this function in delivering Paul's epistle to the Romans: <<***I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me***>> (Romans 16:1-2), and Tychicus likely delivered Ephesians and Colossians by hand on the same journey: <<***Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will tell you everything, so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing. I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage you***>> (Ephesians 6:21-22), and: <<***Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts***>> (Colossians 4:7-8).

## V. 3 John 13-14 - Closing with a Promise to Visit

John echoes the closing words in his second epistle: <<***I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete***>> (2 John 12). In

fact they are so similar that it adds a lot of weight to the argument that this is a covering letter for at least 2 John.

Sometimes pastoral oversight requires physical presence for successful execution. It is also a much better way to communicate in order to demonstrate true love and affection for each other.

<sup>13</sup> I have much to write you, but I do not want to do so with pen and ink.

### 3 John 13

Have much to write. Third John is a bare outline of the many things that John wants and needs to communicate to Gaius and his church. This is similar to his second epistle which is marginally shorter. The two of them are the briefest letters in the whole canon of Scripture.

<sup>14</sup> I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face.

Peace to you. The friends here send their greetings. Greet the friends there by name.

### 3 John 14

Hope to see you soon is a strong use of the word hope that comes from faith. It is also translated as: <<*But I trust I shall shortly see thee*>> in the KJV.

I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. As with the ending of his second epistle, John intends to visit his dear friend Gaius and the church at some point in the future. He values personal communication more than the written word, something else he had in common with Paul: <<*I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong – that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith*>> (Romans 1:11-12).

Peace to you. In some translations this is the start of v.15 but this difference in layout is cosmetic and makes no difference to an understanding of the text, which remains consistent across translations. John is offering a typical, if brief, priestly benediction that would have come from his own Jewish heritage. Paul used this in his benedictions: <<*To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ*>> (Romans 1:7), and: <<*Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*>> (Ephesians 6:23).

The word peace was no doubt based on the Hebrew word shalom, which has a much richer connotation than the English word does, since it conveys not merely the absence of conflict and turmoil but also the notion of positive blessing, especially in terms of a right relationship with God and, as a result, the idea that 'all is well' in one's life. This may be manifested most clearly amid persecution and tribulation.

Peace is a word that John makes surprisingly few references to, with one here, one in his second epistle: <<*Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and*

*from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, will be with us in truth and love*>> (2 John 3), twice in the final book, see Revelation 1:4 and 6:4, and six times in his Gospel (John 14:27 [twice], 16:33, 20:19, 20:21 and 20:26); three of which refer to Jesus bestowing peace upon his apostles, and the other three as a way of greeting his apostles following his resurrection.

Friends is an unusual term for fellow believers, although Jesus does use it to denote his changing relationship with his disciples: <<*I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you*>> (John 15:15). Therefore, it is quite appropriate for John to use it here.

Greet the friends there by name. John's pastoral care is not remote and bureaucratic but personal, as Jesus commended and modelled: <<*The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out*>> (John 10:3), and: <<*I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep*>> (John 10:14). Although Paul knew some of the saints in Rome he had never personally travelled there yet he thought it important to name twenty four of those in Rome, issuing salutations and greetings to each of them. Refer to Romans Chapter 16:3-15 for a list of those Paul greeted. This shows the importance of knowing and using personal names within the wider fellowship of the church. After all, as John has demonstrated, the Christian life is one of a loving fellowship: <<*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete*>> (1 John 1:1-4). Christian joy may be complete when believers share appropriate fellowship with each other and with God. That is their aim!