

Resources Referred to in This Study (by author's last name)

The Epistles of John by Donald **Burdick** (1970)

The Epistles of John by I. Howard **Marshall** in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (1978)

"3 John" by Glenn **Barker** in Volume 12 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (1981)

"1 John"; "2 John"; "3 John" by Zane **Hodges** in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (1983)

"James and I-III John" by Simon **Kistemaker** in *New Testament Commentary* (1986)

The Letters of John by John **Stott** in *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (1988)

The Epistles of John: An Expositional Commentary by D. Edmond **Hiebert** (1991)

"1, 2, 3 John" by Daniel **Akin** in *The New American Commentary* (2001)

"1-3 John" by Robert **Yarbrough** in *The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (2008)

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scriptural citations are from the NASB

Introduction to 3 John

(with corresponding discussion questions)

The book of 3 John is one of the eight New Testament books (Hebrews-Jude) that are commonly called the “General Epistles.” They are entitled such because they are believed to have been written to Christians in general, rather than to a particular church or churches or to a particular individual or individuals (as in the case of all 13 of the “Pauline Epistles”).¹

Authorship

The fact that this epistle is entitled “3 John” is testament to the fact that the overwhelming majority of Christians throughout church history have considered the apostle John to be its human author. As with 2 John, the external evidence for the Johannine authorship of 3 John is relatively scarce, not surprising, considering 3 John’s relative brevity. Eusebius was one early church leader who espoused Johannine authorship of 3 John. As with the other Johannine Epistles, it is internal evidence that decisively tips the scales in favor of Johannine authorship of 3 John. Assuming Johannine authorship of 2 John, Johannine authorship of 3 John is inferred from the similarities between it and 2 John.²

As in 2 John, the writer of 3 John identifies himself simply as “the elder” (verse 1; cf. Philemon 9 and 2 John 1), a title indicative of John’s age, authority, and apostleship.³

¹According to this definition, “general epistle” is a misnomer as far as 3 John is concerned, 3 John likely having been written to a particular church in the Roman province of Asia under John’s oversight (see under “recipients” below). Marshall (p. 10) states in this regard: “The suggestion that the letter is written to Christians generally comes to grief on the clear indications that a concrete situation is envisaged.” Because so many of the so-called “general epistles” are in reality written to a specific audience, whether an individual (as in the case of 3 John), a church (as in the case of 2 John), or a collection of churches (as in the case of 1 and 2 Peter and 1 John), some prefer to refer to them as “non-Pauline epistles,” rather than “general epistles.”

²Compare 3 John 1 to 2 John 1; 3 John 3-4 to 2 John 4; 3 John 13-14 to 2 John 12. It was commentator Henry Alford who called 2 and 3 John “twin sisters” (Stott, p. 28). Johannine authorship of the Johannine Epistles is seen by a four-link chain. Once Johannine authorship of the gospel of John is established (link 1), Johannine authorship of 1 John (link 2) is seen by the internal similarities between the gospel of John and 1 John. Johannine authorship of 2 John (link 3) is seen by the internal similarities between 1 John and 2 John. Johannine authorship of 3 John (link 4) is seen by the internal similarities between 2 John and 3 John (see the start of this footnote).

³“The author . . . must have been so well known to those he was writing to that the title ‘elder’ immediately identified him” (Barker, p. 361); “His identity was so well known and his authority so well recognized that he could use the title without needing to qualify or amplify it” (Stott, p. 42). Though “elder” is one of the Scriptural titles for the office of pastor, John was

John went from being a disciple of John the Baptist to a follower of Jesus (John 1:35-37), eventually becoming one of the twelve apostles (Matthew 10:2-4). His father was Zebedee (Mark 1:19-20), his mother Salome (compare Matthew 27:56 with Mark 15:40).⁴ John was a fisherman by trade (Mark 1:19-20). We know he had at least one sibling, his older (since he is always listed first) brother, James (Mark 1:19).⁵ Christ nicknamed James and John “the sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17), no doubt due to their tempestuous natures, as evidenced in Luke 9:54. Peter, James, and John (fishing partners—Luke 5:10) comprised the “inner circle” among the Twelve (Mark 5:37, 9:2, and 14:33).⁶ John was one of the “pillars” of the early church (Galatians 2:9). Besides 3 John, John also wrote the epistles of 1 John and 2 John, the gospel of John, and Revelation. Most interpreters are of the opinion that, in his later years, John resided in Ephesus, overseeing the churches located in the Roman province of Asia (particularly the seven mentioned in Revelation 2 & 3), of which Ephesus was the capital. Kistemaker (p. 206) states in this regard: “The writer appears to have been a long-time resident in their area; he has taught and preached in their churches.” It is commonly believed that John was the last of the apostles to die, dying a natural death at the end of the 1st century A.D.

Recipient

In verse 1, John identifies his recipient as a man named Gaius. Gaius was a common name in the Roman Empire.⁷ Three other men in the New Testament are also so named: Gaius of Macedonia (Acts 19:29), Gaius of Derbe (Acts 20:4), and Gaius of Corinth (Romans 16:23 and 1 Corinthians 1:14). Most interpreters are of the opinion that the Gaius of 3 John is not to be identified with any of the other three. Gaius was one of John’s “children” (verse 4), most likely indicative of the fact that Gaius was a member of one of the churches under John’s oversight.

probably using the term in a different sense to indicate his apostolic authority and oversight (cf. Peter’s similar designation in 1 Peter 5:1). Notice that he calls himself “the” (not “an”) elder. Assuming John was the only living apostle at the time, this designation would be entirely appropriate.

⁴Based on a comparison of Matthew 27:56 with John 19:25, it may be that Salome and Mary, the mother of Jesus, were sisters (this may be the reason why Christ asked John to look after his mother in John 19:25-27). If so, Jesus and John would have been cousins.

⁵James was martyred by Herod Agrippa I in 44 A.D. (Acts 12:2).

⁶John and Peter are often closely associated (John 18:15-16, 20:2-8, Acts 3:1-4:23, and 8:14-24).

⁷“So common was it that it was selected in the Roman law-books to serve the familiar purpose of John Doe and Richard Roe in our own legal formularies” (F. W. Farrar, quoted in Hiebert, p. 283).

Place of Composition

It is commonly believed that in his later years John functioned as an overseer of a group of churches in the Roman province of Asia, with the church at Ephesus being predominant (Ephesus was the capital of Asia). According to tradition, John resided in Ephesus. If so, it is likely that he wrote the epistle of 3 John from his residence there.

Date of Composition

The overwhelming majority of interpreters date the writing of 3 John in the later years of the 1st century A.D.⁸ If so, 3 John was one of the last biblical books written. The five Johannine books were likely the last five biblical books to be written and were probably written in the order in which they appear in our New Testaments: gospel of John, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, and Revelation.

Occasion

Apparently, a group of itinerant preachers (“brethren” in verses 3, 5, and 10) had been sent out by John to minister in the churches under John’s oversight. Upon returning to John in Ephesus, these men told John about a problem in one of the churches. The church’s pastor (assumed), a man by the name of Diotrephes, was abusing his pastoral authority, rejecting John’s apostolic authority in the process. John responds by writing to Gaius, a leading member of Diotrephes’ church (assumed). Gaius, in turn, would be expected to share John’s words with the rest of the congregation. Several interpreters are of the opinion that Demetrius (mentioned in verse 12) was the bearer of the epistle (i.e., the one who delivered it to Gaius), as well as one of the itinerant preachers sent out by John.

Purpose

John’s primary purpose for writing 3 John appears to have been to warn one of the local churches under his oversight about the improper way in which its pastor was exercising his authority. Implicit in John’s words is the imprimatur for the congregation to move to remove Diotrephes from his post. Gromacki (p. 382) suggests that John’s words in verse 12 were his way of nominating Demetrius as a replacement for Diotrephes.

Outline/Structure

3 John (with some minor variation) conforms to the typical epistolary pattern of the day: an introduction/salutation (verses 1-4) which names the writer (verse 1) & recipients (verse 1), extending a wish of well-being to the second (verses 2-4); the body of the letter (verses 5-12)⁹; and a conclusion/benediction (verses 13-14).

⁸Hodges (early 60s A.D.); Marshall (60s, 70s, 80s, or 90s A.D.); Hiebert (80-81 A.D.); Gromacki and *The NASB Study Bible* (85-95 A.D.); Barker and *The New Open Bible, Study Edition* (90 A.D.); Carson, Moo, and Morris (early 90s A.D.); Kistemaker (90-95 A.D.).

⁹Hodges (p. 912) divides the body of the epistle into three parts: 1) commendation of Gaius (verses 5-8), 2) condemnation of Diotrephes (verses 9-11), and 3) recommendation of Demetrius (verse 12).

Outstanding Features of 3 John

1. Its brevity. Though 3 John is one verse longer than 2 John in our English Bibles, in terms of volume of Greek text, it is actually slightly shorter than 2 John. Thus, in this sense, 3 John, not 2 John, is the shortest book in the Bible. It is for this reason that 3 John is 3 John (as opposed to 1 John or 2 John), the Johannine Epistles being ordered as they are in our English Bibles based on their descending volume.¹⁰

Other Resources Consulted for This Lesson

An Introduction to the New Testament by D. A. Carson, Douglas Moo, and Leon Morris

New Testament Survey by Robert Gromacki

The New Open Bible, Study Edition

The Zondervan NASB Study Bible

¹⁰The same is true in regards to the Pauline Epistles (Romans, largest in volume ⇨ Philemon, smallest in volume) and the General Epistles (Hebrews, largest in volume ⇨ 3 John, smallest in volume).

Discussion Questions for Introduction to 3 John

1. Clearly, the church to whom John writes this letter was not perfect, as seen by the problem posed by a man named Diotrephes. Should we be surprised by the fact that churches are not perfect, including churches in the New Testament?

Answer: no

Why not?

Suggested answer: because churches are composed of imperfect people

What are some of the problems other churches in the New Testament had?

Possible answers:

The church of Jerusalem—problem with Ananias & Sapphira lying (Acts 5); the needs of some of its widows were neglected (Acts 6); false teachers, namely, Judaizers, those who taught one had to be circumcised to be saved (Acts 15)

The church of Rome—disunity due to despising others over their decisions regarding diet and days (Romans 14 and the first part of Romans 15)

The church of Corinth—factions over who to follow (1 Corinthians 1:11-12 and 3:3-4); permitting impurity (1 Corinthians 5); taking fellow Christians to court (first part of 1 Corinthians 6); false teachers, namely, those who denied the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15)

The churches of Galatia—false teaching (Galatians 1:6-9), namely, Judaizers (Galatians 6:12-13)

The church of Ephesus—loss of their love for the Lord (Revelation 2:4)

The church of Philippi—false teaching, namely, legalists, those who taught one had to keep the Law to be saved (Philippians 3:1-9) and libertines, those who taught one had a license to sin (Philippians 3:18-19); disunity (Philippians 4:2)

The church of Colossae—false teaching, namely, the Colossian heresy, a mix of false wisdom (Colossians 2:8), false works (observing a certain diet and certain days, Colossians 2:16), and false worship (of angels, Colossians 2:18)

The church of Thessalonica—bad beliefs regarding the Second Coming of Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11) and bad behavior (not being busy, but being busybodies, 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15)

2. What lesson can be learned from the fact that in this letter John commends Gaius and Demetrius and calls out Diotrephes?

Possible answer: we need to be willing to do both/and, not either/or, or neither

3 John

(with corresponding discussion questions)

INTRODUCTION/SALUTATION (verses 1-4)

John begins his third epistle with a salutation (verses 1-4), in which he identifies himself as the author (verse 1) and Gaius as the recipient (verse 1), extending a wish of physical well-being to the second (verses 2-4).

Verse 1

The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.

As he does in 2 John, John identifies himself simply as “the elder” (cf. 2 John 1; for the significance of this designation, see under “authorship” in the introduction to 3 John). John writes to Gaius, most likely a leading member of one of the churches under John’s oversight in the Roman province of Asia. As he does so often in 1 John (see 1 John 2:7, 3:2, 21, 4:1, 7, and 11), John calls Gaius “beloved” (cf. 3 John 2, 5, and 11). Gaius was loved not only by John, but also by God (cf. Romans 1:7, Colossians 3:12, 1 Thessalonians 1:4, and 2 Thessalonians 2:13). John’s love for Gaius was sincere (“love in truth”=“truly love”; cf. 2 John 1).

Verse 2

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

The typical salutation of an ancient letter would include a wish of well-being. John wishes Gaius overall well-being (“that in all respects you may prosper”), particularly physical well-being¹¹ (“be in good health”), leading some to suggest that Gaius was in poor health physically.¹² We do know that Gaius’s spiritual health was robust (“just as your soul prospers¹³”). Several interpreters make some penetrating, perceptive points at this point: “If our souls were as healthy as our bodies, how spiritual would we be? Reverse the contrast” (Gromacki, p.

¹¹Yarbrough (p. 366) comments: “Given the brief life spans and marginal medical care of antiquity, this would always be a point well taken.”

¹²Hiebert (p. 319) is probably correct in seeing in John’s words nothing more than the “conventional epistolary health-wish for the reader.” Though John’s wish was somewhat “conventional,” it is most likely that he actually did pray for Gaius along these lines. Do we pray for other believers along these same lines?

¹³At least one commentator has pointed out the fact that the Greek verb translated “prospers” is in the passive voice, indicative of the fact that God is the One who is ultimately responsible for the prosperity of the believer’s soul.

384); “Of how many Christians could their physical health be equated with their spiritual health?” (Barker, p. 371); “The spiritual is the standard of measurement for the physical! How many today, even among those who profess the name of Christ, would be willing to have this standard applied to them?” (Hiebert, p. 325). “What if such a prayer was made to God for me and it was answered? What condition would I find myself in physically and spiritually” (Akin, p. 240)? What if our physical condition matched our spiritual condition? How healthy would we be physically?

Verses 3-4

For I was very glad when brethren came and testified to your truth, that is, how you are walking in truth. I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.

In verses 3 & 4 (notice the “for” that begins v. 3), John explains specifically how Gaius’s spiritual healthiness manifested itself. His spiritual prosperity manifested itself by his practice of and progress in the truth (“walking in truth” in verse 3 and “walking in the truth” in verse 4). Some of John’s emissaries (“brethren”; cf. verses 5 & 10) had returned to Ephesus and reported (“testified” in verse 3) to John that Gaius was “walking in truth” (verse 3)/“walking in the truth” (verse 4; cf. “practice the truth” in 1 John 1:6 and “walk in the Light” in 1 John 1:7), a report that made John “very glad” (verse 3; cf. 2 John 4)/gave him the greatest joy (“I have no greater¹⁴ joy” in verse 4). What would be reported concerning us? Do we bring such joy and gladness to other believers by the way we live our lives? John calls Gaius one of his “children” (verse 4). May we behave in such a way that we also are such a blessing. In what sense was Gaius John’s “child”? There are three possibilities: 1) John was the one who had led Gaius to the Lord (for this use of the term, see 1 Corinthians 4:14-15, Galatians 4:19, and Philemon 10); 2) John had discipled Gaius (for this use of the term, see 1 Corinthians 4:17, Philippians 2:22, and 1 Timothy 1:2); or 3) John had been given spiritual oversight of Gaius. Most interpreters see options 1 and 3 as the most viable. Though both could be true, option 3 seems best (compare John’s designation of his readers in 1 John as “children” in 1 John 2:1, 12, 13, 18, 28, 3:7, 18, 4:4, and 5:21). May we strive to have children in all three of these respects.

BODY (verses 5-12)

Verse 5

Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and especially when they are strangers;

In verses 5-8, John explains further just how it is that Gaius is walking in the truth (verses 3-4; compare “testified to your truth” in verse 3 with “testified to your love”

¹⁴The Greek adjective translated “greater” is emphatic, being a “double comparative.” It is literally “more greater” or “greaterer.”

in verse 6). Gaius was “acting faithfully” (i.e., his behavior corresponded to his beliefs/his practice matched his profession) by receiving the itinerant preachers (“the brethren”; cf. verses 3 & 10) sent out by John (contrast Diotrephes in verse 10, who did not receive them). These men were “strangers,” i.e., personally unknown to Gaius (Kistemaker translates “strangers to you”). Inns in the ancient world were notorious for being less than reputable; thus, believers would routinely open their homes to such itinerants (see Matthew 10:11//Mark 6:10//Luke 9:4, Acts 16:15, and Hebrews 13:1-2). May our homes be hotels for other believers.

Verse 6

and they have testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God.

The brethren that had been sent out by John and had personally witnessed Gaius’s love for them gave public testimony to the fact before the church of which John was a member (“they have testified to your love before the church”).¹⁵ John encourages Gaius to continue to meet the needs of these missionaries. The Greek idiom translated “you will do well to” is equivalent to our “please.” The Greek participle translated “to send them on their way” (cf. Romans 15:24, 1 Corinthians 16:6, 11, 2 Corinthians 1:16, and Titus 3:13) connotes “to receive and entertain travellers in preparation for the next stage of their journey” (Stott, p. 226). Yarbrough (p. 370) translates: “You will do well by sending them on their way with all they need.” This would include providing food, shelter, and a speaking honorarium during their stay, as well as providing travel expenses for the next leg of their journey. The manner in which Gaius was to do this was “in a manner worthy of God” (cf. Ephesians 4:1, Philippians 1:27, Colossians 1:10, and 1 Thessalonians 2:12), which Hiebert (p. 331) says is “the standard by which every activity of the believer should be measured.” Gaius was to treat these itinerants in a manner befitting the God Whom they represented, to treat them as he would God (cf. Matthew 10:40, 25:34-45, Luke 10:16, John 13:20, and Galatians 4:14).

Verse 7

For they went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles.

Gaius was to treat the missionaries sent by John in a manner worthy of God (verse 6) because (“for”) these missionaries “went out for the sake of the Name.” The Greek verb translated “went out” has missionary overtones (cf. the same Greek verb translated “left” in Acts 15:40; it is also used of false missionaries in 1 John 4:1 and 2 John 7). “The Name” is a reference to Jesus (see especially Acts 5:40-41); thus, to go out “for the sake of the Name” (cf. Acts 9:16, Romans 1:5,

¹⁵Like Paul and Barnabas in Acts 14:26-27, who reported to the church at Syrian Antioch, the church that had sent them out to the mission field.

and 1 John 2:12) = to go out for the sake of Christ and His cause.¹⁶ “Gentiles” here means unbelievers (NIV: “pagans”).

¹⁶“The ‘name’ of Jesus is the revelation of his divine-human person and saving work, and ‘jealousy’ for his name (zeal that it should receive the honour due to it) is the most compelling of all missionary motives” (Stott, p. 226).

Discussion Questions for 3 John 1-7

1. Several times in this letter John calls Gaius “beloved” (in verses 1, 2, 5, and 11). Why was Gaius beloved?

Possible answers: because he was a Christian, and all Christians are beloved by God, Romans 1:7 and 2 Thessalonians 2:13; because, being a Christian, he was in Christ, the beloved (Matthew 3:17, Ephesians 1:6, and Colossians 1:13); because of the love he showed to the brethren, verses 5-6, not only causing the brethren to undoubtedly love him, but also causing those, like John, who loved anyone who loved the brethren, to love him

Why might have John felt it necessary to remind Gaius of this?

Suggested answer: because of the lack of love that Diotrephes had been showing toward Gaius

2. What significance might there be to the fact that the Greek verb translated “prosper” in “your soul prospers” in verse 2 is in the passive voice (note: the passive voice signifies that the subject of the verb is not doing the acting, but is being acted upon)?

Suggested answer: this is a “divine passive,” signifying that God is the One who is producing the prosperity and that, therefore, He should get the glory for it

3. Verse 7 speaks of itinerant teachers going out. However, the same can be said of false teachers (1 John 4:1 and 2 John 7). According to the first half of 3 John 7, what is the decisive difference between the two groups?

Suggested answer: not the action, but the aim—the true teacher’s aim is the sake of His name

Verse 8

Therefore we ought to support such men, so that we may be fellow workers with the truth.

God's work is to be funded by God's people. The missionaries sent out by John would not accept the support of unbelievers (not that unbelievers would be looking to offer such support) (verse 7b); therefore, it was essential that believers provide what was needed ("therefore we¹⁷ ought to support such men").¹⁸ By "holding the ropes¹⁹," believers in supporting churches have a significant share in the ministries of missionaries (cf. Matthew 10:41). John says that supporting missionaries makes us "fellow workers with the truth." Like Paul and the church at Philippi (see Philippians 1:5 and 4:14-18), missionaries and those who financially support them become partners in the gospel (cf. 2 John 11 for the same principle).

Verse 9

I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say.

In stark contrast to the hospitality of Gaius was the hostility of Diotrephes (*The New Open Bible, Study Edition*, p. 1504). Apparently, John had written a letter to the church of which Diotrephes was the pastor and Gaius a member, which Diotrephes suppressed. Most interpreters speculate that the letter was a letter of recommendation in behalf of the missionaries sent out by John, requesting support for them. If so, John writes the epistle of 3 John to Gaius (rather than to Diotrephes), confident that Gaius will not suppress its contents, but will share them with the church at large, thus communicating John's commendation of his emissaries to the congregation (see verse 12). The root reason for the rejection of John's initial letter was Diotrephes' passion to be preeminent ("loves to be first

¹⁷The "we" is emphatic. The Greek literally reads: "we therefore we ought to support such men," the "we" being repeated for emphasis (we, of all people). It has been said of believers that they are either sent, a sender/supporter, or disobedient.

¹⁸Paul makes the point in a subtle way through a word play. At the end of verse 7, he states that the missionaries were "accepting" [Greek participle from the Greek verb, *lambano*, meaning to take] nothing from the Gentiles." At the start of verse 8, he states: "Therefore we ought to support [Greek verb, *hupolambano*, meaning to undertake] such men." The Greek verb, *hupolambano* literally means "to take under" (the Greek preposition, *hupo*, "under" + the Greek verb, *lambano*, "to take"), signifying, in this context, taking under one's roof (Kistemaker, p. 395 and Burdick, p. 120; cf. NASB marginal note).

¹⁹The terminology, "holding the ropes" comes from a spring of 1793 Baptist Missionary Society meeting in England, where Andrew Fuller said to William Carey: "It is clear that there is a rich mine of gold in India; if you will go down, I will hold the ropes."

among them”), a clear contradiction of the preeminence of Christ in the church (Colossians 1:18) and of Christ’s instructions in Matthew 20:25-28//Mark 10:42-45//Luke 22:24-27 and Matthew 23:5-12 (cf. 1 Peter 5:3).

Verse 10

For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, he himself does not receive the brethren, either, and he forbids those who desire to do so and puts them out of the church.

John’s intention was to deal with the diabolical²⁰ Diotrephes in person. However, such a personal visit was somewhat tenuous (“if I come”; cf. “I hope” in verse 14). Should God in His providence allow John to make the trip, John would not hesitate to take Diotrephes to task (“I will call attention to his deeds which he does”), presumably in the presence of the entire congregation (cf. 1 Timothy 5:20).²¹ John identifies several of Diotrephes’ diabolical “deeds which he does.” First, he unjustly accused John with wicked words²², likely an attempt to assassinate John’s character, thus neutralizing any influence John might have with those in Diotrephes’ congregation. If that was not bad enough (“and not satisfied with this”), Diotrephes (unlike Gaius) also refused to receive the missionaries sent out by John (“does not receive the brethren”). While 2 John 9-11 advises the rejection of false emissaries, Diotrephes rejected the true. Not only that, Diotrephes also prohibited those in his congregation who wanted to receive the missionaries from doing so (“forbids those who desire to do so”). Not only that, Diotrephes even went so far as to excommunicate such individuals (“puts them out of the church”). If Gaius was one of the ones who had been excommunicated by Diotrephes, John obviously viewed any such action as illegitimate.

Verse 11

Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. The one who does good is of God; the one who does evil has not seen God.

Verse 11 is a bridge of sorts between verses 10 and 12, with Diotrephes of verse 10 being the epitome of evil (and, thus, unworthy of imitation) and Demetrius of

²⁰I say “diabolical” because the Greek adjective used to describe the speech of Diotrephes in verse 10 (translated “wicked”) is the same one used by John to describe Satan in 1 John 2:13-14, 3:12, and 5:18-19.

²¹“It is not Christian to refrain from exercising legitimate authority when there is need to do so; the modern church is perhaps too chary in exercising brotherly admonition and even discipline when it is required” (Marshall, p. 91).

²²What Hiebert (p. 339) describes as “unfounded slander.” The NIV translates it “gossiping maliciously.”

verse 12 being the epitome of good (and, thus, worthy of imitation). The Greek verb translated “imitate” is *mimeomai*, from which we get our English word, “mimic.” The second half of verse 11 is an encapsulation of the moral test of doing right so prominent in 1 John. The one whose life is characterized (the Greek participle translated “does good” is in the present tense) by doing good is of divine descent (“of God”; cf. 1 John 3:10), i.e., is a true believer. The one whose life is characterized (the Greek participle translated “does evil” is in the present tense) by doing evil is spiritually blind (“has not seen God”; cf. 1 John 3:6), i.e., is an unbeliever.

Verse 12

Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself; and we add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true.

John concludes the body of the epistle by commending a man by the name of Demetrius. Most interpreters are of the opinion that this Demetrius, though from the same area, is not to be identified with the Demetrius of Acts 19, the Ephesian silversmith who opposed Paul. Demetrius was likely one of John’s emissaries and the one who delivered the epistle to Gaius. Interpreters are probably correct in seeing this verse as John’s recommendation of Demetrius as one worthy of missionary support. According to the Law, in order for evidence to be legally admissible, it had to be verified by at least two or three witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15). John, as it were, calls three witnesses to the stand to vouch for the character of Demetrius. First, “Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone,” meaning that he was considered to be of good repute by the populace at large (cf. Cornelius in Acts 10:22, Timothy in Acts 16:2, Ananias in Acts 22:12, and 1 Timothy 3:7). Second, he has received a good testimony “from the truth (personified) itself,” meaning that Demetrius’ life was consistent with the truth of God’s Word (\approx “acting faithfully” in verse 5).²³ Third, Demetrius has received a good testimony from John himself (“and we add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true”; cf. John 19:35 and 21:24).

CONCLUSION/BENEDICTION (verses 13-14)

John concludes the epistle by expressing his desire to personally visit Gaius (verses 13-14a), giving a brief benediction (verse 14b), and by sending greetings (verse 14b).

²³“This can be taken to mean that if the truth could speak, it too would testify that Demetrius’s life was in accord with its own standards” (Marshall, p. 93).

Verses 13-14

I had many things to write to you, but I am not willing to write them to you with pen and ink; but I hope to see you shortly, and we will speak face to face. Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.

John quickly brings the letter to a close (perhaps, as several interpreters have suggested, because he was running out of room on the piece of parchment upon which he was writing and did not want to use a second piece, since such parchment was pricey, it being estimated that the standard piece of parchment could only hold about the number of words contained in this epistle), saving the rest of what he wanted to say for a future visit (cf. 2 John 12). The typical Greek sign-off was “farewell” (Acts 15:29). John, however, opts for the more Jewish “peace be to you” (cf. Numbers 6:26, Ephesians 6:23, and 1 Peter 5:14). Commenting on this pronouncement of peace, Burdick (p. 124) writes: “In view of the disturbing situation created by Diotrephes, such a wish on John’s part would be particularly meaningful to Gaius.” John’s final words in the epistle are interesting. He sends greetings to Gaius from those with him (whom he calls “friends”; cf. John 11:11 and 15:13-15), as well as asks Gaius to “greet [John’s] friends by name²⁴” in the church of which Gaius is a member. Commenting on John’s designation “friends,” Hodges (p. 915) states: “It is part of the genius of Christianity that one can meet people whom he has never seen before, in places far from home, and discover through a shared faith an immediate bond of friendship.”

Note: Because some Greek texts of 3 John are divided into 14 verses, while others are divided into 15 verses, some English translations of 3 John are 14 verses long (so KJV, NKJV, NIV, and NASB), while others (so ESV) are 15 verses long (depending on the particular Greek text from which they are translated). The content is the same in all. The only difference is that verse 14 is divided into two verses in the ESV.

²⁴Stott (p. 234) makes an interesting comment at this point: “God surely means each local fellowship to be sufficiently small and closely knit for the pastors and the members to know each other personally and to be able to greet each other by name.” If so, this would give credence to the idea that rather than growing to “megachurch” size, congregations should perhaps consider planting daughter churches once the mother church reaches a size that prohibits Stott’s rubric from being the norm.

Discussion Questions for 3 John 8-14

1. Verse 9 speaks of Diotrephes' desire to be preeminent. What are some passages in Scripture that teach that this desire is an improper one?

Suggested answers: Mathew 20:25-28//Mark 10:42-45//Luke 22:24-27, Matthew 23:5-12, John 3:30, Colossians 1:18, and 1 Peter 5:3

2. What significance might there be to John's use of the word, "friends" to describe fellow believers in verse 14?

Possible answer: believers are to be friends, to whatever degree possible, with all other believers, even believers from other churches