

## A Commendation and a Denunciation

### 3 John 1:1-14

3 John - *"The Elder, to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth: <sup>2</sup> Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers. <sup>3</sup> For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. <sup>4</sup> I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.*

*<sup>5</sup> Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, <sup>6</sup> who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well, <sup>7</sup> because they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles. <sup>8</sup> We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth.*

*<sup>9</sup> I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. <sup>10</sup> Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church. <sup>11</sup> Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God. <sup>12</sup> Demetrius has a good testimony from all, and from the truth itself. And we also bear witness, and you know that our testimony is true.*

*<sup>13</sup> I had many things to write, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and ink; <sup>14</sup> but I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak face to face. Peace to you. Our friends greet you. Greet the friends by name."*

## Background Notes

The apostle John wrote this epistle, 3 John, from Ephesus between the years AD 90 and 95. 3 John is the shortest of the three epistles - in fact, it's the shortest book in the New Testament. You may say – "But 2 John is only 13 verses, and 3 John is 14 verses!" But 3 John is one line shorter than 2 John in the Greek language! Remember, there was no delineation of "verses" in the original text.

The aged apostle referred to himself as "the elder" in verse 1, as he also did in 2 John. The term "elder" can refer to either - or both - age or spiritual position.

3 John is a personal letter. It was written to Gaius, a Christian whom John highly commended in this letter. A man named Gaius was mentioned in Romans 16 and in Acts 20, but Gaius was a common Roman name, so we don't know if these verses refer to the same man.

2 John taught that believers **should not** invite **false teachers** into their homes. In 3 John, the apostle encouraged believers to provide hospitality to **true teachers** of the Word of God. Traveling evangelists and teachers were the norm in the early Church, and believers were expected to provide hospitality for these itinerant servants of the Lord. It seems that Demetrius (v12) was one of these traveling preachers. He may even have carried this letter from John to Gaius.

Notice John's commendation of this beloved brother, Demetrius, in verse 12: *"Demetrius has a good testimony from all, and from the truth itself. And we also bear witness, and you know that our testimony is true."* Would your fellow believers be able write a recommendation like this for you? Or would they have to add a few negatives, such as "He's a Christian, but he doesn't show up at church very often." Or, "She comes to church on Sunday, but that's all." Nothing negative was said about Demetrius! What a testimony!

A silversmith from Ephesus whose name was Demetrius is mentioned in Acts 19. He was not a believer - in fact, he organized the opposition against the apostle Paul's preaching of the gospel. So the Demetrius of 3 John is probably not the same Demetrius. However, perhaps it is the same Demetrius, and he became a believer! Wouldn't it be great to find out in Heaven that the pagan Demetrius of Acts 19 became the beloved Christian Demetrius of 3 John? What a great conversion story that would be!

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Believers should imitate the godly example of Gaius.

Gaius may have been converted through the ministry of the apostle John. Verse 4: *"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."* By the way, there's no greater joy in life than seeing your children trust in Jesus Christ as Savior, and continue on in the things of the Lord! This verse can refer to your biological children, or to the spiritual children whom you have led to the Lord and disciplined.

*"For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth"* (v3). John was overjoyed to hear that Gaius' fellow believers spoke well of him. They gave him a good testimony.

*"Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, who have borne witness of your love before the church"* (v5-6). Gaius provided Christian hospitality to the traveling evangelists. Verse 6, *"If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well."* Gaius showed Christian hospitality to the traveling evangelists and teachers of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, and John encouraged him to help them financially when they went on their way.

Gaius did this for the Lord's servants that he knew, and also for "strangers." He provided generously for Christians that he didn't know personally. What a great testimony! Do we imitate the godly example of Gaius? How do we respond when

we hear about the needs of fellow believers - whether we know them personally or not? Are we willing to share? Are we willing to open our homes to provide meals or lodging for visiting missionaries or preachers?

Notice that the traveling teachers and evangelists whom Gaius supported were not “TV evangelists” who owned mansions and traveled in private planes – nor were they the kind of preachers who were involved in money-making schemes (v7). No, these were humble men of God who went forth at the Lord’s direction and for the Lord’s sake. They were not in the ministry for personal fame or to make a name for themselves, or to enrich themselves (as, sadly, some “evangelists” and “teachers” do today).

These men took nothing from “the Gentiles” (v7). In other words, they took no financial support from unbelievers. That brings up a question for today: should Christian workers or ministries ever receive funds from “secular” sources today? Should a Christian college, or an evangelistic or Bible teaching ministry, accept financial aid from non-Christian businesses - or from the government?

Answer: in general, ***the Lord’s people should support the Lord’s work***. There may be some special situations, but in every case, Christian organizations involved in fundraising and receiving gifts should always exercise great caution. They must avoid becoming involved in binding agreements with non-Christian sources, and they must make sure there are no “strings” attached to the gifts that might cause them to compromise their Christian ethics or testimony in the future. Christian ministries should avoid ***all*** “questionable” gifts or sources of funds.

Believers should share and imitate the godly example of Gaius.

## **2. Believers should not imitate the ungodly example of Diotrephes.**

Verses 9-10: *“I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church.”*

Diotrephes had an exaggerated opinion of himself and of his own importance. He liked to be “Number One.” Evidently he was a power-hungry Christian who wanted to call all the shots in the local church, so he had made himself the leader in the church he attended. Then he slandered and excommunicated any fellow believer who got in his way. Have you ever known a “Diotrephes” in the church today? I have, and it resulted in a very sad situation.

Diotrephes not only refused to receive the traveling servants of the Lord himself, but he forbade others to help them! In fact, he excommunicated those who helped – he literally put them out of the church. Apparently Diotrephes couldn’t bear to have anyone else have a differing opinion, or get any of the limelight. Evidently he was an ungodly, micro-managing, “control freak” who was consumed with the sins of pride and jealousy. Verse 11 may indicate that Diotrephes was not

even a believer: *“Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God.”* It is possible that Diotrephes was not a Christian, and it’s possible for unbelievers today to work their way into leadership positions in the church or Christian ministries. So we need to be on guard!

Unfortunately, it’s possible for believers who are power-hungry “Diotrephes-types” to be leaders in the church today. If this kind of person gains leadership in a local church, that church will more than likely be torn apart. God Himself will deal with believers who put themselves above church discipline, but local church members must be very careful and prayerful when selecting leaders for their church.

Believers must not imitate the ungodly example of Diotrephes.

## Practical Application

### Would you want 3 John 2 prayed for you?

What was the apostle John’s prayer for Gaius? John prayed for his physical health and well-being – and he prayed that Gaius’ physical health would mirror his spiritual health.

Would you want the prayer of 3 John 2 prayed for you? At first you might say “Yes – I’d certainly like to have people praying verse 2 for me!” But look at the verse again, *“that you may prosper in all things and be in health, **just as your soul prospers** [emphasis added].”*

How does your soul prosper? How is your spiritual health? Do you really want your physical health and well-being to be in the same condition as the state of your spiritual health? Before you answer, think about the condition of your spiritual health. If you say “Yes, pray that prayer for me” - would you end up in frail or failing health – or worse?

Notice, by the way: John did **not** pray that Gaius would become wealthy! There are Christians who pull this verse out of context and re-create it as a “proof text” for the “prosperity teaching” – the unbiblical idea that the Lord wants all Christians to be both healthy and wealthy at all times! Notice the **context**! It was Gaius’ **physical** health and well-being, not the health of his bank account!

Gaius was in good spiritual shape. He was walking in the truth. He was a beloved Christian brother. He was following the Lord, serving the Lord, and helping others. He was in good spiritual shape, so the apostle John could truthfully pray, *“May you prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.”* What about me? What about you?

Would you want 3 John 2 prayed for you?