

Outline of the Book of 3 John

Introduction

Most of the New Testament deals with problem brethren and problems in the churches. Paul exposed troubling false teachers in the book of Galatians. Paul dealt with the lack of unity and contention among brethren at Corinth (see 1 and 2 Corinthians). The apostle Paul spoke of the "*enemies of the cross*" at Philippians 3:18, the vain and church troubling doctrines of men at Colossians 2:8, and sons of perdition at 2 Thessalonians 2. Peter exposed false teachers at 2 Peter 2 and John exposed the spirit of antichrist at 1 and 2 John. The apostle Paul even named the troubling brethren by name when addressing Timothy (see 2 Timothy 2:17-18). The book of 3 John reveals another trouble maker in the church by the name Diotrephes. Diotrephes goes down in history as one whose priorities were confused and consequentially a nuisance in the Lord's church. The book of 3 John is only fourteen verses long yet packed with information regarding the common occurrence of trouble in the early church. The incident with Diotrephes was not an isolated event.

The apostle John had established a church and apparently baptized one named Gaius at some unrecorded location (see 3 John 4). John keeps up with the progress of this church through letters and word of mouth. John sent preachers to this church to edify its members and preach to the lost in the local area. These preachers represented truth and came with the high commendation of the apostle John. Gaius received these faithful preachers and he was hospitable to them too. Diotrephes; however, rejected these men and cast them out of the church.

Apparently Gaius and Diotrephes were working and worshipping at the same church. Part of the work of these preachers sent by John was to expose error in the local churches. It is likely that these preachers exposed Diotrephes' wickedness and were consequentially cast out of the church. Diotrephes sought after preeminence among brethren and would not stand for any who would take his position away from the minds of other brethren. One such preacher was Demetrius. While the apostle John commends Demetrius' stand for truth Diotrephes was casting him out of the church. Gaius was obviously not following Diotrephes and neither was he viewing the heretic as preminent. Gaius is commended by John as one who walked in truth. Obviously Gaius and Diotrephes were at odds regarding the spiritual standing of Demetrius and John is writing this short letter to encourage him.

Those who do not like thinking or reading about church problems are not likely to be edified by 3 John. Those who do not read the New Testament and learn from the content of these inspired pages will forever be confused. Paul said of such people that that they are, "*Ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of truth*" (2 Timothy 3:7). Let us remember that the apostle Paul wrote, "*For there must be also factions among you, that they that are approved may be made manifest among you*" (1 Corinthians 11:19). There will always be problems in the church. What should we do? Should we say, "That's why I don't go to church?" "They are all hypocrites." "There is no love here." Why not look to the word of God and take note that there is a battle for the souls of men taking place. Satan is doing all that he can to ruin the eternal existence of all men because he hates, with a passion, the church of Jesus Christ (see Revelation 12:14-17). We will be victorious over him by recognizing his tactics among men and standing for truth alone (see 1 John 4:4). Let us be as the apostle John and deal with these corrupt men who do the work of Satan (see 3 John 10-11). Secondly, let us be sure to encourage men like Gaius who are standing for the truth in very difficult times.

Chapter One

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

- A. *"The elder unto Gaius the beloved, whom I love in truth"* (1:1).
1. Comments over the issue of John being an "elder" are discussed at 2 John 1.
 2. Who is Gaius? The name Gaius is used at Acts 19:29, 20:4; Romans 16:23; and 1 Corinthians 1:14. The Gaius mentioned in 3 John is obviously a different individual due to the fact that John refers to him as one of his "children" at 3 John 4. John had obviously baptized this Gaius when establishing a church in this unrecorded location.
 3. John loved Gaius "in truth." To love in truth is to love as God loves (1 John 4:17). To love as God loves is to care for people's spiritual well being (1 John 3:16, 4:10), physical well being (1 John 3:17), to care for the lost of the world (Galatians 6:10), and to apply all fifteen characteristics of love as revealed in 1 Corinthians 13:1-7).
- B. *"Beloved, I pray that in all things thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth"* (1:2).
1. To "prosper" (*euodoo*) is to "help on the way, to have a prosperous journey; used metaphorically to prosper, be successful" (LS 329). John prayed that Gaius would be successful "in all things." The all things may be in Gaius' endeavors to teach and preach to the lost and help brethren out of error. Again, the success prayed for may be for financial success.
 2. The context of the book suggests Gaius prosper in his battle against Diotrephes.
- C. *"For I rejoiced greatly, when brethren came and bare witness unto thy truth, even as thou walkest in truth"* (1:3).
1. This verse is the key to understanding the makeup of 3 John. Apparently, John had received news of the faith of Gaius and now sent this third epistle to him. While Diotrephes was casting faithful men out of the church Gaius was standing for the truth.
 2. The idea of Christians bringing other Christians great joy by walking in truth and not giving in to the false doctrines and teachers around them continues to be brought out. It was the apostle Paul's great concern for the Corinthian Christians that they would follow the doctrines of the devil (2 Corinthians 11:3-4).
 3. To "bare witness" is to give testimony at the mouth of two or more (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:1). There was no gossip (sin) involved in the testimony given by these men to John regarding Gaius. If sin was involved in communicating the soul's condition of others, then John would not have the joy he mentioned here. Paul testified as to the unfaithfulness of men such as "Hymenaeus and Philetus; men who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already, and overthrow the faith of some" to the young evangelist Timothy (2 Timothy 2:17-18). Obviously, the traveling preachers had brought word to John that Gaius was standing for the truth in a troubling place where Diotrephes was wreaking havoc among the brethren.
- D. *"Greater joy have I none than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth"* (1:4).
1. Likewise, John would say 'greater sorrow have I none than this, to hear of my children teaching and following error.' Gaius being one of John's "children" obviously points to John having baptized Gaius in the past (see 1 Corinthians 4:14-17).
 2. As was mentioned at the end of 2 John, brethren were communicating with each other regarding the faithfulness of each other and the faithfulness of churches. Some news was joyous, other news was not (see study # 1; Church Autonomy). To "walk in the truth" is to abide in the teachings of Jesus and to love each other (1 John 3:10).

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

- A. *"Beloved, thou doest a faithful work in whatsoever thou doest toward them that are brethren and strangers withal; 6 who bare witness to thy love before the church: whom thou wilt do well to set forward on their journey worthily of God:"* (1:5-6).
1. The faithful works of Gaius were apparently in the fact that he housed "brethren and strangers" while they went about preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. The brethren are obviously preachers that Gaius had previous knowledge of and the strangers were unknown preachers to

Gaius. John is encouraging Gaius in this area because it is likely that he is being given a hard time about this by Diotrephes.

2. These brethren and strangers had brought back a report to the church where the apostle John worked and gave a favorable report regarding Gaius. Gaius was a man of Biblical love; i.e., he was kind and cared for the spiritual and physical well being of brethren.
 3. Another evangelistic trip was now in the workings. John admonished Gaius to continue his work of support for these gospel preachers. Such work would include housing, feeding, supporting monetarily and accompanying them as far as possible (cf. Acts 21:5, Romans 15:24; Titus 3:13).
- B.** *“Because that for the sake of the Name they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. 8 We therefore ought to welcome such, that we may be fellow-workers for the truth”* (1:7-8).
1. Here John clearly revealed that Gaius did not just support any stranger who came and said he loved Jesus and was preaching Jesus, but these brethren and strangers had a reputation of preaching by the authority of Jesus Christ.
 2. As these preachers went forth preaching the gospel, they did not take support from the Gentiles lest the gospel be hindered in a similar way that Paul reasoned (see 1 Corinthians 9:12). It seems apparent that one of Diotrephes complaints about these visiting preachers was that they only wanted money. Again, Diotrephes was a man desperate for the attention of brethren and was not going to hold back any accusation that would discredit these preachers in the minds of brethren.
 3. Notice that as Gaius *“welcomed such”* this made him a *“fellow-worker for the truth.”* This may shed light on the interpretation of 2 John 11. If I do acts of hospitality to a false teacher such give him a place to stay, feed and financially support him then I have now partaken in his evil works. He continues his work because of me (see study # 2, False Teachers).
 - a. To *“welcome”* (*apolambano*) is to “take or receive from another, to receive what is one’s due... to take of, take part of a thing... to hear or learn... to take back, get back, regain, recover... to take apart or aside..” (LS 101).
 - b. *“Fellow-workers”* (*sunergos*) = “working together, joining or helping in work... a fellow-workman, helpmate, coadjutor, accomplice... helping to make it... helping a person in a thing” (LS 774).
 - c. The meaning is that Gaius took part in the work of these preachers by providing housing, food, and financial support.

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

- A.** *I wrote somewhat unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not”* (1:9).
1. It seems that John had earlier sent a letter to the church where both Gaius and Diotrephes worshipped. Diotrephes did not accept the apostle John nor the preachers sent out into his fellowship. We are not given reasons for this action on Diotrephes’ part, but the remaining comments by John gives us an idea. Though John wrote to the church commanding brethren to receive these preachers Diotrephes rejects them.
 2. Diotrephes may have been an elder or local preacher at the church, again, the record does not state. He was a man who loved to have the *“preeminence”* among the brethren at the local church. The word *“preeminence”* (*philoproteuo*) is to “strive to be first” (LS 864). “Wish to be first, like to be leader” (“AG 860-861). “To be fond of being first, striving after the first place” (Thayer 654). Diotrephes was more likely jealous of these visiting preachers and John because they took some of the attention away from him.
 3. To not *“receive”* (*epidechomai*) is to not “admit besides or in addition: to allow of, admit of” (LS 290).
 4. Remember that 3 John is addressed to Gaius, and therefore John is writing a letter of warning regarding Diotrephes. Diotrephes desired the leadership role in the church to the point of eliminating any threats to his status in the minds of the local brethren. The apostle John and the preachers who now came posed such a threat. Diotrephes extended no right hand of fellowship to these men.

- B. *“Therefore, if I come, I will bring to remembrance his works which he doeth, prating against us with wicked words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and them that would he forbiddeth and casteth them out of the church”* (1:10).
1. *“Remembrance”* (*hupomimnesko*) is to “remind one of a person or thing... to put him in mind... To bring back to one’s mind, mention, suggest... to remind one of, to make mention of... to call to mind, remember... to make mention” (LS 845).
 2. Apparently John was saying that when he came to this church where Gaius and Diotrephes worshipped, he would expose the dark deeds of Diotrephes. Those deeds are:
 - a. Sought preeminence among the brethren.
 - b. *“Prating against us with wicked words.”* To *“prate”* (*phluareo*) against someone is to “talk nonsense, play the fool” (LS 867). Diotrephes was speaking words of foolishness and wickedness against John and the preachers that had come to them from the church where John worshipped.
 - c. Diotrephes did not *“receive the brethren.”* These brethren were no doubt the preachers mentioned in verse 5. The word receive was discussed in verse 9. It means “admit besides or in addition: to allow of, admit of” (LS 290). Diotrephes would not allow a place for these preachers of truth. Notice something very important here. Diotrephes was not "content" with simply speaking foolish words against the apostle John and the preachers of truth. Diotrephes would not be content until he rid himself of these brethren he considered troubling to his agenda of preeminence among brethren (see study # 3; The Unending Work of Faulty Brethren).
 - d. Anyone who does receive these preachers, Diotrephes *“forbiddeth and cast them out of the church.”* To *“forbid”* (*koluo*) is to “let, hinder, check, prevent: to hinder or prevent one from doing...” (LS 459).
 - 1c. Clearly, one in the church where Gaius worshipped who would provide for these visiting preachers would be prevented from doing so by Diotrephes.
 - 2c. Those who continued to house and support these preachers of truth would be cast out of the church. Diotrephes may have led the way in disciplinary action against those he viewed as dissenters. Gaius was no doubt one of these "dissenters."

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

- A. *“Beloved, imitate not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: he that doeth evil hath not seen God”* (1:11).
1. To do works of righteousness is to be *“of God”* (1 John 3:10).
 2. 1 John 3:6 states, *“Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither knoweth him”* (3:6). One who has not *“seen God”* is one who does not understand God’s word (cf. Matthew 13:15; John 1:18; 6:46). Therefore when one proclaims, “we cannot all understand truth alike,” he is proclaiming that he does not have God (see study # 4; Can We Know Truth Alike?).
- B. *“Demetrius hath the witness of all men, and the truth itself: yea, we also bear witness; and thou knowest that our witness is true”* (1:12).
1. It appears that Demetrius is at the center of the issue dealt with in 3 John. While Diotrephes was seeking to cast out any who supported Demetrius Gaius was receiving, supporting, and housing Demetrius.
 2. Demetrius' faith and stand in truth was well documented. Diotrephes spoke evil of this man while other Christians knew of this good standing with God and brethren.

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

- A. *“I had many things to write unto thee, but I am unwilling to write them to thee with ink and pen:”* (1:13).
1. The shortness of this epistle may give testimony to the urgency of the matter.
 2. After hearing of the wicked work of Diotrephes among the faithful brethren John seems to be very anxious to get to that location and deal with this heretic in the church.
- B. *“But I hope shortly to see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be unto thee. The friends salute thee. Salute the friends by name”* (1:14).

1. See the notes at 2 John 3 for a discussion on the "peace" of God. Peace is tranquility and serenity of mind that can only come when one has the forgiveness of sins (Hebrews 9:14). Gaius needed to know that what he was doing was right. Brethren, we need to do the same kind of encouraging of men who are standing for the truth in difficult situations today. Far too often we get complacent because the local work we are a part of has little current issues. There are brethren; however, in locations where peace does not exist. We need to encourage these brethren (see study # 5; Encourage Faithful Brethren in Difficult Situations).
2. Again, the word "salute" is used at 2 John 13 and is defined as "welcome kindly, bid welcome, greet...; as the common form on meeting" (LS 124). The words "*peace*" and "*salute*" indicate one's standing in truth and fellowship with God and brethren. The "*friends*" would be those in fellowship with God and brethren and were thereby known of each other and encouraged each other.