

Introduction to 3 John

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3 John ESV translation

Greeting

¹ The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.

Blessing

² Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul. ³ For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. ⁴ I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

MISSIONARIES

⁵ Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, ⁶ who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. ⁷ For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. ⁸ Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.

⁹ I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. ¹⁰ So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.

Leaders

¹¹ Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God. ¹² Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself. We also add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true.

Closing

¹³ I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink. ¹⁴ I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face.

¹⁵ Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends, each by name.

Grammatical Diagram

1

the elder < to the beloved Gaius
whom
I | love in truth

2

Beloved
[I] | pray > thou prosperest and be in good health
as
thy soul | prospereth

3 for

[I] | rejoice greatly
brethren | coming and testifying > to thy truth
as
thou | walkest in truth

4

[I] | have no > joy
greater than these
that
[I] | hear > my children
walking in the truth

5

Beloved
[thou] | doest > faithful
that
[thou] | worketh > this
for these brothers, strangers

6

who | have testified > your love
before the assembly

7

for
 [they] | went out
 |
 | behalf of the Name
 | taking nothing from the pagans

8

therefore
 we | ought > support > such ones
 |
 | that
 | [we] | become | co-workers
 |
 | to truth

9

[] | wrote > something < to the assembly
 but
 Diotrophes | does not recognize > us
 | who exalts himself over them

10

because of this
 [] | shall remember > the works he does
 |
 | gossiping > us < pernicious words
 | and
 | not content with these things
 |
 | nor
 | he | recognize > the brethren
 |
 | and
 | [he] | hinders > those wanting to
 | and
 | [he] | throws out > [them] from the assemblies
 if
 [] | come

11 beloved

imitate not > the evil thing
 [thou] | but
[imitate] > the good thing
he doing good | is | from God
he doing evil | knows not > God

12

Demetrius | is testified
 and
by all
and
by the Truth himself
 and
we too testify
 and
[thou] | knowest > that
our testimony is true

13

[I] | had > many things > to write < to thee
 but
[I] | want not > to write < to thee
with ink and pen

14 δὲ

[I] | hope > see soon > thee
 and
[we] | shall speak

15 peace | [be] < thine

the friends | greet > thee
[thou] | greet > the friends
by name

Outline of 3 John

Main Sections begin with 'Beloved'.

I. GREETING

1. John's authority
2. John's love for Gaius

II. BLESSING 2-4

1. Prayer for health and prosperity 2
2. Joy because Gaius and local Christians live by the Truth 3-4

III. MISSIONARIES 5-10

1. Exhortation to support itinerate Christian missionaries 5-8
2. Warning about Diotrephes who opposes other Christian workers 9-10

IV. LEADERS 11-12

1. Imitate godly leaders 11
2. Demetrius is a godly leader 12

V. CLOSING 13-14

1. Hope to see Gaius soon
2. Mutual greetings

Textual Variants in 3 John

4 One ancient manuscript mistook "joy" (*charas*) for "grace" (*charis*).

6 Another ancient manuscript miswrote, "you will send them, by doing well" in place of "you will do well, by sending them".

8 A scribe tried to correct an ancient manuscript by modifying "support" (*upolambanein*) to read, "receive" (*apolambanein*).

9 One ancient manuscript misspelled "have written" (*egrapsa*) as "having written" (*egrapsas*), and two others altered "written something" (... *ti*) to "would have written" (*an ...*).

10 Another ancient manuscript altered "against us" to read, "towards us", and "who want to (do so)" to read, "who welcome (them)".

12 Some manuscripts replaced "the truth" with "the church" or with "the church and the truth". "The Truth" is the original.

15 One ancient manuscript replaces "friends" with "brethren".

SPECIAL VOCABULARY

1. Elder (Presbyter)

1. Israelite community leaders, Deut. 19.12
2. Aged gentlemen, John 8.9
3. Officials in Jewish synagogues, Mark 15.1
4. Hellenistic (Greek) magistrates
5. Christian church leaders, Acts 15.4
6. Divine beings in heaven, Rev. 4.4

2. Truth

John employs the term “truth” in three main ways:

1. Truthfulness (3)
2. True teaching from Jesus Christ (4)
3. Title for Jesus Christ, the Truth (8, 12).

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” John 14:7

Background to 3 John

The Christian movement was in its third generation, and there were now more Gentile (pagan) Christians than Jewish Christians.

Itinerate missionary **evangelists** were carrying the Good News of Jesus to the provinces and towns of the Roman Empire, forming new churches led by local men.

Diotrephes, a leader in a provincial church, refused to allow church members to support itinerant evangelists, and would throw out of the church members who did so.

Demetrius and other evangelists went to Ephesus to explain the situation to their “mother” church.

John penned this letter (3 John) to Gaius, a wealthy Christian who would support worthy evangelists. John likely sent Demetrius with this letter to Gaius, who would trust him and provide support to the itinerate evangelists.

Grammar Notes on 3 John

5 “in all your efforts” (ESV). Greek: “what ever you-might-work” (*ho ean ergasēi*). Gaius had not yet done anything for these particular chaps, yet John expected that he soon would do something practical.

8 “fellow workers **for** the truth” (ESV). The Greek noun with prefix *syn* (‘with’) followed by “the truth” in an grammatical ‘instrumental case’ can mean, “fellow workers **with** the Truth” (Jesus Christ).

Christian Doctrines in 3 John

Apostles

John was one of the 12 whom Jesus appointed to continue his work in the world, promising to send them the Spirit of truth. “You know that our testimony is true” (**12**)

God

For John, there is but One True God, who does good and rewards good (**6, 11**).

Truth

John rejoices in truth (**3**), works for truth (**8**), writes truth (**9, 13**) and testifies about the truth (**12**). Christians are only to speak truth in religion, in politics, in business and in daily life.

Love

The main mark of true Christians remains the practical love that they show one to another (**1, 5**).

Church

Christians call themselves “brethren” (**5**). They form communities that they call *church*, a word that means “gathering” or “assembly” (**6, 9**).

Missionaries

Christian churches support itinerate evangelists who receive no support from pagans (**6, 7, 8, 10**).

COMMENTARY ON 3 JOHN

¹ The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.

The Elder = the Apostle John who was also an overseer of the churches in Ephesus, Asia Minor. See lexicon note 1

² Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul.

When an apostle prays for others' health, they get well!

³ For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth.

These were itinerating (travelling) evangelists who came to John for his approval to raise support from Gaius for their ministry work. See lexicon note 2

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

Gaius was a man of means who remained loyal to Jesus, obeying his commandments.

⁵ Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, ⁶ who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God.

John urges Gaius to undertake personally to support these particular itinerate evangelists, whom he did not know. See grammar note 5

⁷ For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. ⁸ Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.

When you support evangelists and church-planting missionaries, you become a co-worker with Jesus who is the Truth. grammar note 8

⁹ I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. ¹⁰ So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.

When a church will not support evangelists, then individuals may do so, even at the risk of being shunned.

¹¹ Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God.

John appeals to Gaius not to follow the example of disobedient church leaders, but to do what he knows is good, helpful and honourable.

¹² Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself. We also add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true.

Demetrius will share with the other evangelists the support that Gaius will donate to them.

¹³ I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink. ¹⁴ I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face.

God gives to generous givers opportunities to grow in knowledge, grace and joy.

¹⁵ Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends, each by name.

“Friends”, in this connection, include fellow Christians who participate in evangelism, in church planting and in supporting others.

ASSIGNMENTS

Home Work

Read through 3 John once a day this week, in different translations (See biblehub.com)

Jot down notes and queries that you want to discuss in our bible-study group.

Think About

- A. Is it legitimate to seek missionary support from churches?
- B. Is it legitimate for individuals and families to support missionaries whom their church does not support?
- C. How can we vet missionaries before we accept to support them?

Pastoral Work

Meet with your coach, or with those whom you coach, and talk together about Christians who show leadership ability.

Plan together ways in which current leaders will share opportunities with new leaders, to serve in tiny churches or out-reach teams. Pray for each one by name.