

3 John

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

2 Beloved, I pray that in everything you are living well and acting in an uncorrupted manner just as your inwardness is operating in an uncorrupted manner.²

3 For I rejoiced exceedingly when the brothers came and bore witness to you with respect to the truth, to the effect that you are living in the truth.³ 4 I have no greater joy than this, when I hear that my children are living in the truth.⁴

5 Beloved, you are doing belief, whatever you have accomplished toward the brothers, even this toward strangers.⁵ 6 They, whom you do well to send on their way in a manner worthy of God, have testified to your love before the group.⁶ 7 Now, they went out on behalf of the Name, receiving nothing from the Gentiles.⁷ 8 Therefore, we are morally obligated to be supportive of such men, so that we may be their fellow workers with respect to the truth.⁸

9 I have written something to the group, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not welcome us.⁹ 10 Therefore, if I come, I will call attention to his actions, which he does by slandering us with evil words; and not being satisfied with this, neither does he himself welcome the brothers, and he hinders those who desire to do so, and he throws them out of the group.¹⁰

11 Beloved, do not imitate evil, but good. He who does good is of God. He who does evil has not seen God.¹¹ 12 Demetrius has been spoken well of by everyone and by the truth itself. Indeed, even we testify, and you know that our testimony is true.¹²

13 I have many things to write to you, but I do not wish to write to you with paper and ink.¹³ 14 But I hope to see you shortly, and we will talk face to face.¹⁴ 15 Shalom to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends in accordance with the Name.¹⁵

¹ Ὁ πρεσβύτερος Γαῖω τῷ ἀγαπητῷ, ὃν ἐγὼ ἀγαπῶ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ – While 2 John is a general cover letter for 1 John to the Christian gatherings of each city in Asia Minor, this letter is for one individual and probably accompanied both 1 and 2 John.

Thus, John, the elder, who is also probably the last remaining apostle, is writing this third letter as a personal cover letter for 1 John, which is a circular being sent to various Christian communities in Asia, western Turkey, to clear up a dispute that is going on within them because of false teachers who are denying Jesus is the Messiah and claiming that he was only a good teacher or rabbi. They are also promoting the idea that even Jesus would want everyone to focus on obeying the Mosaic Covenant.

John describes Gaius as someone whom he personally loves “in the truth,” meaning within the proper boundaries of the apostolic message. John will go on to say that these boundaries have not been kept by Diotrophes and the false teachers. They are discouraging Christians from loving those who are still holding to the gospel as first presented to the older generation (probably by Paul) and has been passed down to the younger generation.

Loving God and His people (by not rejecting them!) in the midst of believing the truth of Jesus as the Messiah and intercessor for sinners is central to John’s understanding of manifesting authentic belief (ἀλήθεια is used 6 times in 3 John).

² Ἀγαπητέ, περὶ πάντων εὐχομαί σε εὐδοῦσθαι καὶ ὑγιαίνειν, καθὼς εὐδοοῦταί σου ἡ ψυχὴ – εὐδοῦσθαι [εὐδόω – from εὖ meaning well and ὁδός meaning way] καὶ ὑγιαίνειν [ὑγιαίνω – from ὑγιής meaning sound, uncorrupted]

John’s prayer to God (in line with God’s promises for those whom He has chosen to be authentic believers) is that Gaius is living a life commensurate with the gospel and its call for believers to pursue moral goodness and obedience to God, which is also in line with the orientation of fundamental desires of their hearts. In the context of 1 and 2 John, this means mostly that Gaius is being kind, accepting, and loving to other believers who are holding to the apostolic message that John himself proclaims.

³ ἐχάρην ὅτι ἴσταν ἐρχομένων ἀδελφῶν καὶ μαρτυρούντων σου τῇ ἀληθείᾳ, καθὼς σὺ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ περιπατεῖς – John is referring to the traveling band of Christian teachers, who were taught by John and sent out by him to proclaim the apostolic message in Asia. When they returned to Ephesus to report on their journey, they spoke highly of Gaius’ faith and life (cf. v. 7). In other words, Gaius has not been influenced by the false teachers and is remaining committed to the apostolic gospel. He is already living in line with John’s exhortations and corrections to the message of the false teachers in 1 John.

⁴ μείζοτεράν ἑαυτῶν οὐκ ἔχω χαράν, ἵνα ἀκούω τὰ ἐμὰ τέκνα ἐν ἀληθείᾳ περιπατοῦντα – Whether Gaius directly heard the gospel from John or someone else, John still considers him one of his children, because he is still responding well to the apostolic message that John continues to propagate through the itinerant teachers whom he sends out from Ephesus. And John also now knows through these traveling teachers that Gaius is remaining committed to the same apostolic message which he himself is proclaiming. For this John truly rejoices such that nothing else makes him happier in the world than that his students persevere in their faithfulness to the gospel.

⁵ Ἀγαπητέ, πιστὸν ποιεῖς ὃ ἐάν ἐργάσῃ εἰς τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς καὶ τοῦτο ξένους – Even though Gaius had never before met the emissaries from John, he welcomed them, because he recognized that they were proclaiming the truth of the gospel of Jesus as the Messiah (cf. 1 John). In this way, contrary to Diotrophes and the false teachers, he is exhibiting authentic belief. As John says, he is doing belief. And John will say in 1 John that it is belief, indeed authentic belief that overcomes the world and its lies.

⁶ οἱ ἐμαρτύρησάν σου τῇ ἀγάπῃ ἐνώπιον ἐκκλησίας, οὓς καλῶς ἐποιήσεις προπέμψας ἀξίως τοῦ θεοῦ – Gaius has been appropriately hospitable to the teachers sent by John from Ephesus and then sent them on their way in the same manner. These men have spoken openly about Gaius’ love for God and His people in front of the Ephesian Christians.

⁷ ὑπὲρ γὰρ τοῦ ὀνόματος ἡ ἐξῆλθον μηδὲν λαμβάνοντες ἀπὸ τῶν ἐθνικῶν – “on behalf of the Name” = perhaps short for יהוה, found 104x in the Old Testament, referring to the transcendent Creator and all that His name, Yahweh, means, i.e., His character and plans and purposes; or perhaps referring to the name of Jesus and all that is involved in his being the Messiah.

The teachers sent by John from Ephesus expected nothing, i.e., hospitality, from the regular, unbelieving populace of Asia Minor, since people are fundamentally hostile to the biblical message. But they would expect their fellow Christians to be hospitable because of their interest in the truth of the gospel which they were bringing from an apostolic source, John himself. And this hospitality would come to those teachers whom people like Gaius understand to be teaching the truth, because they recognize in their message, i.e., that Jesus is the Messiah (contrary to the false teachers).

⁸ ἡμεῖς οὖν ὀφείλομεν ὑπολαμβάνειν τοὺς τοιούτους, ἵνα συνεργοὶ γινώμεθα τῇ ἀληθείᾳ – These itinerant teachers deserve the hospitality of all Christians, including John, because they are willing to travel and provide others in Asia with the truth of the gospel.

⁹ Ἐγραψά τι τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ ἀλλ’ ὁ φιλοπρωτεύων αὐτῶν Διοτρέφης οὐκ ἐπιδέχεται ἡμᾶς – John has written 1 John to the community of believers in Asia Minor. However, Diotrophes, whose main interest is for people to follow him

and no one else, does not accept John's letter as representative of all the apostles. This is the plural of apostolic identity, in order to emphasize their authority and agreement with one another so that John is truly representative of them (cf. 1 John 1:1; 2 John 5).

¹⁰ διὰ τοῦτο, ἐὰν ἔλθω, ὑπομνήσω αὐτοῦ τὰ ἔργα ἃ ποιεῖ λόγοις πονηροῖς φλυαρῶν ἡμᾶς, καὶ μὴ ἀρκούμενος ἐπὶ τούτοις οὔτε αὐτὸς ἐπιδέχεται τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς καὶ τοὺς βουλομένους κωλύει καὶ ἕκ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἐκβάλλει – John hopes to visit Gaius' city and the church located in it. When and if he does, he will expose the error and lies of Diotrefes. He claims that the true apostles are in error, probably stating that he knows better what Jesus said about himself. Even though the apostles were eyewitnesses of Jesus' actions and ministry for three years and saw him die and rise from the dead, Diotrefes completely denies this (cf. 2 John 7). And he does so for strictly selfish reasons. What else can be the case for someone like him who is so aggressively opposed to the apostles? In addition, he shuns the traveling teachers from John. And he is committed to ostracizing authentic Christians who do welcome these teachers of the apostolic message.

¹¹ Ἀγαπητέ, μὴ μιμοῦ τὸ κακὸν ἀλλὰ τὸ ἀγαθόν. ὁ ἀγαθοποιῶν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν ὁ κακοποιῶν οὐχ ἑώρακεν τὸν θεόν – John does not want Gaius to imitate Diotrefes. He probably has to say this because of the confusion and effect that Diotrefes and others like him are having on the authentic believers. They heard one message from Paul, John, and John's emissaries, but they are hearing a completely different message from Diotrefes and the false teachers. And especially the younger generation are confused.

Only people of changed hearts are actually theists. Therefore, the person who pursues morality and God's gracious mercy while being humbly repentant because of his continued moral depravity is genuinely a believer in the one true God. In this context, also, those who welcome the band of teachers who were sent out by John and who embrace the apostolic message are not only doing what is good but also are doing it because of God's work within them to change their hearts and make them his children who will inherit the eternal Kingdom of God. Ethics (Kierkegaard)!!!

John can easily define evil as rejection of the apostolic message such that a person in this context does not welcome the band of teachers from John, refuses to recognize the profound problem of sin within him and therefore rejects God's offer of gracious mercy through Jesus as the Messiah, thus not recognizing who God really is, even while claiming to understand God accurately, i.e., while focusing on the Mosaic Covenant. Therefore, the phrase "has not seen God" means has not recognized the truth that God has proclaimed through Jesus and the apostles, that Jesus certainly is the Messiah.

¹² Δημητρίῳ μεμαρτύρηται ὑπὸ πάντων καὶ ὑπὸ αὐτῆς τῆς ἁληθείας· καὶ ἡμεῖς δὲ μαρτυροῦμεν, καὶ οἶδας ὅτι ἡ μαρτυρία ἡμῶν ἀληθὴς ἐστίν – Demetrius is perhaps someone whom Diotrefes has singled out as a teacher of the true apostolic message and criticized, thus casting doubt in people's minds as to the authenticity of his Christianity and teaching. But John knows how Demetrius has responded to the teachers from John and to the apostolic message. John uses the plural of all but indefinite inclusiveness; "I, John, and all apostles and believers who agree with me, including the 'brothers' and others in Ephesus who are part of my immediate community, testify to Demetrius' goodness as one who is living in the truth (cf. vs. 3,4)."

On the basis of both the objective and subjective evidence, i.e., John's eyewitness accounts of Jesus and their grasping the importance of being reconciled to God for the sake of His forgiveness for their immoral condition, John's readers can say that they really do know John as an apostle is speaking truth with the apostolic message.

¹³ Πολλὰ εἶχον γράψαι σοι ἀλλ' οὐ θέλω διὰ μέλανος καὶ καλάμου ἵσοι γράφειν – cf. 2 John 12. John has still much more to say to Gaius apart from the circular of 1 John.

¹⁴ ἐλπίζω δὲ εὐθέως σε ἰδεῖν, καὶ στόμα πρὸς στόμα λαλήσομεν – cf. 2 John 12. John hopes to visit Gaius and his Christian community personally.

¹⁵ Εἰρήνη σοι ἀσπάζονται σε οἱ φίλοι. Ἀσπάζου τοὺς φίλους κατ' ὄνομα – John wishes God's ultimate blessing on Gaius, the shalom of eternal life. The fellow believers in John's Christian community send their best to Gaius. And John sends his best to fellow believers in Gaius' Christian community. And this in accordance with God's name, i.e., יהוה, found 104x in the Old Testament, referring to the transcendent Creator and all that his name, Yahweh, means; or referring to the name of Jesus and all that is involved in his being the Messiah.