

3 John

1 The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth (ἐν ἀληθείᾳ).¹

2 Beloved, I pray that concerning all things that you may prosper and be in good health just as your existence is prospering.² **3** For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and bore witness to your truth (σου τῇ ἀληθείᾳ), just as you are walking in the truth (ἐν ἀληθείᾳ).³ **4** I have no greater joy than these things, that I hear that my children are walking in the truth (ἐν ἀληθείᾳ).⁴

5 Beloved, you are doing the faith—whatever you perform toward the brothers, even this toward strangers.⁵ **6** They, whom you will do well to send on their way in a manner worthy of God, have testified before the assembly to your love.⁶ **7** For they went out for the sake of the Name, while receiving nothing from the Gentiles.⁷ **8** Therefore, we are obligated to be supportive of such men, so that we may be their fellow workers with respect to the truth (τῇ ἀληθείᾳ).⁸

9 I wrote something to the assembly, but Diotrophes, 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 these things, he does not welcome the brothers, and he prevents those who desire to do so, and he throws them out of the assembly.¹⁰

11 Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God (ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ). He who does evil has not seen God.¹¹ **12** Demetrius has been spoken well of by everyone and by the truth itself (ὕπὸ αὐτῆς τῆς ἀληθείας). And we also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true (ἀληθής).¹²

13 I have many things to write to you, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and ink.¹³

14 But I hope to see you shortly, and we will speak face to face.¹⁴ **15** Shalom to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends according to the Name.¹⁵

¹ Ὁ πρεσβύτερος Γαῖῳ 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—but after these latter two letters have reached the community of believers that includes Diotrephes and after John has received word as to how Diotrephes reacted negatively to especially 1 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, which they both share together. In other words, John’s love is in the midst of the common understanding of God, Jesus, and the gospel which Gaius and he believe. John will go on to say that men such as Diotrephes and false teachers like him have not remained within these boundaries of the truth. They are discouraging Christians from loving those who are still holding to the gospel as first presented to the older generation (probably by Paul, but maybe by John too) 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 εὐδοῦταί σου ἡ ψυχὴ – εὐδοῦσθαι [εὐδοῶ – from εὖ meaning well and δόξ meaning way] καὶ ὑγιαίνειν [ὑγιαίνω – from ὑγιής meaning sound, uncorrupted, free from error]

John’s prayer to God (in line with God’s promises for those whom He has chosen to be authentic believers) is that Gaius continue living a life commensurate with the gospel and its call for believers to pursue moral goodness and obedience to God, including and perhaps especially loving others who have embraced the truth that Jesus is the Messiah, and that he continue being free from error in his understanding of Jesus, specifically that he is the very human Messiah as John describes in 1 John and that is line with the true apostolic message.

John also points out that Gaius’ “existence,” i.e., what it fundamentally means for him to be an embodied human being, is on the right path—probably because John is thinking that God has changed Gaius’ inwardness and caused him to be an authentic believer. 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.

Cf. 1 John 5:16 If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this. 17 All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not leading to death.

³ ἐχάρην ὁ γὰρ λίαν 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. This is how John is able to encourage Gaius in v. 2. to continue living according to the truth of the gospel.

⁴ μείζοτεράν ‘τούτων οὐκ ἔχω χαράν’, ἵνα ἀκούω τὰ ἐμὰ τέκνα ἔν 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 (they were “strangers” (ξένους) to him), 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 Diotrephes and the false teachers, he was exhibiting authentic belief and acting faithfully with respect to the truth of the apostolic message. This acting faithfully on Gaius’ part means that he has authentic belief in the gospel, by which John will say in 1 John that it anyone overcomes the world and its lies.

1 John 5:4 For whoever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world — our belief.

⁶ οἱ ἐμαρτύρησάν σου τῇ ἁγάπῃ ἐνώπιον ἐκκλησίας, οὓς καλῶς ‘ποιήσεις προπέμψας’ ἀξίως τοῦ θεοῦ – Gaius has been appropriately hospitable (perhaps ποιήσας) to the teachers sent by John from Ephesus and then sent them on their way in the same manner. These men have spoken openly and favorably about Gaius’ love for God and His people in the assembly 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. My guess is that it is the first option, that these men learned from John the OT message regarding the God of Israel and the NT message of Jesus as His Messiah and went out from Ephesus and its assembly of Christians led mainly by John to proclaim what they had learned. And they did it well. But they found no support or encouragement from unbelievers, the “pagans” (ἐθνικῶν) of their society, whether Gentile worshipers of “idols” (the false gods of the Greeks) or Jewish worshipers of “idols” (the false god of the Jews who are rejecting the one true God of Israel by not embracing His Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth).

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. And it will be clear that they are proclaiming a different message from anyone else in their culture because no one will be willing to provide them with hospitality, whether worshipers of Greek gods or the false Jewish god that rejects the OT teachings of the very human and suffering Messiah. Others’ hospitality towards these bona fide teachers is a tangible way of demonstrating their sharing in their work.

The main idea is the Christians have the moral obligation to encourage and support apostolic teachers. But who are they in our day, because there are no apostles around to verify or affirm that others are proclaiming the apostolic message?

⁹ Ἐγραψά ἔτι τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ· ἀλλ’ ὁ φιλοπρωτεύων αὐτῶν Διοτρεφῆς 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 1:1ff.; 2 John 5).

¹⁰ διὰ τοῦτο, ἐὰν ἔλθω, ὑπομνήσω αὐτοῦ τὰ ἔργα ἃ ποιεῖ λόγοις πονηροῖς φλυαρῶν ἡμᾶς, καὶ μὴ ἀρκούμενος ἐπὶ τοῦτοις οὔτε αὐτὸς ἐπιδέχεται τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς καὶ τοὺς βουλομένους κολύει καὶ ἐκ 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 Diotrophes. 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, Diotrophes 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.

Diotrophes is a great example of what the hardness of the human heart can look like—complete rejection of the truth in the midst of hearing it from an apostle and mistreatment of people, even rejection of them who do embrace the truth.

¹¹ Ἀγαπήτέ, 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 Diotrophes. He probably has to say this because of the confusion and effect that Diotrophes 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 Diotrophes and the false teachers. And this has left especially the younger generation very confused.

The implication of John’s teaching here is that only people of changed hearts are actually theists. Everyone else is worshipping a false god even if they are using biblical words in their supposed worship of “God.” 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 Ἀληθείας· καὶ ἡμεῖς δὲ μαρτυροῦμεν, καὶ οἶδας ὅτι ἡ μαρτυρία ἡμῶν ἀληθής ἐστιν – Demetrius is perhaps someone whom Diotrophes 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. And

Demetrius' life matches that of the gospel, especially being completely supportive of and encouraging towards those who embrace Jesus as the Messiah.

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 believing the truth and living in the truth (cf. vs. 3,4)."

Thus, on the basis of both the objective and subjective evidence, i.e., John's eyewitness accounts of Jesus, his proclamation of the gospel, and his readers such as Gaius grasping the importance of being reconciled to God for the sake of His eternal forgiveness of their sin, all John's readers can say that they really do know that John as an apostle is speaking truth that everyone should believe.

¹³ Πολλὰ εἶχον 'γράψαι σοι' ἀλλ' 'οὐ θέλω' διὰ μέλανος καὶ καλάμου 'σοι 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 local Christian community personally.

Here εὐθέως probably has the meaning of shortly or forthwith, i.e., at his earliest convenience. To translate it "immediately" would not make as much sense. Even the NAS95 translates it "shortly."

¹⁵ Εἰρήνη σοι. ἀσπάζονται σε οἱ 'φίλοι. 'ἀσπάξου 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 is 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. Probably the first option is correct in the light of the false teachers claiming to know God better than John and the true apostles.