

## A Study of 3 John

### I. Outline.

01. Source and address (3 John 1).
02. Prayer and commendation (2-6).
03. Concerning the missionaries (7-8).
04. Diotrephes (9-10).
05. Follow good (11).
06. Demetrius (12).
07. Hoping to see them face to face (13-14).

### II. Summary.

**3 John** was written to Gaius, a faithful member of the Lord's church. This church wanted to assist some missionaries and Gaius was leading in the effort, but he and the faithful ones were opposed by a brother named Diotrephes, who was an obvious tyrant in that congregation. The Apostle John instructs the church to support the preaching of the gospel and promises to deal with Diotrephes.

### III. Chronology.

**BIBLE PERIOD:** The Period of the Church.

*If you are not familiar with the 15 Bible Periods, please click here:*

<https://maplehillchurchofchrist.files.wordpress.com/2018/05/15bibleperiods.pdf>

### IV. Words/Phrases to Study

- **3 John**... “Four crucial issues which face the church today are explicitly treated in John’s brief epistle: (1) The attitude of love and concern which Christians should have for each other. (2) The importance of walking in the truth. (3) The responsibility of the church to support missionaries. (4) The nature of a church tyrant and how he is to be dealt with” [John Howard Parker, “The Living Message of Third John,” in *The Living Messages of the Books of the New Testament*,” edited by Warren and Elkins, p. 316].
- **3 John 1... THE ELDER**--“‘Old one’ translates *presbuteros*. The term is often used elsewhere in the New Testament to designate the elders of the church. Here John uses it merely to call attention to his age and experience” [Clinton Gill, *Hereby We Know: A Study of the Epistles of John*, 1966, Bible Study Textbook Series, College Press, Joplin, MO, an e-Sword Module].
- **3 John 2... EVEN AS THY SOUL PROSPERETH**—“Does man consist solely of flesh and bones, or is there an eternal ‘something’ that resides within the tabernacle of flesh? Materialism, both secular and religious, advocates the notion that human beings are wholly mortal. But the Bible teaches otherwise. The apostle John shows an obvious distinction between the body and the soul... Of special significance here is the adverb *kathos*, ‘even as,’ which indicates a comparison. John hopes that the bodily ‘health’ of Gaius will prosper *even* as this brother’s soul is prospering. There is a clear distinction here between the physical body and the soul. ... The language is similar to phraseology in 2 Corinthians 7:1 where Paul alludes to the ‘defilement of flesh and spirit’”  
[Wayne Jackson, <https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/884-3-john-2-body-and-soul> ].
- **3 John 3... EVEN AS THOU WALKEST IN THE TRUTH**—“The three virtues (grace, mercy, and peace) flourish in an environment where truth and love prevail. Truth unites the Christian community when it faces the common foe of falsehood; it is evident among Christians when they demonstrate their unity in showing love toward one another. Then the Christian church prays the prayer John Greenleaf Whittier composed, ‘Drop Thy still dews of quietness, Till all our strivings cease; Take from our souls the strain and stress, And let our ordered lives confess, The beauty of Thy

peace.” [Simon J. Kistemaker, *James and the Epistles of John*, 1986, Baker’s New Testament Commentary, an e-Sword Module].

- **3 John 4... NO GREATER JOY**—“The Greek reads, ‘Greater joy than this I do not have.’ ‘Children’ is *teknon*. The verbal form is *tiktō*, ‘to give birth to’; thus a *teknon* is a child as it is seen in relation to its parents. The use of this word and the fact that ‘my’ is not the personal pronoun in the genitive case in the Greek text but a possessive adjective, literally, ‘my own,’ would seem to indicate that Gaius was a convert of John. Translation: *Greater joy than this I do not have, namely, that I am hearing that my own children are habitually ordering their behavior in the sphere of the truth*” [Kenneth S. Wuest, *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*, 1942-1955, an e-Sword Module].
- **3 John 5... AND TO STRANGERS**—“According to another reading it is, ‘And that, strangers,’ as in 1 Corinthians 6:6, Ephesians 2:8, Philippians 1:28. Either way, the strangers would be Christians; but, according to the reading in the text, the brethren would be more or less acquaintances of their host. The duty of entertaining Christians on their travels was of peculiar importance in early times: (1) from the length of time which travelling required, (2) from the poverty of the Christians, (3) from the kind of society they would meet at public inns. The duty is enforced in Romans 12:13; 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8; Hebrews 13:2; 1 Peter 4:9.” [W.M. Sinclair, *The Epistles of St. John*, A Bible Commentary for English Readers, Editor: Charles Ellicott, an e-Sword Module].
- **3 John 7... TAKING NOTHING OF THE GENTILES**—“The term ‘Gentile’ embraced all who were not ‘Jews,’ and it is evident that these persons went forth particularly to labor among the pagan. When they went, they resolved, it seems, to receive no part of their support from them, but to depend upon the aid of their Christian brethren, and, hence, they were at first commended to the church of which Gaius and Diotrephes were members, and on this second excursion were commended particularly to Gaius. Why they, resolved to take nothing of the Gentiles is not stated, but it was doubtless from prudential considerations, lest it should hinder their success among them, and expose them to the charge of being actuated by a mercenary spirit. There were circumstances in the early propagation of Christianity which made it proper, in order to avoid this reproach, to preach the gospel “without charge,” those to whom it is preached to contribute to its maintenance, and that it is the right of those who preach to expect and receive a support” [*Barnes’ Notes*].
- **3 John 8... OUGHT TO RECEIVE SUCH**—“We who are Jews, that have believed in Christ, for such an one Gaius, it seems, as well, as the apostle, were, ought to receive such preachers of the word into our houses, and entertain them cheerfully, while they continue, and supply them with all necessaries when they depart” [*John Gill’s Exposition of the Whole Bible*, an e-Sword Module].
- **3 John 9... LOVETH TO HAVE THE PREEMINENCE**—“The word is made up of *phileō*, ‘to be fond of,’ and *prōtos*, ‘first, thus, ‘to be fond of being first.’ Smith remarks that ‘*proagein* (transgresseth) of 2 John 1:9, and *philopro-teuein* (fond of being first) of 3 John 1:9, denote two tempers which disturbed the Christian life of Asia Minor - intellectual arrogance and personal aggrandisement.’ He evidently was not satisfied with the official position he held and its scope of power, but desired to rule the entire church” [Wuest].
- **3 John 10... PRATING AGAINST US WITH MALICIOUS WORDS**—“That is, Diotrephes is making unjustifiable accusations against John and his companions because he resents John’s apostolic authority. Therefore, he tries to undermine John with malicious gossip. In fact, the word *gossip* in Greek is descriptive for bubbles that appear momentarily and disappear. They are useless. The term, then, implies that the evil words Diotrephes utters are empty and meaningless (consult 1 Timothy 5:13). Nevertheless, the offense is an undisguised violation of God’s explicit command, “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor” (Exodus 20:16; Deuteronomy 5:20). A leader in the local congregation, Diotrephes stands condemned as a violator of God’s law” [Simon J. Kistemaker].

- **3 John 11... FOLLOW NOT THAT WHICH IS EVIL, BUT THAT WHICH IS GOOD**—“There can be no doubt that in this exhortation the writer had Diotrephes particularly in his eye, and that he means to exhort Gaius not to imitate his example. He was a man of influence in the church, and though Gaius had shown that he was disposed to act in an independent manner, yet it was not improper to exhort him not to be influenced by the example of any one who did wrong. John wished to excite him to acts of liberal and generous hospitality” [*Barnes’ Notes*].
- **3 John 12... WE ALSO BEAR RECORD; AND YE KNOW THAT OUR RECORD IS TRUE**—“There is no arrogance or egotism in this: it is solely the appeal to the loyal fidelity of Caius—to the simplicity of Christ’s gospel as set forth by John in accordance with the other Apostles. The personal experience of believers would convince them of the truth of the last of the Apostles. (Compare John 19:25; 21:24” [W.M. Sinclair].

## V. Lessons & Applications.

- **LESSONS FROM 3 JOHN.** [DRL NOTE: The lessons below come from Roy C. Deaver, out of the publication, *Biblical Notes*, 9/1983].
  - 1) The apostle John, faithful, elderly, servant of the Lord, is a beautiful example of how God wants us to deal with error. When John learned about the problem caused by the dictator Diotrephes, he immediately got to work on the problem. His message was clear, pointed, and forceful. Such sins (as those of Diotrephes) are not to be ignored, and are not to be tolerated among God’s people.
  - 2) It is right for us to be concerned about physical health [cf., verse 2, DRL]. It is more important that we be concerned about our spiritual health. The right concern about our spiritual health will cause us to be meaningfully concerned about our physical health. We must present our bodies unto God.
  - 3) Like John, we ought to rejoice in every right effort to extend the influence of the truth. We must be anxious to get the whole gospel to the whole world—in our generation. Now!
  - 4) To be right with God we must WALK IN THE TRUTH [cf., verse 4, DRL]. We walk in the truth by observing God’s commandments, by being obedient to His will. Zacharias and Elizabeth were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless (Lk 1:5-6).
  - 5) Like John, we rejoice in hearing about the faithfulness of those whom we have been instrumental in bringing to the Christ [cf., verse 4, DRL].
  - 6) We are “acting faithfully” [verse 5, DRL] (i.e., according to God’s will) when we do the best we can to help those faithful servants who are determined to accomplish the Lord’s will.
  - 7) It is right and good and necessary for missionaries to report on their work “before the church” [verse 6, DRL].
  - 8) We should send out and support those who labor in the gospel, “...after a godly sort” [verse 6, DRL].
  - 9) Faithful servants of the Lord will work “...for his name’s sake.” They will not work to accomplish their own will, but the will of Him to whom they belong.
  - 10) These missionaries went forth “...taking nothing of the Gentiles” [verse 7, DRL]. It is important that we do nothing (i.e., in the area of expediency) that would in any way jeopardize our efforts to reach men with the gospel of Christ. However, we must be faithful in proclaiming that gospel. We cannot compromise, and be right with God.
  - 11) In supporting faithful servants of the Lord, brethren are being “...fellowhelpers to the truth” [v. 8, DRL]. Cf., Ph 1:3-5.
  - 12) When one rejects what the Bible teaches he is rejecting the authority of the apostles, the authority of Christ Himself, and the authority of God.

- 13) It is right and is necessary that faithful men deal with any and all who would hinder the Lord's work. These must be identified, and their sins must be pointed out.
  - 14) Diotrephes *could* refuse to do according to the letter from John, and he *could* reject the authority of John, but JOHN WAS RIGHT. Diotrephes was wrong! Diotrephes will face John's letter in the Judgment.
  - 15) When men use "malicious words" [v. 10, DRL] in talking about the Bible, and when they refuse to recognize its authority—they are guilty of the sins of Diotrephes.
  - 16) Diotrephes was guilty of the terrible sin of "anti-ism"—the sin of making a law that God did not make. Cf., Acts 15:1; Gal 2:1-5; 1 Tm 4:1-3. This is a sin which has always plagued the church. It is just as sinful for one to attempt to make a law which God did not make as it is for one to violate a law which God did make.
  - 17) It needs to be observed that John wrote this letter (condemning Diotrephes) before he talked with him "face to face." And, it is possible that John never did get to talk with Diotrephes "face to face." The idea that I have to talk personally with a false teacher (who has taught his false views publicly) before I can respond to him and to his teaching is wrong.
  - 18) Diotrephes was not an "eldership." There is no evidence that he was even one of the elders. He *assumed* the authority to disfellowship any and all who would violate a law which he had made. He had no such authority. he stood condemned for assuming such.
  - 19) It took some real courage for some of the brethren (who wanted to help the missionaries) to proceed to do so in spite of Diotrephes and the law which he had made. But, they *did* help the missionaries, and they *were* disfellowshipped. Not all "fellowship" is right, and not all "disfellowship" is wrong. The fact that certain ones were disfellowshipped by Diotrephes did not mean that they were out of fellowship with God. And, if there were some brethren who joined Diotrephes in his views, and who were thus in fellowship with each other, it does not follow that they were in fellowship with God.
  - 20) John says: "Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good." He cites a wonderful example, the man Demetrius. he was truly a man of good report—from everyone, from the truth, and from the apostle John.
  - 21) Many things *can* be dealt with in *writing*. But, there are some things which can best be dealt with "face to face." [vv., 13-14, DRL].
  - 22) The word "receive" is used in verses 9 and 10. Diotrephes refused to "receive" John and John's letter. Diotrephes refused to "receive" the brethren—the missionaries, and he (Diotrephes) forbade and cast out of the congregation the brethren who did (or who did want to) receive the missionaries. "Receive" here is the translation of the Greek *dechomai*, compounded with various prepositions in different passages. We should study this word as it used in the following: Acts 18:27; Rom 16:2; Acts 2:41; 15:4; 21:17. The following (from Thayer) is significant: "...the suggestion of a welcoming or an appropriating reception generally cleaves to *dechomai*."
- **FELLOWHELPERS TO THE TRUTH...** (3 John 1.8). How were some "fellow workers" (3 Jn. 8) received who had a commendation from the apostle John? While the "beloved apostle" commended Gaius, who "received" the church workers, others were censured for snubbing their noses, and treating the endorsed Christians like itinerate church cons. The apostle had occasion to write about this "evil" (3 Jn. 11), having previously written to the church about their obligation (3 Jn. 8,9a). John elsewhere described the one who would "close up his heart" to a brother in Christ as a person lacking the love of God (1 Jn. 3:17). While he praised certain brethren for their loving support, Diotrephes, "who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority" (3 Jn. 9, ESV). Diotrephes' conduct was not above scrutiny, however. One of the strongest censures in the New Testament was forthcoming, and divine providence saw the need to prepare and preserve a small letter that likely was written on a single piece of papyrus more than 1,900 years ago – 3 John.

John's commendation of certain preachers was disregarded, and Diotrephes dominated the situation through manipulation and deceit. D. Edmond Hiebert comments on 3 John 9 in the following way: "It apparently was a brief letter, now lost, requesting assistance for the missionaries being sent out by John. If so, it is not impossible that Diotrephes suppressed the letter" (**The Epistles of John**, Greenville: Bob Jones University Press, 1992, p. 336). Faithful brethren were deprived of needed help. Other faithful brethren were dispossessed of the blessings that come from supporting the Lord's work. Why would Diotrephes reject a legitimate request by known brothers for the spreading of the gospel? Maybe the more appropriate question is this: Why was Diotrephes making unilateral decisions? Unscriptural terminology notwithstanding, W.H. Griffith Thomas made a valuable point when he wrote: "In some respects they [foreign missions] constitute a test of a clergyman's [preacher's] own spiritual life, because they show whether or not he has the genuine missionary spirit. It is an almost universal experience that there is no contradiction or incompatibility between interest in Home Missions and interest in Foreign Missions. The distinction thus drawn is merely one of convenience, because in the sight of God there can be no 'Home' or 'Foreign' work...It has been well and truly said that our greatest problem is not so much the 'non-Church-going,' as the 'non-going Church,' and it will probably be found in almost every instance that the extent and power of missionary work in a parish [congregation] will depend largely on the clergyman's [preacher's] own attitude to God's great work of world-wide evangelization. It is unspeakably sad to contemplate the fact that there are still Churches where little or nothing seems to be done for Foreign Missions. It would be interesting, and perhaps spiritually significant, to discover what is collected each year in such churches for 'Church Expenses,' and how these expenses are made up. We happen to know two or three churches where one-tenth of every collection is devoted to the work of Foreign Missions, and we have yet to learn that these churches suffer financially or spiritually by putting God's greatest enterprise first. Let every minister therefore settle it in his own heart that if missionary work is not of much interest to him he should carefully scrutinize his own spiritual life in the light of God's Word..." (**Ministerial Life and Work** (1911), Grand Rapids: Baker, nd., p. 218). Diotrephes obviously needed to do some "careful scrutinization." Other congregations had given in their poverty to brethren for physical needs in the first century (e.g., the Macedonians). Why would the apostle's recommendation to support spiritual needs, i.e. preaching of the gospel, be discounted? Was Diotrephes so concerned about "the local work"? Perhaps he simply had not yet had the opportunity to instruct the apostle on "church autonomy" (see "Congregational Autonomy – Not a Shield for Error")? John Stott was correct when he said: "To John the motives for governing the conduct of Diotrephes were neither theological, nor social, nor ecclesiastical, but moral. *The root of the problem was sin*" (**The Epistles of John**, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964, p. 226; emphasis added). As the facts began to circulate, what followed was predictable. Diotrephes attacked the messengers (see v. 10), thus misdirecting the attention from his own conduct. But John was not voicing his opinion, nor was he trying to intervene in matters of judgment. He laid down the moral principle, "Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be *fellow workers for the truth*" (3 Jn. 8; emphasis added). Ability and opportunity equals a moral obligation. Concerning the informative letter of the apostle, Hiebert noted, "In view of the self-seeking motive of Diotrephes just laid bare, it seems natural that he desired to establish the autonomy of his local church to enhance his own authority" (*ibid.*, p. 337). In order to shore up his position, Diotrephes attempted to discredit those opposing him by "talking wicked nonsense." He had a plan, and they were going to stick to it. "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" (3 Jn. 10). Attacks against sound men whose primary interest was in the gospel, John called evil. It was then, and it still is today. We do not know if Diotrephes repented. John determined that the church's mission should not suffer at the hands of a domineering, self-centered man, and the public rebuke of Diotrephes was both right and necessary. Diotrephes' blatant maneuvering and manipulation could not be hidden behind a misguided statement like,

“You should have come to me privately.” John exposed the truth of the matter for the brethren to fairly consider. John also said, “I will bring up what he is doing” (v. 10). The facts will speak for themselves. The past actions of Diotrephes could not be explained away. A.T. Robertson once wrote an article on Diotrephes, and it was printed years ago by a denominational journal. He recalled: “The editor told me that twenty-five deacons stopped the paper to show their resentment against being personally attacked in the paper” (**Word Pictures in the New Testament**, vol. 6, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1933, p. 263). “The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion” (Prov. 28:1). Why would Diotrephes sever a relationship with one of the Lord’s closest companions? Why would he feel the need to “bad-mouth” the “apostle of love” whose only interests were in helping others? Only Diotrephes could answer those questions. Even more perplexing, why did the Lord broadcast to the world such a distasteful church problem? Because he loves us, and wants us to learn some lessons that have eternal consequences. Our motives must be sincere; our decisions scriptural. And our conduct is not exempt from righteous judgment [Jason Jackson, <https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/1202-fellow-workers-for-the-truth> ].

**VI. Questions.**

**True or False**

- 01. \_\_\_\_ Demetrius loved to have the preeminence.
- 02. \_\_\_\_ John intended to see Gaius soon after writing 3 John.
- 03. \_\_\_\_ Gaius was loved in the truth.
- 04. \_\_\_\_ Deeds of Diotrephes John would remember.
- 05. \_\_\_\_ 3 John has a reference to walking in truth.

**I Found it in Verse(s)**

- 06. \_\_\_\_ Follow that which is good.
- 07. \_\_\_\_ Gaius was walking in the truth.
- 08. \_\_\_\_ Writing instruments.
- 09. \_\_\_\_ Something done in the name of Christ.
- 10. \_\_\_\_ John vouching for Demetrius.

**Short Answer**

- 11. The soul of \_\_\_\_\_ evidently was prospering.
- 12. \_\_\_\_\_ was involved in casting some out of the church.
- 13. Helping the traveling preachers was a work John recommended to: \_\_\_\_\_.
- 14. Gaius was faithful in doing to: (1) the \_\_\_\_\_; and (2) \_\_\_\_\_.
- 15. Receiving traveling preachers would be like being \_\_\_\_\_ to the truth.

*Each Question is worth 7 Points*

**My Score is:** \_\_\_\_\_

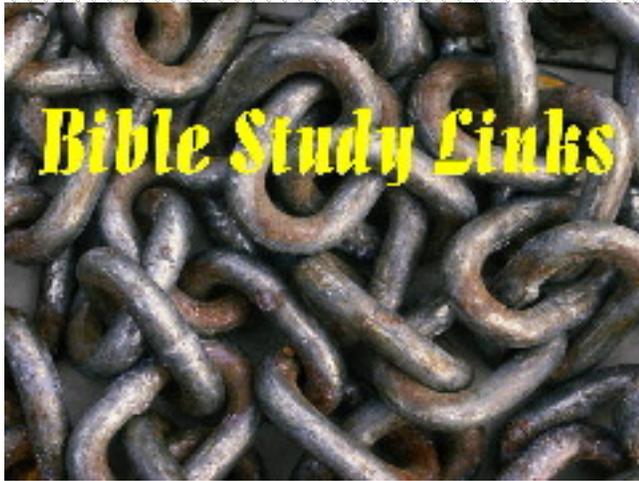
**ANSWERS to 3 John Questions...** **01**—False (9); **02**—True (14); **03**—True (1); **04**—True (9-10); **05**—True (4); **06**—11; **07**—3; **08**—13; **09**—7; **10**—12; **11**—Gaius (2); **12**—Diotrephes (10); **13**—Gaius (6); **14**—brethren, strangers (5); **15**—fellowhelpers (8).

**VII. Seek-A-Word Puzzle.** The words may be backwards, diagonal, upside down, etc. See if you can find them all. The more you use the words of the Bible, the greater blessed you will be! You might be surprised at how much this little exercise will help you retain important truths. THANK YOU for the good effort you are putting forth in Bible study. -DRL

D G A I U S G D R D H J W  
 P R O S P E R E T H T H E  
 O E O O C E T I U F E E L  
 V A H C D A D F R N O M L  
 C T T R E J O I C E D A B  
 T L D R B R E T H R E N E  
 U Y G E U N S S T E V I L  
 A M C P D T T E L M O H O  
 G A S S V S H T A A L C V  
 F F L O V E V I E C E R E  
 H N G R U K G T H F B U D  
 S E I P A L U S G N I H T  
 I V S L M A Y E S T D C R  
 W E T I R W P M R E D L E

<b>BELOVED</b>	<b>BRETHREN</b>	<b>CAME</b>	<b>CHURCH</b>	<b>DOEST</b>
<b>DOETH</b>	<b>ELDER</b>	<b>EVEN</b>	<b>EVIL</b>	<b>FACE</b>
<b>FRIENDS</b>	<b>GAIUS</b>	<b>GOOD</b>	<b>GREATER</b>	<b>GREATLY</b>
<b>HEALTH</b>	<b>LOVE</b>	<b>MAYEST</b>	<b>NAME</b>	<b>PROSPER</b>
<b>PROSPERETH</b>	<b>RECEIVE</b>	<b>RECORD</b>	<b>REJOICED</b>	<b>SOUL</b>
<b>TESTIFIED</b>	<b>THINGS</b>	<b>TRUTH</b>	<b>WALKEST</b>	<b>WELLBELOVED</b>
<b>WHEN</b>	<b>WISH</b>	<b>WRITE</b>		





IX. Links.

**for 3 John...**

*These links are to the writings of men and not to inspired Scripture, thus care and caution in weighing the conclusions is always wise. Some are not really links, but listing of material commonly available in books and publications.*

- **Burton Coffman's Commentary on 3 John...**

<http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/bcc/view.cgi?bk=63>

- **Albert Barnes, *Barnes Notes on the Whole Bible*, on 3 John...**

<http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/bnb/view.cgi?bk=63>

- **Joseph Benson's Commentary on the Old and New Testaments, on 3 John...**

<http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/rbc/view.cgi?bk=63>

- **Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament, on 3 John...**

<http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/rwp/view.cgi?bk=63&ch=1>

- **Vincent's Word Studies on 3 John...**

<http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/vnt/view.cgi?bk=63&ch=1>

- Collection of notes published by Bradley S. Cobb (from notes in his classes at the Bible Institute of Missouri) available, as an e-Sword module, for \$5.00 online at: <http://bit.ly/1l6wncN>