



STUDY GUIDE

3 John

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Although this epistle does not have a listed author it is traditionally thought (based upon the style of writing, the vocabulary etc) that it was written by the Apostle John – the same John who wrote the gospel of John, the preceding two epistles as well as the book of Revelation.

Verse 1: *“The elder: To beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth:”*

The elder: The author, presumably John, is speaking of himself here. He was probably not speaking as the elder of a local congregation, but as someone who oversaw many different congregations. As such, he was in a position of authority and respect. Elders had a reputation of providing G-dly counsel to individuals, as well as to the local assembly.

Gaius: John is writing to this individual (possibly a leader in a local assembly) in order that the local congregation might be set in order. When the church is in order, the power of G-d can be released through them, and they can have a testimony that is pleasing to G-d.

Love: (ἀγαπᾶω) Agape – a love that involves investment and sacrifice. The author of this epistle loved Gaius and wanted to be involved in his life – willing to assist him and make sacrifices for him.

In truth: John recognized that Gaius knew truth and lived according to it. John wanted that same proper (correct) doctrine to characterize this local congregation. G-d is a G-d of truth. Our enemy, the father of lies, enjoys deceit. In the last days a very strong delusion will be in the earth, and this will lead to a rejection of the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12).

Verse 2: *“Beloved, concerning all things, I pray that you might prosper and be in health, just as your soul prospers.”*

All things: In everything that can be part of our lives.

Pray: We should be praying for others. We need to pray that they would mature in their faith and grow in their knowledge of the truth, so that they are able to implement truth in their lives. This is a prayer we should also be praying for ourselves as well. Living in truth pleases G-d.

Prosper: Have success, achieve – not what we want to achieve, but achieving what G-d has called us to achieve/fulfil. Biblically, prosperity has nothing to do with what we want or desire. We need to submit to the purposes of G-d, His objectives, in every area of our lives (leisure, work, sustenance, service to Him etc). The prosperity that the Word of G-d speaks about is G-d having His way, His will, in our lives.

Your soul prospers: This is speaking about the spiritual aspect of an individual. When we walk in truth we are going to prosper spiritually. As Gaius prospers spiritually, John is praying that his health and everything he has will also be touched by the power of G-d – every aspect of Gaius’ life. This does not necessarily mean that someone who is in the faith is going to be wealthy materially. John is simply revealing that truth is fundamental in bringing about the prosperity or success of someone spiritually. As we grow and mature spiritually, we will have discernment, and G-d will move to accomplish heavenly purposes in and through our lives.

Verse 3: *“For I rejoiced exceedingly when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as in truth you walk.”*

The truth...in you: John placed an emphasis on truth. Gaius was someone who implemented the truth of G-d in his life. Truth is the foundation for success and spiritual prosperity, and it should touch every aspect of our lives. It is only when we know the truth, and when we walk in it, that we can submit to the objectives/purposes of G-d.

In truth you walk: Walking is an important concept Biblically. In Judaism, applying the instructions or law of G-d to our lives is related to the term ‘walking’. ‘Walking’ speaks about a behaviour, a lifestyle, a way of living out our lives.

Verse 4: *“No greater joy than these things do I have –that I should hear my children in truth are walking.”*

Joy: This is the second time that John has emphasized joy (see 3 John 1:3). John is filled with joy when he sees others implementing truth in their lives, as he knows that truth leads to spiritual success and prosperity (i.e. G-d’s will being done).

Children: This is a word that is frequently used by John. It is a term that speaks about those that he has great endearment, love, compassion, and concern for. In many instances he is probably discipling and training them, so that they learn greater truth in the Word of G-d and can mature in it.

Verse 5: *“Beloved, faith you are doing for the brothers and for the strangers.”*

Faith you are doing: Truth caused Gaius to behave in faith, and to do the things that demonstrated what he believed.

Doing: Making or working. A word of action, a doing word.

Brothers: Other believers.

Strangers: There is great debate as to who John meant by ‘strangers’. He could have been talking about fellow believers who were unknown to Gaius but whom Gaius impacted (For example: Doing something similar to what is described in Acts 11:29-30 or 1 Corinthians 16:1-3). ‘Strangers’ could also be referring to those who were non- believers (Gentiles or foreigners – see 3 John 1:7).

Either way, Gaius had a testimony of doing faith before those he knew and those he did not personally know (Believers and unbelievers).

Verse 6: *“They have testified of your love before the congregations, the things that well you have done. You have set forth worthily of G-d.”*

They have testified: John is writing to encourage Gaius. Gaius has embraced truth, he is living in a way that demonstrates faith, and he shows no partiality (favouritism) for those fellow believers that he knows and for those who are unknown to him. He has a testimony that is pleasing to G-d.

Testified of your love: Gaius demonstrated love to those he knew and to those he did not know.

Well you have done: He did things well, properly.

Set forth worthily of G-d: This means that he put things into order in a proper or G-dly way.

Verse 7: *“For on behalf of His name they have gone forth, not receiving from the Gentiles.”*

His name: (Ha Shem) G-d. Within the Jewish community it is very common to refer to G-d as ‘HaShem’ or ‘The Name’. A unique feature of this epistle is that the name of G-d, Yeshua or Messiah is not mentioned. The author, clearly Jewish, uses this term instead.

They: Fellow believers who went out (preaching, teaching etc) in G-d’s name.

Gentiles: This is a term that could refer to strangers or foreigners, non – Jews or people from the nations (see 3 John 1:5). In this verse John is clearly speaking about non-believers.

The term ‘Gentile’ is used frequently throughout the New Testament. Usually, it is a term used to describe those who have no (old or new) covenantal relationship with G-d.

Not receiving from the Gentiles: These believers did not take anything from the unbelievers and nor did they participate with them, because the unbelievers were not in the truth.

Verse 8: *“Therefore we ought to receive such ones in order that fellow servants we become to the truth.”*

We ought to receive such ones: These sent out believers behaved in a way that agreed with truth and therefore they agreed with us. For this reason, we can fellowship or partner with them. Truth impacts our decisions and, therefore, our behaviour – who we fellowship with, who we serve with, who we receive into our congregations, who we do not receive etc.

Fellow servants: By receiving them we demonstrate to them that we are committed and loyal to the same truth that they are walking in (truth that has its foundation in the Word of G-d). We become fellow servants, as we are all committed to, and working towards, the same objective or goal – to see G-d glorified and lives transformed.

Verse 9: *“I have written to the congregation; but the one who loves to be first among them, Diotrephes, has not received us.”*

Congregation: ἐκκλησία (ekklēsia) The church or local assembly (i.e. those who have heard and responded to the call of G-d and have formed a community, or fellowship, with other believers – ‘called out ones’)

Diotrephes: The name of a man – probably a leader in this congregation. When someone is not walking in truth, is troublesome, is divisive, is harming the local congregation, etc it becomes the responsibility of other leaders to confront this man/woman. Sometimes this means that the person first needs to be confronted privately. If he/she remains unrepentant, take one or two witnesses. If there is still no resolution the matter needs to be taken before the entire congregation (Matthew 18:15-17). There comes a point in time when it is acceptable for unsubmitive and unrepentant people to be called out, publicly, by name (see also Titus 3:10-11, Ephesians 5:6-7, etc).

Has not received us: John, and the fellow believers with him, wanted to have an influence in this local assembly. Diotrephes, however, was not willing to receive them.

Verse 10: *“On account of this, if I should come, I will **make mention of his works** which he does. He babbles words that are evil against us. Not being pleased concerning these things, he is not willing to receive the brothers, and the ones who are wanting to receive us he forbids, and from the congregation he casts them out.”*

Make mention of his works: Although John has called out and named Diotrephes, this verse makes it clear that it is not personal. John does not have anger, hatred, or bad feelings toward Diotrephes on a personal level. John knows that what Diotrephes is doing is dangerous and harmful to the local congregation. John calls him out because of his behaviour.

Babbles: Gossips or slanders. He repeatedly speaks in a negative way.

These things: Diotrephes is not pleased concerning the criticism levelled against him. Although the criticism is well founded, he has no desire to receive it, submit to it or make changes to his behaviour concerning it.

The ones who are wanting to receive us: Those who are part of Diotrephes’ congregation. They have purposed in their minds that what John is saying is right and correct. They want John and the fellow believers to come and speak into this situation.

From the congregation he casts them out: Diotrephes is a controlling individual. He is not open to criticism and nor is he willing for debate, for instruction, or for any correction whatsoever. Whoever does not agree with him he excommunicates.

Verse 11: *“Beloved, do not imitate that which is evil, but rather do that which is good. For the one that is doing good is from G-d, but the one who is doing evil has not seen G-d.”*

Has not seen: When the perfect tense of a verb is used in Greek (which it is here), it is a unique grammatical construction and one which we need to pay particular attention to. The perfect tense speaks of an action that was completed and true in the past, but it produced results which are still true today and which will continue into the future – maybe eternally.

Has not seen G-d: Those who are doing evil did not see (experience or perceive) G-d in the past, they do not see Him now and nor, left to themselves, will they see Him into the future. There is no knowledge of G-d in an evil man’s life. Although he may be in the congregation of believers, he is not someone of faith because he is not living according to the truth.

Verse 12: *“Demetrius has been testified by all that by truth he is living. Also we bear witness, and you know that our testimony is true.”*

(Diotrephes)...Demetrius: What we can conclude here is this: In this local congregation there seems to be a struggle, or a contention, going on between these two men. Some might say: ‘We will love and support both of them.’ This is not possible, as there is a conflict between truth and lie. Truth demands an evaluation and a decision. We cannot submit to both truth and lies. By default, one has to give way to the other. Also, we do not submit to someone because he is more likeable than another. We submit to those who are committed to the things of G-d, those who have the truth of G-d.

Truth: Emphasised, once again, in this passage.

Testified by all... we bear witness: Between these two men, Demetrius is the man who has a testimony of living in truth.

Verse 13: *“Much I have to write, but I do not want through ink and pen to write to you.”*

Much: Many things.

Verse 14: *“But I am hoping immediately to see you, and that mouth to mouth we will speak. Peace to you. Our friends greet you. You greet the friends by name.”*

Friends: φίλοι (philoí). This is a Greek word for friends that speaks of those we have brotherly love for (friendship, affection, liking etc)

By name: John is speaking about a need to get to know the character of those we love and associate with. When we know people, we can make informed and wise decisions as to whether or not we should listen to their counsel, whether or not we should follow them etc. As we begin to know people, we will know what they are committed to, we will know if they live/ behave in truth etc.

In summary: A study through the Epistles of John reveals that doctrine is extremely important to us. Our doctrine begins (and ends) with Biblical truth. John has emphasised the divinity of Yeshua, the Messiah, and how we are to submit to Him. Through Him we have forgiveness of sins; and the good news is that this justification removes us from the wrath of G-d. As new creations in Messiah we are completely submitted to the truth and are committed to the instructions (commandments) of G-d – which is seen in our love for one another. Loving each other involves removing and warring against those things that attack the spiritual well-being, the growth, the maturity, the prosperity, the success, etc of each believer and of each local congregation. John was a serious individual in regard to preparing congregations, one individual at a time, that they might function in the anointing of the Spirit of G-d.