

God's Amazing Book

Journey Through the New Testament

SERVING THOSE WHO SERVE THE LORD

A Quick Look at the Third General Epistle of John

FOCUS	COMMENDATION OF GAIUS			CONDEMNATION OF DIOTREPES		
REFERENCE	1 -----	2 -----	5 -----	9 -----	12 -----	13 ----- 14
DIVISION	SALUTATION	GODLINESS OF GAIUS	GENEROSITY OF GAIUS	PRIDE OF DIOTREPES	PRAISE FOR DEMETRIUS	BENEDICTION
TOPIC	SERVANTHOOD			SELFISHNESS		
	DUTY OF HOSPITALITY			DANGER OF HAUGHTINESS		
LOCATION	WRITTEN IN EPHESUS					
TIME	c. A.D. 90					

Source: Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts

A. T. Robertson was fond of telling us that when we were in the pastorate we must love the people, "warts and all." Every church has both. It is against such a background that we can best understand 3 John. – Herschel H. Hobbs

This little letter gives us a glimpse into an early assembly, its people and its problems. As you read this brief letter, you find yourself saying, "Times have not changed very much!" We have similar people and problems today!

- Warren W. Wiersbe

3 John is all about the Elder, who wrote it; Gaius, who received it; Diotrephes, who provoked it; and Demetrius, who carried it. – Archibald Hunter

In First John the apostle discusses fellowship with God; in Second John he forbids fellowship with false teachers; and in Third John he encourages fellowship with Christian brothers. Following his expression of love for Gaius, John voices his joy that Gaius is persistently walking in the truth and showing hospitality to the messengers of the gospel. But John cannot commend certain others in the assembly. Diotrephes, for example, has allowed pride to replace love in his life, even rejecting the disciplining words of

Fast Facts on 3 John
Written by? John
Written to whom? "The beloved Gaius" (v. 1).
Written when? A.D. 85-100
Written why?

1. To praise Gaius for his commendable behavior.
2. To condemn Diotrephes for his conceited behavior.
3. To honor Demetrius for his consistent behavior.

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John. Everything that Gaius is, Diotrephes is not! John uses this negative example as an opportunity to encourage Gaius. Godly character and loyalty to the truth are never easy, but they bring God's richest commendation—and John's as well!¹

Key People in 3 John

John—wrote to commend Gaius for his generous hospitality (vv. 1–14)

Gaius—sole recipient of John's letter; member of one of the churches under John's spiritual oversight (v. 1)

Diotrephes—self-centered and domineering member of the church (vv. 9, 10)

Demetrius—faithful servant and excellent role model in the church (v. 12)²

Why was John so upset about this person called Diotrephes in his third letter? - Some think that Diotrephes may either have been a heretical teacher or at least favored the false teachers who were condemned by 2 John. However, the epistle gives no clear evidence to warrant such a conclusion, especially since one might expect that John would have mentioned Diotrephes' heretical views. **The epistle indicates that his problems revolved around arrogance and disobedience, which is a problem for the orthodox as well as the heretic.**

John mentioned Diotrephes to Gaius as an example of the kind of negative effect caused by a leader who contradicts Jesus' teaching on servant-leadership in the church (Matt. 20:20–28; Phil. 2:5–11; 1 Tim. 3:3; 1 Pet. 5:3) and who violates the standards of hospitality required of Christians. John noted at least six errors in Diotrephes' behavior that form helpful warnings to others:

- He loved to have preeminence (the desire to be first, v. 9).
- He rejected John's authority and therefore the authority of God's Word by refusing to receive John's letter (v. 9).
- John charged Diotrephes with "prating against us" (a term that conveys the idea of someone talking nonsense, v. 10).
- Diotrephes acted "with malicious words" (his false accusations against John were also evil, v. 10).
- He "does not receive the brethren" (his hostility extended to other Christians, v. 10).
- He was even "putting them out of the church" (he excommunicated those who resisted his authority, v. 10).³

THINGS TO REMEMBER ABOUT 3 John⁴

1. 3 John is the shortest book in the Bible.
2. 3 John is one of only three personal letters in the New Testament (2 John, Philemon).
3. 3 John contains one of the briefest New Testament greetings.
4. 3 John is the only book in the Bible dedicated entirely to the subject of hospitality.
5. 3 John is the only New Testament book in which the names 'Jesus' or 'Christ' do not appear.
6. 3 John is written with great affection (1:1, 2, 5, 11).
7. In 3 John, the word "truth" is a keyword and is found six times and some twenty times in John's three epistles combined.
8. 3 and 2 John are the only two New Testament books addressed from "The Elder."

LIFE LESSONS FROM 3 John⁵

1. Strive to walk in the truth. It will ensure a spirit of loving hospitality.
2. Realize Christian teachers, leaders, and missionaries need your support.
3. Partner with Christian workers in their ministries by supporting them.
4. Encourage Christian workers so they don't grow weary in their service.
5. Be careful not to misuse any leadership position.

¹ Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa, *Talk Thru the Bible* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1983), 495.

² John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 510.

³ *ibid*, 511.

⁴ Jeff Lasseigne, *Highway 66* (Santa Ana, CA: Calvary Chapel Publishing, 2004)

⁵ Jim George, *The Bare Bones Bible Handbook*