



Investigating the Word of God

Third John



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An Introduction to Third John

The Author of the Book

Although the author does not identify himself by name, the contents of the book support the apostle John as its writer.

He does identify himself as “The Elder.” There are two possible explanations for this term. The writer could have been an elder or bishop in a local church. The other possibility is that he was an aged or older man.

“The similarity of style, vocabulary, structure, and mood between 2 and 3 John makes it clear that these letters were written by the same author. In addition, both (especially 2 John) bear strong resemblance to 1 John and the Fourth Gospel. Thus, the internal evidence lends clear support to the traditional view that these epistles were written by the apostle John.” (*Nelson’s Complete Book of Bible Maps & Charts*, 472)

Those to Whom the Book Was Written

“The book was addressed ‘unto the well beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth’ (1). He was well known not only to John, but also to many Christians and to the church at Ephesus (1, 3, 5-6). But who was he? Gaius was a common name in the first century. Gaius of Macedonia assisted Paul in the apostle’s ministry at Ephesus and was dragged into the amphitheater along with Aristarchus during the insurrection of the pagan silver-smiths (Acts 19:29). Gaius of Derbe journeyed with Paul from Macedonia into the province of Asia in the latter months of Paul’s third missionary journey (Acts 20:4). Gaius of Corinth was evangelized and baptized by Paul (I Cor. 1:14). Later he became Paul’s host and his house became the meeting place of the Corinthian church (Rom. 16:23). The three afore-mentioned men could all be considered as possibilities for the addressee of this book; however, there is one major problem common to all three. They all were probably converts of Paul, whereas ‘the well beloved Gaius’ seems to have been a convert of John (4). Little is known about this fourth Gaius except that he was an influential, hospitable member of some church in the Roman province of Asia...” (Robert G. Gromacki, *New Testament Survey*, 381-382)

The Time and Place of Writing

The apostle John has been placed at Ephesus when this book was written. It is likely that it was written about the same time as First and Second John—probably between A.D. 80 and 90.

Why This Book Was Written

“Trouble had developed in the church of which Gaius was a member. Diotrophes had usurped authority in the church, speaking ill against John, refusing to receive the apostles’ representatives, and maltreating those who did (9-10). A previous letter sent to the church (either one of the two Epistles or a lost letter) had been totally disregarded by Diotrophes. News of Diotrophes’ audacity reached John either through the return of his emissaries (10), the report of

brethren who had been entertained in the home of Gaius (3), or the report of Demetrius (12). John hoped to visit Gaius and the congregation to correct the situation personally, but he was unable to make the trip right away (10, 14). John thus wrote this epistle to encourage Gaius to cope with the situation himself (11). It may be that Demetrius was the bearer of the letter and that John wanted Demetrius to take charge of the work after Diotrophes had been disciplined (12).” (Gromacki, 382)

An examination of the text of the book shows that it was written to:

- Inform Gaius of his love and prayers. (1-2)
- Express his joy over Gaius’ stand for truth. (3-4)
- Commend Gaius for his hospitality. (5-8)
- Reveal his displeasure over the arrogance of Diotrophes. (9-10)
- Promote a rejection of the leadership of Diotrophes and a following of the example of Demetrius whom he commends. (11-12)
- Inform Gaius of his plans to visit him. (13-14)

An Outline of Third John

I. Salutation (1)

II. Hospitable Gaius (2-8)

- A. Prayer for Gaius. (2)
- B. Rejoicing over Gaius. (3-4)
- C. Commendation of Gaius. (5-8)

III. The Preeminence of Diotrophes (9-11)

- A. His rejection of John. (9-10)
- B. John's rejection of Diotrophes. (11)

IV. The Good Demetrius (12)

Conclusion (13-14)

Third John

Keys to This Chapter

Key Passage: Verse 9

“I wrote to the church, but Diotrophes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us.”

Key People

Gaius

Diotrophes

Demetrius

Key Words

Faithfully

Preeminence

Prating

Malicious

Imitate

Testimony

Key Lesson

Questions on the Text

1. Who wrote this book?
2. To whom is this book addressed?
3. What was the writer’s prayer for Gaius?
4. What had caused the writer to rejoice?
5. What was the writer’s greatest joy?
6. Who had borne witness of Gaius’ love before the church?
7. How had Gaius been sending strangers and brethren forward on their journey?
8. From whom did the brethren take nothing?
9. According to verse eight, if a person receives one who goes forth for God’s name’s sake, what does he become?
10. Who loved to have preeminence?
11. According to verse ten, what did Diotrophes:
 - a. Do against John?
 - b. Not do for the brethren?
12. What did John want his readers to imitate?
13. According to verse 11, who is of God?
14. What did Demetrius have from all?
15. What did John hope shortly to do?

True - False

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|---|---|--|
| T | F | 1. John wanted Gaius to prosper in all things. |
| T | F | 2. John’s greatest joy was that he walked in the truth. |
| T | F | 3. Diotrophes put those who received the brethren out of the church. |
| T | F | 4. Demetrius did not have a good testimony from all. |
| T | F | 5. John’s friends greeted Gaius. |

Discussion Question

Name some ways you can imitate what is good.

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