

# 3 John

**WHAT'S THIS BOOK ABOUT?** John praises Gaius for welcoming Christian preachers and condemns Diotrophes for keeping those preachers out of the church.

**WHO WROTE IT?** The apostle John.

**WHEN DID IT HAPPEN?** Around A.D. 85.

**WHERE DOES THIS BOOK FIT?** Late in the first century.

## THE BREAKDOWN

- 1:1-4: Greeting
- 1:5-8: Praise for Gaius's hospitality
- 1:9-10: Warning against Diotrophes
- 1:11-12: Praise for Demetrius's actions
- 1:13-15: Closing remarks

## KEY CONCEPTS

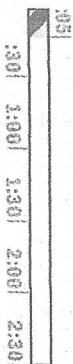
- Truth
- Hospitality
- Good and bad examples

## SCORECARD

- Gaius: John's friend, to whom the letter is written
- Diotrophes: A dictatorial church leader who opposes John
- Demetrius: A faithful brother

## READING TIME

IN HOURS



## WORTH MEMORIZING

- 1:4 I could have no greater joy than to hear that my children are following the truth.

## THE MASCULINE PERSPECTIVE

- ROLE MODELS.** It matters whom we choose to look up to and emulate. John advises Gaius to follow the example of Demetrius—not Diotrophes. The truth is that we become like the people we admire.

## WHAT'S THE POINT OF

### 3 John?

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Be a  
gracious,  
yet discerning,  
host.



## INTRODUCTION TO 3 JOHN

### BACKGROUND

The apostle John, identified as “the elder” in verse 1, sent itinerant teachers as part of his oversight of churches unnamed in this epistle. These teachers would stay in the homes of church members.

### MESSAGE

Responding to a report received about a congregation, John compares and contrasts the conduct of three individuals: Gaius, Diotrophes, and Demetrius. Gaius is a humble servant of Christ, who has offered hospitality to the teachers whom John sent, recognizing them as “brethren” even though they are strangers (verse 5). His conduct elicits great joy in John and causes John to pray for

Gaius's health and well-being (verse 2).

In contrast, Diotrophes seizes control of a congregation, selfishly rejects the authority of John and the ministry of the teachers he sent. Diotrophes's opposition to John extends to spreading lies about him and excommunicating those who welcome the teachers. As a further contrast, John commends Demetrius who “hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself” (verse 12).

### TIME

The similarities in style and theme between 2 and 3 John indicate that John probably wrote them around the same time, likely A.D. 90, when he lived in Ephesus (the most prominent city in the region) and had oversight of the churches in Asia Minor.

### OUTLINE

- I. Greetings 1
- II. Gaius 2-8
- III. Diotrophes and Demetrius 9-12
- IV. Conclusion 13-14





r. A. W. Tozer pointed out that a hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork will automatically be tuned to each other. In the same way when each of God's workers is tuned to Christ, we'll be in harmony with one another. But beware the discordant note. One of the joys of being a pastor, as I've been for many years, is watching how harmoniously God's people labor side-by-side for His kingdom. One of my sorrows is seeing how one person with a personal agenda, jealous spirit, or harsh personality can disrupt the work.

The apostle John faced the same thing as he wrote 3 John. He expressed gratitude for those working alongside his friend Gaius, and he encouraged them to show continued hospitality toward traveling workers. But John expressed dismay at one man, Diotrephes, who loved attention, sowed discord, and turned away John's emissaries.

This short letter, small enough to be written on a single parchment, tells us that those who selflessly support the Lord's work are to be commended, but those serving Satan's agenda, particularly if they infiltrate the church, must be confronted.

God wants you to be a Gaius, not a Diotrephes. Maybe He doesn't intend for you to preach before an entire congregation, but He wants you to support those who do. We each have a place in God's work; and as we labor in harmony and mutual support, we're walking in truth—and that brings joy to the whole church.



**KEY THOUGHT:**

Those who selflessly support the Lord's cause are to be commended; those who don't must be confronted.



**KEY VERSES:**

"I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."  
3 John 1:3-4



**KEY ACTION:**

Diligently encourage God's work and show hospitality to His workers.



**KEY PRAYER:**

Lord, may I be faithful in the work of the Lord, encouraging the Body of Christ.



## BASIC SURVEY

## 3 JOHN

**AUTHOR:** The apostle John, according to church tradition. The author is identified only as “the elder” (3 John 1:1 KJV).

**DATE:** Approximately AD 92.

## IN TEN WORDS OR LESS

Church leaders must be humble, not proud.

## DETAILS, PLEASE

Addressed to a believer named Gaius, 3 John praises those (like Gaius and another Christian named Demetrius) who lived in “love before the church” (1:6 NASB). But 3 John also has harsh words for Christians like Diotrophes, “who loves to have the preeminence” (1:9 NKJV) and refused to show kindness and hospitality to traveling evangelists.

## QUOTABLE

> I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth (1:14 KJV).

> Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God (1:11 NIV).

## UNIQUE AND UNUSUAL

Third John, one of four single-chapter books in the New Testament, is the second-shortest by verse count. Its fourteen verses are one more than 2 John.

## SO WHAT?

Hospitality isn’t just for the Martha Stewarts of the world—Christians are expected to feed, house, and encourage other believers, especially those who minister full-time for God. Humble service to others follows the example of Jesus Himself (see John 13:14).

READ 3 JOHN 1 AND PSALM 21.

- One-Month Course: your next reading is on page 278. →
- Three-Month Course: your next reading is on page 278. →
- Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 278. →

## HIDDEN TREASURE

## PROSPERING IN EVERY WAY

John wrote, “Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers” (3 John 1:2 NASB). The most important thing for believers is our spiritual life. Whatever state our health or our finances are in, it’s important that our soul prospers. But John didn’t believe in embracing poverty and sickness. He prayed that the recipient of his letter would not only prosper spiritually, but be in good physical health and prosper “in all respects.” This surely included having sufficient finances. This is not (contrary to what some people think) advocating a selfish, materialistic lifestyle, but is praying for God to bless people in every area and to supply their every need (Philippians 4:13).

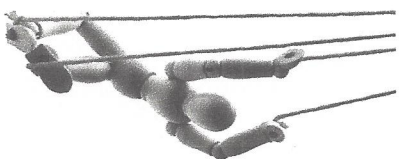
READ ISAIAH 57-58.

## HIDDEN TREASURE

## POWER-HUNGRY LEADERS

Unfortunately, there were power-hungry shepherds in the early church as well. John mentioned one such person, saying, “Diotrophes, who loves to be first, will not welcome us.” John added that he was “spreading malicious nonsense about us. Not satisfied with that, he even refuses to welcome other believers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church” (3 John 1:9–10 NIV). These were serious sins. Diotrophes was a classic example of a control freak who insisted on having his way instead of humbly serving others. He used his position of leadership to squelch all dissenting voices and exclude those who disagreed with him. Eventually things catch up with such people, however.

READ ISAIAH 59 AND 63.



We should focus on serving other people rather than trying to control them.



IN THIRD JOHN THE APOSTLE encourages fellowship with Christian brothers. Following his expression of love for Gaius, John assures him of his prayers for his health and voices his joy over Gaius's persistent walk in truth and for the manner in which he shows hospitality and support for missionaries who have come to his church.

But not everyone in the church feels the same way. Diotrephes's heart is one hundred and eighty degrees removed from Gaius's heart. He is no longer living in love. Pride has taken precedence in his life. He has refused a letter John has written for the church, fearing that his authority might be superseded by that of the apostle. He also has accused John of evil words and refused to accept missionaries. He forbids others to do so and even expels them from the church if they disobey him. John uses this negative example as an opportunity to encourage Gaius to continue his hospitality. Demetrius has a good testimony and may even be one of those turned away by Diotrephes. He is widely known for his good character and his loyalty to the truth. Here he is well commended by John and stands as a positive example for Gaius.

The Greek titles of First, Second, and Third John are *Ioannou A, B, and G*. The *G* is gamma, the third letter of the Greek alphabet; *Ioannou G* means the "Third of John."

#### WATCH WORD

☞ receive (accept, welcome)—8

#### FOR REFLECTION

The Danger of Desiring Power • 9, 10

The great English preacher Charles Spurgeon once said, "A man who will not do well in his present place because he longs to be higher is already too high and should be put lower." The self-seeking and self-important Diotrophes heads a long line of people who never learned to distinguish between love for Christ and love for their place in the church.

John writes stinging words about this leader within the church because he posed a serious danger. He was power-hungry and prideful; he aggressively opposed the truth and those who were preaching it; he worked hard to keep out anyone who might threaten his position; and he used his influence to promote selfishness in others.

Today, we find such an attitude manifested in churches that become a cult of personality. Those with "Diotrophes' Disease" want to be first; they greedily seek prominence and control. Yet only one person can have preeminence among God's people: Christ (Col. 1:18).

Our focus as believers should not be our position within the church but rather our participation in the work of the church to advance God's kingdom and bring Him glory. We serve God best when we generously employ the resources and talents He has given us to serve His people.

Someone you  
should know:

## Diotrephes

### "Me First" Comes In Last

A FEW YEARS AGO a college admissions officer had some difficult decisions to make. She stared at a tall pile of applications from highly qualified students, knowing that the university had room only for a small percentage of them. As she called through the hopeful students' letters, one immediately stood out. She smiled broadly and put that student's application in her "accepted" file. What made the difference?

This student, almost alone among the applicants, described himself as a follower. He could lead, he said, but he didn't need to; he had no problem with taking a number two position.

"What would we do with a college full of leaders and no followers?" asked the beaming admissions officer.

Too bad Diotrephes didn't have the same attitude. This man caused the apostle John some real headache. He occupied a position of leadership in a church overseen by John, and once he tasted power, he wasn't interested in letting anyone else know the feeling. John had written to the church, asking it to take care of some traveling teachers and evangelists who intended to visit the area, but Diotrephes objected. He didn't want anyone encroaching on "his" authority. In his third short epistle, John described several unsavory traits about Diotrephes that had to be confronted:

*He loved to be the leader* (3 John 1:9). Other translations say he loved "to be first" (NIV). He never bought into Jesus' idea of servant leadership. Instead, he operated under the philosophy of "my way or the highway."

*He refused to acknowledge the authority of others* (1:9). Diotrephes didn't merely like to be a leader; he insisted on being the *only* leader. His word had to rule not only supremely, but exclusively.

**Diotrephes  
didn't want  
anyone  
encroaching on  
"his" authority.**

*He spoke maliciously about other leaders* (1:10). Not content to disregard the legitimate authority of others, he insisted on slandering them as well. He filled the church with nasty gossip and self-serving rumors.

*He outlawed church hospitality and punished those who dared oppose his will* (1:10). Diotrephes went beyond turning away the visiting teachers. He forbade the members of his church to host these men on their own. If they opened their homes anyway, he threw them out of the church.

Egocentric control freaks like Diotrephes may hold on to power for a while, but eventually they cause enough hurt that either they leave on their own or get asked to leave. We don't know what happened to Diotrephes or his church, but we do know that John pleaded with his good friends there not to follow the man's self-centered example (1:14). John would have agreed with the apostle Paul's guidance: "Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves" (Philippians 2:3).

That's good advice in any century.

**THE POINT: Good leaders honor others; bad leaders praise only themselves.**



# 3 John

BOOK INTRODUCTION

For nearly 2,000 years, Christians have universally affirmed that following Christ at times feels like “hard work.” Satan exerts great effort to oppose the advance of the gospel. And he often uses people—even Christians within the church—to do it.

John knew well the trouble that human beings cause, especially in the body of Christ. For that reason, when problems arose, such as false teaching or division—John would not back down. The truth of the gospel had to be preserved at all costs.

This last living apostle was a tiger for the truth. In his Gospel and three epistles, he mentions “truth” 46 times. He also declares that the test for discerning who is in Christ is to see who is walking in the truth (3; 1 John 2:6). Is it any wonder, then, that he would be so indignant when Diotrephes, a leader in one of the churches he shepherded, was making it harder for those in that fellowship to obey the truth.

From John we learn that those who selflessly support the Lord’s work are to be commended. Likewise, those who infiltrate the church with Satan’s agenda must be confronted.

## WHAT IT SAYS | *Truth Must Be Told*

It is interesting to compare 2 and 3 John. Both are brief. Both deal with the treatment of itinerant teachers. Second John was written to instruct readers *not* to receive those who deny the incarnate Word of God. Third John was written to instruct believers to receive those with a history of loving the truth and walking in it. The positive instruction of the third letter complements the negative instruction of the second letter. Both epistles are concerned with truth, love, and hospitality. But John’s third letter addresses leading members of the local church, Gaius.

Gaius was a fairly common Latin (Roman) name. At least four different men have that name in the NT (1; Acts 19:29; 20:4; Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 1:14). But we know more about John’s Gaius than any of the others. He was spiritually healthy and walked faithfully in the truth of Christ. He was a selfless servant whose faith was evidenced by his actions. And he was a dear friend of the apostle (1–6) who apparently knew of Diotrephes and his arrogant refusal of hospitality for John’s emissaries.

The apostles of the first century had two duties: to establish and pass on the truth as they received it from Christ (2 Tim. 2:1, 2), and

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to encourage those who were walking rightly in the faith. So John wrote *not* only to commend Gaius for his faithfulness but also to alert him that Diotrephes was soon to be confronted about his self-serving ways.

## WHAT IT MEANS | *The Talk of Your Walk*

As with 2 John, 3 John is so brief that little space is given to explicit themes. Nevertheless, several themes are implied or spoken of:

- **Walking in Truth:** Truth is mentioned six times in the 14 verses of this brief letter. John uses the phrase “walking in truth” to describe faithfulness to Christ—the One who is truth personified (1, 3, 8, 12). Gaius’ faithful walk in the truth and his good works toward others offer us a beautiful example of the link between faith and works. Works are essential to a living faith (1–8).
- **Steadfastness:** John’s emphasis on truth goes hand in hand with steadfastness in the faith. If believers intend to walk in the truth, at some time they will have to defend that truth from those who would dilute or distort it. From his days of standing against the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem (Acts 4), John never yielded to those who would malign or suffocate the truth found in Christ (9–11).
- **Hospitality:** Those who labor to spread the gospel and establish churches should be supported by the Christians they serve (5–10). But hospitality has limits: those who promote themselves and cause dissension in the church must be confronted.
- **Family:** John uses familial language that expresses the close relationship between himself and Gaius. Three times he refers to him as “beloved” (2, 5, 11). He also refers to other members of the church as “brethren” (3, 10). Members of the body of Christ should be as close as family.

## WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU | *Be Selfless*

Gaius was clearly a faithful man with a quiet gift for empowering others to serve God—a stark contrast to the selfish, divisive Diotrephes. Gaius is an example of “the good” that should be imitated, one who humbly served God’s people in love and truth. John’s commendation of him reveals an important truth for us as well: that when we join in the ministry of others with our hearts and hands, our ministry is just as meaningful to God as theirs, and He blesses it in exactly the same way (Gal. 6:7–9).

The church needs many more people like Gaius—people who are willing to work behind the scenes, unconcerned about who gets the credit as long as God does. It may be true that God does not want you on the mission field . . . but He wants you to help others get there. Maybe God does not intend for you to preach or lead worship in front of an entire congregation . . . but He wants you to support and encourage those who do. It is all the same in His eyes.

Hebrews 6:10 says, “God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name.” Whatever we do to bless God’s people and to further the work of His church, it is a priceless offering to Him. And for every sacrificial act of ministry, God sees. God smiles. God remembers. And God rewards.



# 3 JOHN

## THE BIG PICTURE

- A. SALUTATION (1)
- B. GAIVUS: A CASE FOR COMMENDATION (2-8)
- C. DIOTREPHES: A CASE FOR CONFRONTATION (9-10)
- D. DEMETRIUS: A CASE FOR CONGRATULATION (11-12)
- E. CONCLUDING REMARKS (13-15)

### Essential Facts

- PURPOSE:** To commend Gaius for his hospitality and encourage him in his faithfulness.
- AUTHOR:** The apostle John.
- AUDIENCE:** Gaius, a prominent believer, perhaps from Derbe in Asia Minor.
- DATE WRITTEN:** Around AD 90.
- SETTING:** Like 1 and 2 John, 3 John was probably written from Ephesus and circulated among the churches in Asia Minor.
- KEY VERSE:** "Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God" (11).
- KEY PEOPLE AND RELATIONSHIPS:** John with Gaius, with Diotrephes and with Demetrius.

We know little about Gaius except that he was generous, hospitable and highly regarded by the apostle John. Apparently, Gaius took it upon himself to provide free room and board for traveling preachers and missionaries. In a day when most preachers had to travel from town to town with no regular means of support, this service was greatly needed. John wrote this letter to commend Gaius and to warn him to watch out for a self-important, spiritual teacher named Diotrephes. John challenged Gaius to warn others about him too and urged them not to be influenced by Diotrephes' bad example.

Aside from this warning about Diotrephes, John was primarily concerned with encouraging his friend Gaius. The simple act of including others in our lives and sharing ourselves with them is pleasing to God. One of the reasons God places people in our lives is so that we can support and encourage them. As we reach out to help others, we will also discover that we are blessed and strengthened in a special way. Hospitality doesn't have to be complicated. It can be a simple act—setting an extra place at the table or offering someone a ride. Yet hospitality is a potent way to show love, appreciation and support. We all need a little affirmation sometimes. That affirmation can come through a simple invitation to enter someone else's life. Hospitality is a part of the process of spiritual renewal, a time to open up and support one another along the way.

### SPIRITUAL RENEWAL THEMES

#### PRIDE LEADS TO A FALL

Diotrephes refused to humble himself before others and decided that he alone would be the boss. His arrogant attitude disqualified him from the very leadership role he coveted. One of the vices we face in our spiritual growth is pride. As we experience success in our spiritual growth, we can easily feel spiritually superior. We begin to think we are better than others and self-sufficient at last. A word to the wise: Pride and self-sufficiency often lead to a fall.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF HELPING OTHERS

In contrast to Diotrephes, Gaius and Demetrius were commended for their service. They had generously shared with others without complaining, both in hospitality and in their teaching of the truth. In their own way, Gaius and Demetrius carried the message of God's transforming power to people who were still in bondage. John did not take these men for granted; instead, he commended them for their service, and today they live on as examples for each of us.

LIFE LESSONS: Fellow Christians are family (verse 5).

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## DID YOU KNOW?

► This letter from John contains only 14 verses and is the shortest book in the Bible.

**TO THE PEOPLE**  
Rather than speaking about general issues or doctrines, John directed this letter more to individuals and their small congregation. In the 14 verses of his letter, he used the word friend six times and the word church only three times.

## KEY PASSAGE

"It gave me great joy when some believers came and testified about your faithfulness to the truth, telling how you continue to walk in it. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth" (verses 3-4).

### More to the Story

John expressed his need to address many other matters, and he hoped to be able to meet with the believers and speak with them face to face (verse 13).

BY THE NUMBERS	
CHAPTER	1
VERSES	14
WORDS	323

### Up and Down

John's third letter was written to commend two believers, Gaius and Demetrius, for their faithfulness, while chastising another, Diotrephes, for his errors.

LIFE LESSONS: Support other believers and show them hospitality (verse 8).