3 John

Introduction and Thanksgiving

1:1 From the elder to Gaius my dear brother, whom I love in truth.

1:2 Dear friend, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul.

1:3 For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, just as you are living according to the truth.

The Charge to Gaius

1:5 Dear friend, you demonstrate faithfulness by whatever you do for the brothers (even though they are strangers).

1:6 They have testified to your love before the church.

1:7 You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God.

1:8 For I have no greater joy than this: to hear that my children are living according to the truth.

The use of the Greek verb περιπατέω (peripateō) to refer to conduct or lifestyle is common in the NT (see 1 John 1:6, 2 John 4, as well as numerous times in Paul. Here the phrase refers to conduct that results when a person has "truth" residing within, and possibly alludes to the indwelling Spirit of Truth (see 2 John 2). In the specific context of 3 John the phrase refers to true Christians who are holding fast to an apostolic Christology in the face of the secessionist opponents' challenge to orthodoxy.

1:9 Which church does the author refer to here? The church where Gaius is, the church where the author is, a different local church where the "brothers" are, or the "universal" church where Gaius is, the church where the author has already done in this regard.

1:10 When the author tells Gaius "you demonstrate faithfulness by whatever you do" he is commending him for his faithful service to the traveling missionaries (the brothers). Gaius has assisted them, and they have now returned with a report of this to the author (see 3 John 3).

1:11 Now the author, after commending Gaius for his faithful service to the traveling missionaries in the past (see 3 John 5), now requests additional assistance at the present time (send them on their way in a manner worthy of God). Apparently the missionaries are on their way to visit the area where Gaius' church is located a second time. They had been there once already and had returned with a good report of how Gaius had assisted them. It is entirely possible that they themselves carry with them the present letter as a letter of introduction. Along these lines it has been suggested that Demetrius (see 3 John 12) is one of these traveling missionaries, perhaps the leader of the delegation, and the author is formally introducing him to Gaius, since when he was there
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3 John 1:10

**Diotrephes the Troublemaker**

1:9 I wrote something to the church, 6 but Diotrephes, 7 who loves to be first among them, does not acknowledge us. 8 1:10 Therefore, if I come, 9 I will call attention to the deeds he is doing — the bringing of unjustified charges against us with evil words! And not being content with that, he not only refuses to welcome the brothers himself, but hinders the people who forth 4 on behalf of “The Name,” 2 accepting nothing from the pagans. 3:8 Therefore we 6 ought to support such people, so that we become coworkers in cooperation with the truth. 5

the last time he was a stranger (v. 5) but Gaius assisted him anyway.

1 sn The verb gone forth (ἐξέρχομαι, exarchomai) almost certainly refers to some form of missionary activity. This verb is used of Paul’s travels in Acts 14:20, and of his setting out on his second missionary journey in Acts 15:40.

2 sn Three possibilities for the identification of The Name have been suggested: (1) the name of God, suggested by the unqualified noun with the Greek article. In Rabbinic literature “the Name” is a frequent substitute for the Tetragrammaton YHWH, the name of God, which was too sacred to be pronounced. This would make good logical sense in 3 John, because in the previous verse the author has instructed Gaius to send the missionaries on their way “in a manner worthy of God.” (2) Some have argued that Gaius is referring to the self-designation of the Johannine community, or as a reference to the Christian cause at large, or as a way of designating Christians before the title “Christian” came into common usage. (3) The interpretation favored by most commentators is that this is a reference to Jesus’ name. Paul uses a similar phrase in Rom 1:5, and in 1 John 2:12 the author wrote, “your sins are forgiven you in the name of His (Christ’s) name.” John’s Gospel also makes reference to believing “in the name of Jesus” (John 1:12, 13-18).

3 sn The word εὐνικος (ethnikos) occurs only 4 times in the NT (the other three are in Matt 5:47; 6:7; and 18:17). It is virtually synonymous here with the far more common εὐνός (ethnos, used some 162 times in the NT). Both refer to the Gentile Gentile.

4 sn Since the issue here is support for the traveling missionaries, and there is no indication that the author would want to forbid receiving support from Gentile converts to Christianity, the word pagans must refer to Gentile unbelievers, i.e., pagans. The traveling missionaries sent out to combat the false teaching of the sectarian opponents have been accepting nothing by way of support from non-Christians.

5 sn Clearly the author does not refer to himself alone by the use of the first person plural pronoun we here, since the issue is support for the traveling missionaries. It stands in contrast to the pagans mentioned in the previous verse, and is thus to be understood as inclusive of all true Christians: the author, Gaius, and all true Christians. All true Christians ought to support the endeavors of these traveling missionaries in their efforts to counteract the heretical teaching of the opponents.

6 sn The εἰνα (hina) clause indicates the result of such support for the traveling missionaries: The Christian who helps to support them in their efforts thus becomes a coworker in cooperation with the truth. Although the dative τῇ ἀληθείᾳ (τῇ αἰθήθεαι) is somewhat difficult to specify, it would appear (corresponding to the εἰνα- [sun-] prefix of the noun modified) to refer to (that is, pagans) the practical and/or ethical aspect of the missionary activity as the missionaries themselves are about the business of spreading unjustified charges against the author with evil words!

7 sn Diotrephes appears to be an influential person (perhaps the leader) in a local church known to Gaius, but to which Gaius himself does not belong. The description of Diotrephes as one who loves to be first suggests he is arrogant, and his behavior displays this: He refuses to acknowledge the written communication mentioned by the author at the beginning of v. 9 (and thus did not recognize the author’s apostolic authority), and furthermore (v. 10) refuses to show any hospitality to the traveling missionaries (welcome the brothers) already mentioned by the author. It has been suggested that at the description of Diotrephes in 3 John 9-10 Gaius is in charge of another, a church known to Gaius but to which Diotrephes sought prominence or position in this church, and had not yet attained any real authority. But his actions here suggest otherwise: He is able to refuse or ignore the author’s previous written instructions (v. 9), and he is able to have other people put out of the church for showing hospitality to the traveling missionaries (v. 10).

8 sn Since the verb ἐπιστρέφω (epistropho) (epidechomai) can mean “receive into one’s presence” (BDAG 370 s.v. 1; it is used with this meaning in the next verse) it has been suggested that the author himself attempted a previous visit to Diotrephes’ church but was turned away. There is nothing in the context to suggest an unsuccessful prior visit by the author, however; in 3 John 9 he explicitly indicates a prior written communication in which Diotrephes apparently refused to accept the letter. The verb ἐπιστρέφω can also mean “accept” in the sense of “acknowledge someone’s authority” (BDAG 370 s.v. 2) and such a meaning better fits the context here: Diotrephes has not accepted but instead rejected the authority of the author to intervene in the situation of the traveling missionaries (perhaps because Diotrephes believed the author had no local jurisdiction in the matter).

9 sn The third-class condition (εἰ δὲ ἔλθω, εἰκα εἰθικ) seems to be used by the author to indicate real uncertainty on his part as to whether he will visit Diotrephes’ church or not.

10 sn Because Diotrephes did not recognize the authority of the author, the author will expose his behavior for what it is (call attention to the deeds he is doing) if he comes for a visit. These are the charges the author will make against Diotrephes before the church: (1) Diotrephes is engaged in spreading unjustified charges against the author with evil words; (2) Diotrephes refuses to welcome the brothers (the traveling missionaries) himself; (3) Diotrephes hinders the others in the church who wish to help the missionaries; and (4) Diotrephes expels from the church (throws them out) people who aid the missionaries. (Diotrephes himself may not have had supreme authority in the local church to expel these people, but may have been responsible for instigating collective action against them.)
want to do so and throws them out of the church!

1:11 Dear friend, do not imitate what is bad but what is good.² The one who does good is of God; the one who does what is bad has not seen God.²

Worthy Demetrius

1:12 Demetrius³ has been testified to by all, even by the truth itself. We also testify to him,⁴ and you know that our testimony is true.

Conclusion

1:13 I have many things to write to you, but I do not wish to write to you with⁵ pen and ink.⁶

1:14 But I hope to see you right away, and we will speak face to face.⁷ 1:15 Peace be with you.⁸ The friends here⁹ greet you. Greet the friends¹⁰ there¹¹ by name.

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² sn The exhortation do not imitate what is bad but what is good is clearly a reference to Diotrephes’ evil behavior. The author exhorts Gaius (whom he wishes to continue assisting the missionaries) not to follow the negative example of Diotrephes, but to do what is right. Implicitly there may be a contrast between the bad behavior of Diotrephes and the good reputation of Demetrius (mentioned in the following verse), but it seems more likely that Demetrius is himself one of the traveling missionaries (perhaps their leader), rather than the leader of a local congregation who, unlike Diotrephes, has supported the missionaries himself.

³ sn The statement The one who does what is bad has not seen God is asyndetic; its abrupt introduction adds emphasis. The statement reiterates the common Johannine theme of behavior as an indication of genuine faith, found in 1 John in 3:6, 10; 4:7, 20; and in the Gospel of John in 3:17-21. By implication, the genuineness of Diotrephes’ faith is called into question, because he has obviously done what is bad (v. 11b; cf. vv. 9-10). In John’s terminology it is clear that the phrase has not seen God is equivalent to “is not a genuine Christian” (see John 3:17-21 and 1 John 3:6, 10; 4:7, 20).

⁴ sn Demetrius is apparently someone Gaius would have heard about, but whose character was not known to him. Thus the author is writing to Gaius to attest to Demetrius’ good character. It appears that Demetrius is coming to Gaius’ church and needs hospitality and assistance, so the author is writing to commend him to Gaius and vouch for him. It is difficult to know more about Demetrius with any certainty, but the author is willing to give him a powerful personal endorsement (We testify to him too). Demetrius may well have been the leader of a delegation of traveling missionaries, and may even have been the bearer of this letter to Gaius. The writing of letters of introduction to be carried along by representatives or missionaries in NT times is also attested in Paul’s writings (1 Cor 16:3).

⁵ tn Grk “by means of.”

⁶ tn Grk “ink and pen.” The more normal order in contemporary English is “pen and ink.”

⁷ sn The figurative phrase with pen and ink is parallel to 2 John 12, suggesting that both letters may well have been written at approximately the same time and in similar situations. The author tells Gaius that he has more to say, but does not wish to do so in writing; he would rather talk in person (3 John 14). It appears that the author anticipates a personal visit to Gaius’ church in the very near future. This may be the same visit mentioned in connection with Diotrephes in v. 10. Gaius’ church and Diotrephes’ church may have been in the same city, or in neighboring towns, so that the author anticipates visiting both on the same journey.

⁸ tn Grk “peace to you.”

⁹ tn The word “here” is not in the Greek text but is implied.

¹⁰ sn It is possible that the designation friends (φίλοι, philoi) indicates that these are personal friends of Gaius who send their greetings, but if this is the case it is somewhat surprising that their names are not mentioned, especially when the author instructs Gaius, Greet the friends there by name. More likely this is an alternative to “brothers” (ἀδελφοί, adelphoi) as an early Christian self-designation, especially within the Johannine community. It may have arisen in the Johannine community from Jesus’ teaching in John 15:13-15, “you are my friends if you do what I command you.”

¹¹ tn The word “there” is not in the Greek text but is implied.