## Third John

The Tyndale Commentary introduces this epistle as follows: "Like the second letter, the third is brief enough to have been written on a single sheet of papyrus. A similar problem lies behind both letters, namely the visits of itinerant teachers and what treatment is to be given to them. Both letters are therefore concerned with Christian truth and love and with their relation to hospitality. There are differences, however. In the second letter 'the elder' writes to a local church, personified as 'the chosen lay and her children', whereas in the third letter he addresses by name one of the leading members of a local church, and refers to two others. This mention of Gaius (1), Diotrephes (9) and Demetrius (12) makes the third letter more vivid than the second and gives us a clearer glimpse into the inner life of a first-century church. The message differs also. In the second letter the church is warned not to extend hospitality to false teachers who deny the doctrine of the incarnation, while in the third the elder command (commends) Gaius for the hospitality he has shown to teachers of the truth, urges him to continue it, and sharply rebuke Diotrephes for his refusal to welcome them and for his opposition to those who wished to. In this way the positive instruction of the third letter is complementary to the more negative instruction of the second. The two letters must be read together if we are to gain a balanced understanding of the duties and limits of Christian hospitality.

The Didachē, the first-century church manual ... shows that early Christian hospitality was sometimes abused. Instructions are given that an 'apostle' may not stay beyond on (one) day or, 'in case of necessity', tow (two). 'If he stays three days, his is a false prophet (II:5). On departing, he may receive enough food to last him his journey. But 'if he asks for money, he is a false prophet' (II:6). Again, if a prophet, apparently speaking under the inspiration of the Spirit, says 'give me money, or something else', he is not to be heeded unless the money is 'for other (another) in need' (II:12). It is recognized that true prophets have a right to stay and be supported (13), but an ordinary Christian traveller must not be entertained free for more than two or three days (12:2). If he wants to settle, he must work for his living ... If he refuses to do this, he is trading (?) on Christ' (12:3-5). (John: Even if "on", "tow" and "trading" are correct as found in the Didachē, for better comprehension of your readers, it may be a good idea to change these to modern usage words.)

The third letter contains messages to or concerning Gaius (1-8). Diotrephes (9-10), and Demetrius (11-12), with a conclusion and greeting (13-14)."

## Who is Gaius?

The Hitchcock's Bible Names Dictionary states about the meaning of the name Gaius: "lord; an earthly man."

There are several people in the New Testament who are called Gaius. There is a Gaius who became a companion of the Apostle Paul, when he travelled through Macedonia. When the silver smiths in the area began to lose business because the idol statues they made were no longer bought by converts to Christianity, they caused an uproar in their city, in which Gaius was caught and beaten up.

The Tyndale Commentary writes: "Since 'Gaius' was perhaps the most common of all names in the Roman Empire ..., it is safer to resist the attempt to identify the Gaius of this letter. We do not know who he was. It is clear, however, from the terms in which John writes, that he occupied a position of responsibility and leadership in the local church. Visiting evangelists seem to have stayed with him rather than with others, and the elder would hardly have written so outspokenly of Diotrephes to any but a church leader. Although we can only guess his identity and his position, John leaves us in no doubt of his personal affection for him. He calls him his dear friend<sup>1</sup>, and three times addresses him directly by the term agapēte, 'beloved' (RSV) or 'my dear friend' (NEB). See verses 2, 5 and 11. John's love for him was in the truth. As in 2 John 1 there is no definite article in the phrase. [One Bible scholar] quotes two letters from an Egyptian farmer in AD 110 in which he sends greeting to 'all who love you (or us) truly'. Nevertheless, the RSV and NIV are certainly right to translate the expression here not 'in truth' (RV), or 'sincerely', but in the truth, the truth being the sphere in which their mutual love existed and flourished. Perhaps their relationship to each other was more personal even than this and the reference to 'my children' hints that Gaius owed his conversion to John."

The Greek text of v. 2 reads literally: "Beloved, above all things I wish [that] you may prosper and be in health, even as your soul prospers." The Greek word rendered "prosper" is euodoo, which refers to "help on the road," or "to succeed in business affairs." The Apostle Paul uses the verb in the verses: "Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you.<sup>2</sup>" 2 And "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come."

The people John mentions in v. 3 may have been members of Gaius' church, or people who knew him because they were living in the same area. They gave their testimony to John about Gaius' daily life. "Walking in the truth" refers to a lifestyle.

The Adam Clarke's Commentary suggests that those people were: "Probably the same of whom he speaks in the fifth and following verses, and who appear to have been itinerant evangelists."

Barnes' Notes observes: "Who these were is not certainly known. They may have been members of the same church with Gaius, who, for some reason, had visited the writer of this Epistle; or they may have been the 'brethren' who had gone from him with a letter of commendation to the church, (3 John 9), and had been rejected by the church through the influence of Diotrephes, and who, after having been hospitably entertained by Gaius, had again returned to the writer of this Epistle. In that case, they would of course bear honorable testimony to the kindness which they had received from Gaius, and to his Christian character." The Tyndale Commentary states: "The evidence of Gaius' spiritual well-being, which had caused John great joy, had been brought to him by certain brothers. They are mentioned in this verse and in verse 5. They had visited the church in which Gaius held a responsible position and had seen certain things about him which enabled them, on their return to 'the elder', to bring him a good report. Two characteristics of Gaius' spiritual prosperity are mentioned, namely your faithfulness to the truth<sup>3</sup>, literally 'your truth' (RV), and 'your love' (v. 6). To both the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Acts 19:23-28

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Rom. 1:10 (KJV)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> I Cor. 16:2 (KJV)

travelling brothers had 'borne witness' (3 and 6). Gaius was a balanced Christian. He held the truth in love (cf. Eph. 4:15). He also loved in truth.... Since testimony can be borne only to what has been seen..., it is clear that Gaius was a transparent, open Christian who was letting his light shine and not hiding it. His truth and love were known to all. Even 'strangers' (5) could see his sterling worth and bear witness to it."

In v. 4 John expresses his joy about his children walking in truth. That suggests that Gaius was one of John's spiritual children. It probably means that John led Gaius personal (personally) to accept Jesus as his Savior and Lord. One of the greatest joys in the life of a Christian is to draw persons to Christ. The greatest fruit we can bear as Jesus' disciples is new disciples.

Barnes' Notes comments: "This is such language as would be used by an aged apostle when speaking of those who had been converted by his instrumentality, and who looked up to him as a father; and we may, therefore, infer that Gaius had been converted under the ministry of John, and that he was probably a much younger man than he was. John, the aged apostle, says that he had no higher happiness than to learn, respecting those who regarded him as their spiritual father, that they were steadfast in their adherence to the doctrines of religion. The same thing may be:

- a) of all the ministers of the gospel, that their highest comfort is found in the fact that those to whom they minister, whether still under their care or removed from them, persevere in a steadfast attachment to the true doctrines of religion, and live accordingly; and
- b) of all Christian parents respecting their own children. The highest joy that a Christian parent can have is to know that his children, whether at home or abroad, adhere to the truths of religion, and live in accordance with the requirements of the gospel of Christ.

If a child wished to confer the highest possible happiness upon his parents when with them, it would be by becoming a decided Christian; if, when abroad, in foreign lands or his own, he wished to convey intelligence to them that would most thrill their hearts with joy, it would be to announce to them that he had given his heart to God. There is no joy in a family like that when children are converted; there is no news that comes from abroad that diffuses so much happiness through the domestic circle as the intelligence that a child is TRULY converted to the Savior. There is nothing that would give more peace to the dying pillow of the Christian parent, than to be able to leave the world with the assurance that his children would always walk in truth." The Greek text of v. 5 reads literally: "Beloved, whatsoever you do to the brethren and to strangers you do faithfully."

The Tyndale Commentary observes: "The elder' again addresses Gaius as dear friend and proceeds to write not now of his truth but of his love. He was 'given to hospitality,' as all Christians (Rom. 12:13; Heb. 13:2; 1 Pet. 4:9) and particularly widows (I Tim. 5:10) and presbyter-bishops (I Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:8) are commanded to be. In each of these verses the Greek word is either the noun philoxenia or the adjective philoxenos, which indicate literally a love for strangers. In welcoming such, we may not only entertain angels without knowing it (Heb. 13:2), but will be receiving the Lord Jesus himself (Mt. 10:40-42; 25:35, 38; cf. Didachē 11:2, 4, 'welcome him as Lord'). This love for strangers is just what Gaius possessed, for his ministry had been exercised towards the brothers, even though they were strangers to him. 'The brethren and the strangers are not two classes, but one and the same'.... Gaius' philadelphia (love of the brothers) and philoxenia (love of strangers) were combined. Cf. Hebrews 13:12, where these

words occur together. He must have received them into his house and entertained them at his own expense. He was faithful, 'the elder' comments, in what he was doing. This may signify that John recognized in the hospitable practice of Gaius a token of his loyalty to himself and his principles. He could 'still be counted on'...; cf. RSV, 'it is a loyal thing you do' and NEB, 'you show a fine loyalty'. Or, as Westcott suggests, the phrase should perhaps be rendered: "thou makest sure ...' i.e. 'such an act ... will not fail of its due issue and reward'. But it is noteworthy that what Gaius is said to be faithful in ... doing is his 'work' (ergasē). His work was the outcome of his faith; it was 'a faithful work' (RV). The word 'faithful' seems to link together the truth and the love of Gaius. His practical ministry to strangers was true to his profession. His love was consistent with the truth which he believed. The verb they have told is an aorist ermatyrēsan, 'have testified', (RSV) and must refer to some particular occasion when before the assembled congregation, of which John was leader, the returned travellers had spoken appreciatively of the love Gaius had shown them, and of his truth."

The Greek text of the second part of v. 6 is rather complicated. It reads literally: "you bring forward on their journey, you shall do well if you bring them you bring forward after a godly sort." The first lengthy clause "bring forward on their journey," is the rendering of the single Greek verb poieéseis. The second clause: "you bring forward on their journey" is the translation of another single verb prompémpsas.

Some modern translations of this verse read: "They have told the church here of your loving friendship. Please continue providing for such teachers in a manner that pleases God." 4 And: "I am glad when you send them on their way with a generous gift."

The Adam Clarke's Commentary takes the opportunity, in commenting on v. 6b to draw the attention of church members to the needs of their pastor. We read: "Let all churches, all congregations of Christians, from whom their ministers and preachers can claim nothing by law, and for whom the state makes no provision, lay this to heart; let them ask themselves, Do we deal with these in a manner worthy of God, and worthy of the profession we make? Do we suffer them to lack the bread that perishes, while they minister to us with no sparing hand the bread of life? Let a certain class of religious people, who will find themselves out when they read this note, consider whether, when their preachers have ministered to them their certain or stated time, and are called to go and serve other churches, they send them forth in a manner worthy of God, making a reasonable provision for the journey which they are obliged to take. In the itinerant ministry of the apostles it appears that each Church bore the expenses of the apostle to the next church or district to which he was going to preach the word of life. So it should be still in the mission and itinerant ministry."

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary adds: "He who honors God's missionaries (3 John 7), honors God."

Finally, The Matthew Henry's Commentary states: "The direction the apostle gives his friend concerning further treatment of the brethren that were with him: Whom if thou bring forward on their journey, after a godly sort, thou shalt do well. It seems to have been customary in those days of love to attend travelling ministers and Christians, at least some part of their road, 1 Cor. 16:6. It is a kindness to a stranger to be guided in his way, and a pleasure to travellers to meet with suitable company: this is a work that may be done after a godly sort, in a manner worthy of God, or suitable to the deference and relation we bear to God. Christians should consider not only

what they must do, but what they may do, what they may most honourably and laudably do: the liberal mind deviseth liberal generous things. Christians should do even the common actions of life and of good-will after a godly sort, as serving God therein, and designing his glory."