

**International Sunday School Lesson**  
**Study Notes**  
**May 3, 2015**

**Lesson Text: 3 John 1:1-14**  
**Lesson Title: Coworkers with the Truth**

**Introduction**

The Apostle John wrote his third epistle around A.D. 85. He was most likely still in Ephesus at the time of the writing. John's third epistle is without question the most personal of the three. There are no names or personal references in 1 John. It seems that the epistle is written to believers in general. Second John is obviously more personal as references himself as "*the elder*" and writes specifically to an elect lady and her children. Second John is directed toward a particular family of believers. When we come to John's third epistle, his message is very personal and directed to named individuals. He mentions Gaius, Diotrephes, and Demetrius by name. He also speaks to unnamed friends.

At the time of the writing of 3 John, hospitality toward travelers and strangers was considered one of the greatest acts of kindness and love. When people traveled they did not have the luxuries we have today of food and lodging. They were dependent upon someone giving them food and shelter. John had warned the elect lady in Second John not to open her doors to those who taught false doctrine. He didn't want her to be so hospitable and loving that she allowed deceivers and antichrist to take advantage of her and bring error into her home. Now, John must deal with those in the church who are the exact opposite of the elect lady. Instead of being too loving and hospitable they were so narrow-minded that they refused to show love and hospitality to anyone.

John wants his readers to know that true believers are coworkers with the truth. Truth and love always go together. And while false teachers who deny the truth are not to be shown hospitality in the name of showing love, all who embrace the truth are to be loved and cared for. Everything we do as believers is to be done within the boundaries of faithfulness to the truth.

**Gaius the Exhorter (3 John 1-8)**

Verse 1

"The elder unto the wellbeloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth."

"Elder" is a reference to John the Apostle. The word "elder" is the Greek word *presbyteros* {pres-boo-ter-os} which means "older" or "senior." As in Second John, it could be a reference to John's age but also refers to his spiritual

oversight of God's people. John is writing his third epistle to a man named "Gaius." The New Testament mentions the name "Gaius" four other times but it is not known if any of these men were the same "Gaius" addressed here (Acts 19:29; 20:4; Romans 16:23; 1 Corinthians 1:15).

John's use of the words "wellbeloved" and "whom I love in the truth" indicates that whoever this particular "Gaius" was, he was well respected and loved by John and others in the Christian community. John loved this man for the "truth" he had received as a believer. Once again we are confronted with the fact that "truth" and "love" are inseparably linked in the Christian faith. The "love" John spoke of here is more than a general love for all mankind. It is that *agapao* {ag-apah-o} self-sacrificing and unique love that believers who are faithful to the "truth" have for one another (1 Peter 1:22).

"Truth" always governs the exercise of "love." Christians have no difficulty loving those who are committed to biblical "truth." When people are committed to "truth," it solidifies every relationship with an unspeakable "love." Homes, families, and churches "love" each other when biblical "truth" is believed.

### Verse 2

"Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth."

Addressing "Gaius" as "beloved," John expresses his "wish" that Gaius may "prosper and be in health." John's prayer that Gaius may "prosper and be in health" doesn't mean he was poor and sick. This was a common greeting used in ancient letter. It's just a gracious way to start a letter.

"Wish" means "to pray." "Prosper" means "to succeed." The phrase "be in health, even as thy soul prospereth" expresses John's desire for Gaius is that his physical health would be as good as his spiritual health. Maybe we could learn something about our praying here. Don't we pray more for the physical health of people than we do their spiritual health? Could that be part of the reason we are in such bad shape spiritually? God is concerned about our physical health. But too much emphasis is being placed on the *outer man* and the *inner man* is suffering severally. Take care of your physical body (1 Timothy 4:8). But also take care of the *inner man* (Ephesians 3:16).

### Verse 3

"For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth."

We don't know who "the brethren" are that John mentions here. They might have been traveling Christians or disciples who visited with Gaius. Whoever

they were they were impressed with Gaius and told John about him. They “testified of the truth that is in thee even as thou walkest in the truth.” These “brethren” spoke highly of the character of Gaius and the fact that he lived the truth he professed. “Walkest in the truth” means what Gaius believed was evident in his daily life. He lived the “truth” he believed.

John “rejoiced” to here this about Gaius. “Rejoiced” means “he was glad, happy, and cheerful.” Most likely Gaius had opened his home to these “brethren” so they knew first hand he was genuine. When “truth” is believed and lived, it is encouraging to everyone. John rejoices in this verse. The “brethren” were obviously impressed with Gaius. Gaius must have been encouraged if he got word of what the brethren said and how John rejoiced. And certainly the lost world was better off to have men of such caliber and integrity living the truth before them.

#### Verse 4

“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.”

The Apostle John might have been old but he was a happy old man! And the reason he was is connected to the “great joy” he received when he would “hear” that his “children” were “walking in truth.” Since John refers to “my children,” it is not unreasonable to conclude that Gaius was converted under John’s ministry. Nothing brought John any “greater joy” than to “hear” or receive a report that a young convert was “walking in truth.”

“Truth” is what starts the Christian life. “Truth” is what makes the Christian life continue. The greatest joy any spiritual leader can have is to see a sinner come to Christ through the “truth” and then continue to grow in “truth.” It always refreshes the heart and soul of a pastor or Sunday school teacher to see those they have taught continue to “walk in truth.”

#### Verse 5-7

“Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers; Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well: Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles.”

In these verses John speaks in a more particular way concerning Gaius’ acts of love and generosity. Again, he addresses “Gaius” as “Beloved.” He tells Gaius that he is acting “faithfully” in “whatsoever thou doest” or whatever ministry he is involved in “to the brethren, and to strangers.” Gaius is probably giving them food and shelter. But whatever Gaius’ is doing on behalf of the brethren and strangers, he is “faithful” and John wants him to know that he is aware of it.

The brethren and strangers Gaius had helped had “borne witness” or testified “before the church” of his love and acts of kindness. “Whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort” is better understood as “whom, having brought forward on their journey.” In other words, John is asking Gaius to please keep helping those who come his way by refreshing them and supplying them with what they need to move on in their spiritual walk with God.

“Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles.” “For his name’s sake” refers to these brethren doing what they were doing in the interest of the Lord’s work. These “brethren” Gaius had fed and refreshed were doing the Lord’s work and he was supporting the Lord’s work by helping them. These “brethren” had taken “nothing of the Gentiles.” They were determined not to take any financial help from unbelievers. They were dependent upon believing brethren only. That’s why it is crucial that believers help and support one another.

Christians are coworkers with and in the truth. The world is not about to support the work of the gospel and believers should not expect support from the world. A false prophet will take help from whatever source he can get it. But the gospel message and the “truth” of God’s Word is dependent upon believers like Gaius and all those committed to “truth” and “love.”

### Verse 8

“We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellowhelpers to the truth.”

John is teaching that believers should be hospitable to other believers. “Ought” means “it’s our duty, we must, and we are indebted.” “Receive” means “take aside, be a host.” In John’s second epistle he told the elect lady to be careful not to take in deceivers and antichrist. Here, John is teaching that believers should have open hearts and homes to those true believers who are our coworkers in truth. There should be no selfishness among believers. If you see a place to help a fellow believer, help them!

Gaius was a “fellowhelper to the truth.” When he helped these brethren he shared in their work for the truth. Jesus said, *“He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward”* (Matthew 10:41-42).

### **Diotrephes the Egotist (3 John 9-11)**

## Verse 9

“I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not.”

It would be a blessing of Gaius was the main character of Third John but we are introduced to a man named “Diotrephes.” In contrast to the well-loved Gaius, John now exposes this individual in the church who was proud and self-centered. There always have been these kind of people in the church.

“I wrote unto the church” is a reference to a letter John had written to the church. This “church” was the church where Gaius was a member. Evidently John had written them a letter that they never received. The language of verse 9 suggests that Diotrephes might have intercepted the letter or destroyed it.

John’s description of “Diotrephes” is powerful. He “loveth to have the preeminence among them...” The word “preeminence” means “to be fond of being first.” It is used to describe this man who was selfish, self-centered, and self-seeking.

Now remember that this letter John is writing to Gaius is about showing love and Christian hospitality. And now John must reveal the dark side to all of that in the life of Diotrephes who was only interested in the church for what he could gain personally. Anyone who “loveth to have the preeminence” is actually replacing Christ. The Apostle Paul said, “*And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence*” (Colossians 1:18). Christ alone is to have the “preeminence.”

How is Diotrephes replacing Christ? By rejecting the Apostle John’s authority. John said, “receiveth us not.” This means Diotrephes did not accept John as God’s apostle, a true spiritual overseer of the church. He may have been envious or jealous of John.

## Verse 10

“Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church.”

Evidently John planned a visit to see Gaius and the church to which he belonged. John promised Gaius that if and when he come, he would “remember his deeds.” Simply put, John intended to deal with Diotrephes in the proper Christian manner. John is not angry or threatening. Remember, John is the

apostle of love. And there is nothing in his intention to deal with the pride of Diotrephas that is unbiblical.

John speaks of Diotrefes “prating against us with malicious words.” “Prating” only appears here in the New Testament and means “to overflow with talk.” This man was one who talked too much without saying anything of value. His talk was “malicious” or evil. It was also “against us,” a reference to John and the church. Jesus said, *“But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment”* (Matthew 12:36).

Not only was Diotrefes’ speech evil, his conduct was worse. “And not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church” means he was satisfied with just talking about the church, he refused to show Christian hospitality and respect for God’s authority and work. He refused to “receive the brethren” into his home as commanded and also interfered with those who did. He also tried to expel or dismiss those who showed hospitality to brethren and strangers out of the church.

“Diotrefes” had too much influence and power in the church. Anyone or anything that is a threat to him and his position must go. The church belongs to Jesus Christ, not one individual or one family.

#### Verse 11

“Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.”

When John said, “Beloved, follow not that which is evil,” he had Diotrefes in mind. John is telling Gaius not to let the wicked influence of Diotrefes influence him. He wanted Gaius to “follow that which is good.” It is so sad that churches that allow people like Diotrefes to rule and never discipline or replace them live to see the next generation produce more like Diotrefes. If people who love to be first aren’t dealt with biblically, someone will “follow” them and their “evil” will never end.

“He that doeth good is of God: but that doeth evil hath not seen God” simply means what it says. The person that does evil such as Diotrefes doesn’t know the first thing about biblical truth or Christianity. The person who does good such as Gaius knows God and knows the truth. The difference is not hard to discern.

#### **Demetrius the Example (3 John 12-14)**

#### Verse 12

“Demetrius hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself: yea, and we also bear record; and ye know that our record is true.”

The third character in John’s third epistle is “Demetrius.” Gaius and Demetrius are like to positive book ends with the evil Diotrephes in the middle. John describes Demetrius as a man of “good report” and “of the truth itself.” John knew him personally and so did “all men” or others in the church. And everyone knew that John’s “record is true.” What John said about this man could be trusted.

“And of the truth itself” is a beautiful testimony to Demetrius. It means that if “truth” could stand up in public like a person and testify to the righteousness and integrity of this man, it would.

#### Verse 13-14

“I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee: But I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be to thee. Our friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name.”

John closes his third epistle in much the same fashion as his second. He had “many things to write” or say but he preferred to wait until he could “see” them and “speak face to face.” He wishes them “peace” which is very fitting for a congregation of believers who had to deal with men like Diotrephas.

“Our friends salute thee” means the “friends” there with John at the time of writing send their greetings. John also ask Gaius and to “greet the friends by name” or give our love to each individual who stands with us in the truth. A heart-felt and personal ending to a heart-felt and personal letter.

#### **Conclusion**

From John’s third epistle we can learn several important truths. First, truth and love are inseparable. Where you have one you must have the other. Second, it is not difficult to love those who love truth. As you read this epistle you sense the closeness and sacrificial love John had for Gaius, Demetrius, and his Christian friends. Third, Christians cannot live in their own selfish world. There is nothing biblical about wanting to be in positions of prominence and standing in the way of others coming to Christ. Fourth, it is the duty of every Christian to abide in truth and demonstrate love to our brethren and to strangers. Fifth, no matter how powerful and ugly some professing believers can be, don’t forget the people like Gaius and Demetrius and many others who truly are coworkers with the truth.

Amen.