



THE elder unto the well beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth. 2 Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth. 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. 4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. 5 Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers; 6 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: 7 Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. 8 We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellowhelpers to the truth. 9 I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. 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. 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. 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. 13 I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee: 14 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. (3 John 1-14)

This brief commentary will complete my study of the Epistles of John (1,2,3 John). John was renowned for the depth of his love for the Lord as well as all those who belong to the Lord. In the 3rd Epistle of John, the Apostle identifies three men whom he singles out for appraisal. He judges men by the word of God as we should be doing, and too often do not, in our day. Following the example of our Lord in calling the Jewish rulers the children of their father the devil – and a generation of vipers – John conveys praise where due and condemnation where deserved.

There are no salient biblical doctrines proffered in this epistle, but there is an example of how we must love dearly those who have persevered under stressful days in the service of the Lord, and how we must avoid following the wrong man whose heart is not owned by the Holy Spirit of God.

The three men mentioned are (in order), Gaius, Diotrephes, and Demetrius. As with most of John's writings, he opens with a positive approach by commending a good and faithful servant, Gaius; rebuking a hypocritical back-biter in between (Diotrephes); and concluding with the positive praise of Demetrius.

John opens by addressing the "*well-beloved Gaius*" whom he LOVES in the truth. Since God is love, our love for others may be graduated in the degree of godly character a soul possesses and demonstrates through his life and action. This, Gaius did well. Truth being an unadulterated property of God, that truth is refined by love. "*The elder unto the well beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth.*" Note that John uses no fancy titles for his apostolic office. He humbly refers to himself as '*the elder.*' How many today seek honorifics and academic recognition when God looks on the purity of the heart and not the brain-cells of the mind.

Love always seeks and hopes the best for its object, and so does John profess the same for Gaius. "*Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.*" It is possible for the soul to be in excellent health while the body suffers many maladies; but it is a rare blessing when both body and soul are in a high state of health. It must be pointed out, however, that even pain and suffering can be the sustenance that builds a healthy and profound spiritual health. Persecution often leads to a stronger church.

John bases his love for Gaius, not on personal charms, but upon the reputable character of his service. "*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. 4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. 5 Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers; 6 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: 7 Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. 8 We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellowhelpers to the truth.*" Do we not love to hear accolades on the character and success of our children? So does the man of God who labors to bring up strong and successful workers in the Vineyard of the Lord. Not only does Gaius perform faithfully toward the brethren of the church, but also to strangers. If we love only those of our own blood, how different are we from the heathen? When a man backs up his faith with action, even strangers take note and will commend him. Gaius possessed the distinction of every true Christian in his generous nature to be charitable.. One distinct quality I admire in Gaius as revealed in John's comment is the fact that he took nothing of money or of goods from those to whom he witnessed among the Gentiles.

Though the names of three men are mentioned, observe that the letter is written directly to Gaius (see first verse).

John now turns his attention to an unsavory sort of the Church (every church has at least one and sometimes many such men). This man, Diotrephes, is proud, ambitious for power, and one who is swift to speak gossip behind the backs of his friends. "*9 I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. 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." How many churches have suffered division over such men who seek the foremost power in the Church? Unless all things flow their way, they are constantly contentious of every decision and move of the Church. The Christian is not to be foolish in overlooking dangerous weaknesses in others. We forgive serious penitents, but we do not discount the danger of future excesses. If the shepherd is to defend the flock, he must be wise to single out the masquerading wolves among them. John's best counsel is: *"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."* Churches need to restore Godly discipline among the people. We cannot condone open sin in the House of the Lord – a prominent failing of the modern church.

John turns at last to Demetrius whom he commends in the work. When men and women render faithful and persevering service to our Lord, they are worthy of commendation after the example of the Apostle John: *"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."* Not only can John attest to the character of Demetrius, but all men who know him do so as well. That is an enviable plateau of Godliness for any Christian. Note that John always emphasizes truth as a complement of love.

John closes his epistle with a benediction not only to Gaius, but to all his friends of the Church. *"13 I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee: 14 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."* Words on paper carry much weight, especially in legal terms; but there is no substitute for warm, personal visitation of friends. We could study the law and the prophets, *ad infinitum*, but we could never have so full a knowledge of God had our Lord Jesus Christ not come down to us to show us personally the character and love of the Father. So, John will visit soon and wishes Gaius to convey his greetings to all the friends – all Christians are friends. If not, what kind of brothers and sisters can they be to us and to each other?