

3 John

In 1 John the apostle discusses fellowship with God; in 2 John he forbids fellowship with false teachers; and in 3 John he encourages fellowship with Christian brothers. Following his expression of love for Gaius, John voices his joy that Gaius is persistently walking in the truth and showing hospitality to the messengers of the gospel. But John cannot commend certain others in the assembly. Diotrephes, for example, has allowed pride to replace love in his life, even rejecting the disciplining words of John. Everything that Gaius is, Diotrephes is not! John uses this negative example as an opportunity to encourage Gaius. Godly character and loyalty to the truth are never easy, but they bring God's richest commendation—and John's as well!

INTRODUCTION

In 1 John the apostle discusses fellowship with God. In 2 John he forbids fellowship with false teachers. In 3 John he 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' persistent walk in truth and for the manner in which he shows hospitality and support for missionaries who have come to his church. The phrase "send them forward on their journey" means to provide help for the missionaries' endeavors. Included in this help can be food, money, arrangements for companions, and means of travel. By supporting these men who are ministering for Christ, Gaius has become a fellow worker of the truth.

But not everyone in the church feels the same way. Diotrephes' heart is in complete opposition to Gaius' 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 He has refused a letter John has written for the church, fearing that his authority might be superseded by that of the apostle.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.

AUTHOR

Although the external evidence for 2 and 3 John is limited (there is even less for 3 John than for 2 John), what little there is consistently points to the apostle John as author. The internal evidence is stronger, and it, too, supports the apostolic origin of both letters.

The Greek titles of 1, 2, and 3 John are *Ioannou, A, B, and G*. The *G* is "gamma", the third letter of the Greek alphabet; *Ioannou G* means "Third of John."

DATE & SETTING

The parallels between 2 and 3 John suggest that these epistles were written at about the same time (A.D. 90). Early Christian writers are unified in their testimony that the headquarters of John's later ministry was in Ephesus, the principal city of the Roman province of Asia. John evidently commissioned several traveling teachers to spread the gospel and to solidify the Asian churches, and these teachers were supported by believers who received them into their homes.

Third John, probably delivered by Demetrius, was occasioned by the report of some of these emissaries (called "brethren" in this letter), who returned to the apostle and informed him of the hospitality of Gaius and the hostility of Diotrephes.