

# The Third Epistle of John

Teaching Conducted At  
West Side Church of God in Christ  
Rockford, Illinois

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*Blessings upon you, people of the most high God! As you prepare to read this brief study, it is my prayer that it will be a blessing to you. This study was conducted on March 28, 2008, at West Side Church of God in Christ in our Friday evening teaching service. I hope this study is a blessing to you and gives you the encouragement you need to dig deeper into the Word of God. I speak blessings into your lives in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*Pastor Maurice A. West – March 28, 2008*

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### THE LEGAL DISCLAIMERS

There will be various translations of the Scriptures used in our study. If we depart from the King James Version, which will be our standard, what follows are the typical translations used:

- **Amplified Bible** – The Amplified Bible. Copyright © 1965, Zondervan Publishing House.
- **Net Bible** – The Net Bible. Copyright © 1996-2003, Biblical Studies Press
- **NIV** – The New International Version. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society.
- **NKJV** – The New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.
- **NLT** – The New Living Translation. Copyright © 1996.

At various times in this study, you may also find the following designations referring to reference material used to assist in putting together this study. Direct quotations will be shown in italicized text.

- {Adam Clarke} Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Whole Bible
- {David Guzik} Pastor David Guzik. Enduring Word Ministries
- {JF&B} The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary
- {Matthew Henry} Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible in One Volume
- {Dake} Dake's Annotated Reference Bible
- {Thompson} The Thompson Chain-Reference Bible
- {McGee} Thru the Bible Commentary Series by Dr. J. Vernon McGee

If other references, commentators, or Bible translations are used they will be identified in the text.

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### INTRODUCTION TO THE THIRD EPISTLE OF JOHN

**WRITER:** The writer of this book is the Apostle John, the beloved disciple. There is little controversy about that.

**DATE:** From the commentators, we see that this book was written somewhere toward the end of the first century (85-99 A.D.) or more than 60 years after Christ left the earth.

- {McGee} *“It is now the belief of some expositors that John wrote these epistles last—after he wrote the Book of Revelation. I'm rather inclined to agree with that viewpoint. This means that these epistles were written close to the end of the first century, somewhere between A.D. 90–100, but it would be very difficult to date them exactly. John probably wrote all three epistles very close together. I don't think there would be much difference in time from one epistle to the other.”*
- {Adam Clarke} *“This and the preceding epistle are, by Dr. Lardner, supposed to have been written between A. D. 80 and 90. There are no notes of time in the epistles themselves to help us to fix any date, therefore all is conjecture concerning the time in which they were written.”*

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**STATISTICS:** {Dake} The Third Epistle of John is the 64th book of the Bible. It contains 1 chapter and 14 verses. It has no prophecies.

**INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:** {McGee} *“As we come now to the third epistle, there is a similarity to John’s second letter in some ways. It is very personal in character, and it carries the same theme of truth. Truth again is presented as all-important. When truth and love come into conflict, truth must survive. This means that you are not to love the false teacher. Walking in truth is all-important.*

*However, this third letter differs from the second in other ways... this epistle deals with personalities. Also, in the second epistle, John says that the truth is worth standing for, but in this third epistle, John’s emphasis is that the truth is worth working for. Someone has put it like this: ‘My life in God—that’s salvation. My life with God—that’s communion and fellowship. But my life for God—that’s service.’ This epistle deals with my life for God, and it has to do with walking and working in the truth. Love can become very sloppy; it can become misdirected, and it certainly can be misunderstood if it is not expressed within the boundary of truth.”*

**PURPOSE:** {Matthew Henry} *“In this epistle the apostle congratulates Gaius upon the prosperity of his soul (v. 1, 2), upon the fame he had among good Christians (v. 3, 4), and upon his charity and hospitality to the servants of Christ (v. 5, 6). He complains of contemptuous treatment by an ambitious Diotrephes (v. 9, 10), recommends Demetrius (v. 12), and expresses his hope of visiting Gaius shortly (v. 13, 14).”* This epistle is a personal letter from the Lord’s dear friend and apostle, John, to his son in the Gospel, Gaius. Everything in the letter is for Gaius’ direction.

# Chapter 1

In this very brief epistle, one of the shortest in the Bible, we have an insight into a personal letter between the Apostle John and one of his sons in the Gospel. He instructs him to stay in the truth by focusing on two extremes – the controlling, arrogant spirit of Diotrephes and the inherent goodness of Demetrius. Of course, John continues to focus on the importance of embracing the Truth throughout this epistle.

### **Opening and Greeting**

*1 The elder unto the well beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth.* According to Adam Clarke, Gaius is the Greek form of the Roman name Caius. There were five men in the New Testament with this name but this one is unique. He is called one of John's children in verse 4 so John probably converted him or they have some special relationship that developed after his conversion. There is obviously a special relationship between John and Gaius because he calls him "well beloved" and one "whom I love". So in this final epistle of the Bible, we have access into a tender note between an old apostle and his son in the Gospel. Notice how tenderly the **Message Bible** puts this opening verse – *The Pastor, to my good friend Gaius: How truly I love you!*

Notice also that John begins his last epistle with the same focus on the truth. Remember that he told us in Second John that the Truth lasts forever (2 John 2). Also, remember what I stated regarding the Truth in the study of that epistle, "What is this "Truth"? The Lord Jesus answered this question for us in His prayer to the Father before going to the cross. **John 17:17 Sanctify them through thy truth: thy WORD is truth.** So from now on, when you see that word "Truth", think of the Word of God, not as delivered through the "filters" of people with issues or the teaching of denominations, but just as it reads." Let me add this about the Truth – church truth is not always THE Truth. Churches often teach things that change over time. If it changes, it was not the Truth. Church leaders have afflicted people by church rules and regulations in the name of the Truth that changed in succeeding generations. However, THE Truth never changes. **SAINT'S PRINCIPLE: Find the Truth in the Word of God – the Bible.**

*2 Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth. Amplified Bible Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in every way and [that your body] may keep well, even as [I know] your soul keeps well and prospers.* The secret of true prosperity begins with the soul. This is one of those verses that was at one time "popular" in the church. The focus, of course, was on the word "prosper". However, we did not focus on the essential part – even as your soul prospers. {Adam Clarke} *"The prayer of St. John for Caius includes three particulars: 1. Health of body; 2. Health of soul; and 3. Prosperity in secular affairs. That thou mayest PROSPER and be in HEALTH, as thy SOUL PROSPERETH. These three things, so necessary to the comfort of life, every Christian may in a certain measure expect, and for them every Christian is authorized to pray; and we should have more of all three if we devoutly prayed for them."* **SAINT'S PRINCIPLE: There's no sense in seeking out worldly prosperity if your soul does not prosper and if your soul is prospering, it's unlikely that you'll have a love for the things of this world.**

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**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.** Gaius was a man of good reputation in the church. Dake speculates that those that told about him may have been the ministers of verses 5-8. Look at his reputation – he is a man known for having and walking in the Truth. He is a real man of the Word not just in his words but also in his deeds.

**4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.** Our joy should be in the Truth, not in denominations or in a particular doctrine but that those that come after us seek after the Truth. Again, the Truth is only discovered by study of the Word. **Acts 17:11 NIV And the people of Berea were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, and they listened eagerly to Paul's message. They searched the Scriptures day after day to see if Paul and Silas were teaching the TRUTH.**

### **Commendation to Gaius for Charitable Actions**

**5 Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers; NIV Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you.** Gaius was a WORKER in the church exercising the Truth that was in him. Many today claim to know the Truth but do nothing. **SAINT'S PRINCIPLE: The Truth cannot be in you without manifesting itself in your actions.** Too many people “talk a good line” without really having the mind and heart of Christ.

**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: NIV They have told the church about your love. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God.** {Dake} “Gaius had entertained the visiting ministers and also strangers, and had done many works of charity.”

**7 Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. SAINT'S QUESTION: Is there anything wrong with receiving help from unbelievers as you spread the Gospel?** After all, they may want to help you but may not necessarily embrace the Gospel. The “wrong” comes later (and it's not really wrong as much as an opportunity for the enemy) when the enemy works on the conscience of those unbelievers and they come to the conclusion that if the Gospel is so great, why can't God take care of His own. **SAINT'S PRINCIPLE: The Truth knows how to be wise in all things.**

**8 We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellow helpers to the truth.** Since we understand the key to verse 7, we (those of us that are not on “the field” or in the front line of spiritual warfare) ought to do what we can to help those that are on “the field” so that we might be partners with the Truth.

### **Warning Against the Spirit of Diotrephes**

**9 I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Amplified Bible I have written briefly to the church; but Diotrephes, who likes to take the lead among them and put himself first, does not acknowledge my authority**

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**and refuses to accept my suggestions or to listen to me.** What an idiot! I'm sorry but I have no other way to express this. This unnamed church, which obviously Gaius was a part of, is seeing the last of those that walk with Jesus die out but they're missing everything because of bad "leadership". (I put leadership in quotes because Diotrephes appears to be a self-appointed leader.) {McGee} "*Diotrephes is a man who puts on airs. He is pretentious. He is vainglorious. He struts around as a peacock. He has an overweening ambition. He is puffed up, inflated like a balloon. He is one whom you have to receive with a flourish of trumpets. He comes [arrives] in a blaze of glory. That's Diotrephes. John will bring five charges against him: (1) He must occupy the leading place in the church; (2) he actually refused to receive John; (3) he made malicious statements against the apostles; (4) he refused to entertain the missionaries, the ones who were traveling through the country (and the reason obviously is that he wanted to do the speaking and teaching himself); and (5) he excommunicated those who did entertain the missionaries. In other words, Diotrephes wanted to be the first exalted ruler of the church.*" Unfortunately, this spirit remains in the church. There are some that feel that they have the final word in everything and if you don't appeal to them for direction and guidance, you are rebellious. However, let us never forget this Scripture (with my emphasis added) – **Colossians 1:18** *And HE (Jesus Christ) 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.* The preeminence belongs to Christ, not to the spirit of Diotrephes and those that operate in that spirit today.

**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.** As an apostle, John had apostolic authority to correct this situation. Per Dake, this is the only threatening statement in John's writings (except, of course, his account of the words of the Lord in the Book of Revelation). He is well within his rights and responsibilities to take care of this for the sake 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.** John begins his correction with his son Gaius and warns him not to follow those that are evil but follow those that are good. How can you tell? John always uses the simplicity of the Gospel to explain this – those that are of God do good and those that do evil have not seen God. {Matthew Henry} "*The practice of goodness is the evidence of our filial happy relation to God. Evil-workers vainly pretend or boast an acquaintance with God.*"

### **Commendation of Demetrius for His Reputation**

**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.** Since John's letter is to Gaius, he wants to give him an example to follow. Unfortunately, people often emulate leaders like Diotrephes because of the positions of power and prestige they have attained in life. However, take note of this principle:

**SAINT'S PRINCIPLE: Personal success is not an indication of God's favor.**

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### **Closing**

*13 I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee: {Matthew Henry} “Many things may be more proper for immediate communication than for letter. A little personal conference may spare the time, trouble, and charge, of many letters; and good Christians may well be glad to see one another.”*

*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.*

**I pray that this brief study has been a blessing to you!**

