

### 3 John Fellow Workers for the Truth

What does it take to effectively serve God? Surprisingly little, really. We might think we need great abilities or resources. We might imagine we have to be very special people to be used in some significant way by the Almighty. If we think so we are mistaken. In this very personal letter we know as 3 John, the elderly apostle reveals that it is a very simple thing to become a fellow worker for the truth.

This letter is a partner to 2 John. In that we letter saw the importance of Christian hospitality in the days of the early church. John warned “the elect lady” about certain false teachers, “deceivers and antichrists” John called them (2 John 7-11), who would be passing through and hoping to receive hospitality – a place to stay and a chance to teach. In this letter he commends a man named Gaius for showing hospitality to some true ministers of the Word – who then brought back news of it to John, “the elder.” Gaius was a help to other Christians, especially to “strangers” who came to visit the church and to serve through teaching or evangelism.

The writer to the Hebrews reminds us,

**Hebrews 13:1-2** <sup>1</sup>*Let brotherly love continue.* <sup>2</sup>*Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.*

John wrote this letter to his friend Gaius, with three basic things in mind:

#### 3 John Outline:

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|------|--|-------|
| I.   | Reinforce right ideas about ministry.    | 1-8   |
| II.  | Warn against wrong ideas about ministry. | 9-11  |
| III. | Recommend a reputable minister.          | 12-14 |

#### I. Reinforce right ideas about ministry. 1-8

**1 the beloved Gaius** John clearly thought well of this man. He calls him “beloved” not only here but also in vv. 2, 5 & 11. We don’t know anything for sure about him other than what we find in this letter. **Gaius** may have been the most common name in the Roman world of that day, so there is really no point in trying to match him with some other NT Gaius.

**2** While most New Testament letters start with something like this, John’s introductory blessing is unique. A prayer for good health was, however, pretty normal in letters of the day.

John thinks of Gaius and knows that he is spiritually healthy. His prayer for him is that every aspect of his life would be as prosperous as his spiritual health. We can have all the blessings in the world, and there is no problem in praying for them, but a prosperous soul is the greatest blessing of all.

Here's what the Scottish Baptist Alexander MacLaren had to say about the prosperous soul:

*"The prosperous soul is the Christ-inhabited soul. By willing reception, by patient waiting, by the study of God's word, by the endeavor to bring ourselves more and more under the influence of the truth as it is in Jesus, does that truth that makes prosperity take up its abode within us. ...*

*"The prosperous soul is the soul that walks – not that sits idle – for action is the end of thought, and the purpose of the truth is to make men good, and not merely wise – a soul that acts and advances, yet never passing out of the atmosphere of the Gospel, nor going beyond the principles and motives that are laid down there. ...*

*"And so the prosperous soul is the soul that has the truth in it, and walks in the truth which it has, and does everything because it trusts in the living God and in Jesus Christ His Son."*

3-4 In all three of John's letters, he speaks of his fullness of joy resulting from things like his fellowship with his readers and their walking in the truth. (**1 John 1:4; 2 John 4; 3 John 3-4**)

In **1 John 5:6**, the apostle told us that "the Spirit is truth." Warren Wiersbe highlights the Holy Spirit's work in this way:

*"The Spirit of God uses the Word of God to reveal the Son of God, and then to enable us to obey the will of God and 'walk in truth.'" – Warren Wiersbe*

5-6 Word got back to John from travelling teachers and evangelists that Gaius was supportive of them in their ministries. The missionaries bore witness not only to John but **before the church** when they came to Ephesus. In v.3 we saw that "brethren came" and bragged about Gaius to him – what a loving, generous, hospitable brother he was. Word got around.

7 **for His name's sake** more literally, *"on behalf indeed of the name"*

ESV puts it, *"for the sake of the Name"*

In the OT there is frequent reference to the "name of the Lord" – and there was a commandment not to take "the name of Lord" in vain. The Psalms are full of praise "to the name" of the God of Israel. John the Apostle was steeped in this way of thinking. Given that OT heritage, look at the parallel John draws by attaching this expression "the Name" without any clarification to those who went out for the name of Jesus. It shows how freely and certainly he and the early church attributed full divinity to Jesus Christ. He uses this kind of terminology without explanation or qualification and simply assumes Gaius will totally understand.

Peter would agree, as he stated in Acts,

**Acts 4:12** *Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*

Paul is equally emphatic:

**Philippians 2:9-11** <sup>9</sup>Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, <sup>10</sup>that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, <sup>11</sup>and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

And remember that John is the same apostle who tells us in the introduction to his Gospel that “the Word was God.”

**Taking nothing from the Gentiles** What John means is that these workers did not rely upon non-Christian or pagan donations so support themselves. They were not simply beggars requesting money from anybody and everybody.

8 **We ... ought to receive (or “support”) such** John clearly instructs Gaius to receive or support these travelling missionary evangelists or teachers that he has sent out. They were doing the Lord’s work and he wants Gaius to join them in that.

Notice this: In the receiving or supporting of such missionaries we **become fellow workers for the truth**. John does not expect Gaius to become a travelling missionary. Gaius’s part is in hospitality or support. Yet he is a “fellow worker” – the word is related to our English word *synergy* which describes two or more things or people working together to accomplish a common goal.

The church fell into a certain error when it sharply divided congregations into *clergy* and *laity*. From that point on it became possible to think that certain people did the work of the ministry while others stood around and observed. The reality is that each of us has a specific role to play. Each member of the body has a specific calling, special gifts, and a vital role to play in the overall work of the Gospel. If any one of us neglects out duty, the whole enterprise will suffer as a result.

**Personal Illustration:** When I was young I worked for a mission organization that required a lot of cars. That organization needed mechanics who fixed and maintained cars for the glory of God. And I think of how many of you have blessed God’s people through what you do.

**Illustration: Rod Thompson**, who is at the Men’s Advance this year, first went over to Europe to help redo the plumbing at an old facility that Calvary Chapel had acquired. There was a eventually a need, so he became a missionary pastor and he stayed in Europe a total of 15 years. He now runs the large Calvary Chapel conference center in Murrieta, CA, and teaches at the Bible College there. He started by doing what he knew he could and ended up doing a lot more.

John had a high view of Gaius and what he did by receiving and supporting missionaries. As far as we know, he had an ordinary secular job – but he was nonetheless a fellow worker for the truth, just like John the apostle and just like the travelling missionaries that were so blessed by him. He served others faithfully in whatever way that he could.

5-8 **Review:** If we read 3 John alongside 2 John, we see that two distinct sets of missionaries were travelling around among the churches. Some were spreading wrong and harmful teaching. They were deceivers and antichrists and the elder warns his readers against them lest they “share in their evil deeds.” These others had gone out “for the sake of the Name.” They deserved to be given hospitality and by doing so Gaius showed that he was a fellow-worker for the truth.

## II. Warn against wrong ideas about ministry. 9-11

9-11 **Diotrephes** We said earlier that in the Roman world of that day, Gaius was an extremely common name. *Diotrephes*, by contrast, was extremely rare. An old Bible commentator named George Findlay observed that the name was only found “in noble and ancient families” and concludes that Diotrephes “belonged to the Greek aristocracy” His point is that Diotrephes, being a man of high social status, may have more naturally loved **to have the preeminence**.

At any rate, he ended up consistently opposing John and those he sent out – not a good example to follow. John plans to visit – evidently Gaius lived in close proximity to Diotrophes – and draw attention to the damage Diotrephes was doing by not working together for the truth.

An interesting point is that nowhere does John condemn the doctrine or teaching of Diotrephes. That was the main topic in **2 John** and a significant topic in **1 John** as well. As far as we know, however, Diotrophes was completely accurate – completely orthodox – in his beliefs. Right doctrine is certainly important, but right doctrine will never be enough.

His error is that he **loves to have the preeminence**. He always has to be the boss. He needs to be the center of attention. He can’t share the limelight or the leadership of the church with anybody else. His error is not in doctrine but in thinking too highly of himself – to the point of opposing even the last living apostle of Jesus Christ.

## III. Recommend a reputable minister. 12-14

12 **Demetrius has a good testimony from all** We don’t know anything about this Demetrius. It was a common name, so we don’t really even know who he was exactly. Yet we know this: He had a good reputation. Many could speak well of him including John himself. And John was convinced that the truth itself (Jesus?) spoke well of him too – a fellow-worker for the truth.

The Apostle Paul lists says the following regarding those who would qualify to be overseers or elders in the church:

**1 Timothy 3:7** *Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.*

Again Alexander MacLaren:

*“It is a very righteous and good thing that people who are not Christians should have such extremely lofty and strict standards for the conduct of people that are. We sometimes smile when we see in the newspapers, for instance, sensational paragraphs about the crime of some minister, or clergyman, or some representative religious man. No doubt a dash of malice is present in these; but they are an unconscious testimony to the high ideal of character which attaches to the profession of Christianity.”*

13-14 So John simply closes the letter. It's a warm and friendly letter to someone John knew fairly well and held in high regard. It's a glimpse into the struggles that were taking place at this early stage in the church's development.

Clearly the number of Christian workers had multiplied. Some of them were genuine fellow workers for the truth and others were not.

### 3 John

### Fellow Workers for the Truth

### Conclusions:

1. Before we knew Jesus, most of us spent our time doing things that were ultimately futile. The Apostle Peter reminds us of the change in focus that should take place. God's servant should:

**1 Peter 4:2-3** <sup>2</sup> ... *no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.* <sup>3</sup>*For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries.*

So our lives ought to be characterized by this change in focus. Our former life's work was of one kind; our present life's work is of another kind.

2. An obvious application from this letter has to do with hospitality. We may not need to exercise this practice in the same way they did in the early church, but it sure is a helpful way to enhance a church's ministry. Opening our homes is one of the simplest way to develop stronger relationships within the body of Christ.
3. Support of missionaries is still a relevant practice. Christian workers need support now as much as ever. As John points out, we can't expect the non-believers to support them. When Jesus sent out a large group of workers (70 or 72), he reminded them that "a laborer is worthy of his wages." Paul repeated the principle to Timothy who was organizing churches in Ephesus. The concept still holds true today.
4. How did Gaius become a **fellow worker for the truth**? We can't say with any certainty that he was any kind of speaker or had any special skills that would qualify him for some key position of ministry. Maybe he had great abilities, maybe not. John doesn't mention those.

We do know this: Gaius had a house – and that house was open for the Lord's servants when John sent them his way. He had a house and a heart that was open to serving Jesus.

5. What do you have? And is what you have available for the Lord to use? Let's consider some possibilities.
  - a. A car, a computer some tools?
  - b. Some ability or specific type of knowledge?
  - c. A strong back or hands that can accomplish some task?
  - d. A simple desire to serve.
  - e. An idea for a type of ministry that just doesn't seem to be getting done.
6. Offer that thing, whatever it is, to Jesus. Ask him to show you ways in which you might serve. As we've seen, it doesn't take much – but on the other hand, it ought to take everything we have. After all, it's not like we should have areas in our lives to which we would refuse Jesus access. Everything we have and everything we are ought to be open and available to him.