

An Attempt To Listen To God

A Survey of The Third Epistle of John

By

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## Introduction

The third epistle of John is one of five single chapter books in the scriptures (Obadiah, Philemon, 2 John, 3<sup>rd</sup> John and Jude). It is also one of the nine private correspondences in the New Testament (Luke's Gospel, Acts, Philemon, 1st and 2nd Timothy, Titus, Philemon, 2nd and 3rd John).

The name of Christ, Jesus, or Lord, is never mentioned in the book, the only reference being: "For His name sake". This leads to the questions:

- 1) What is the Name?
  - a) Jesus - "That at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow." (Phil. 2:10)
  - b) Lord - "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord." (Mk. 11:9-10)
  - c) Jesus Christ - "Be baptized . . . in the name of Jesus Christ." (Acts 2:38)
  
- 2) What does it mean?
  - a) The composite of all that He is in His Person, Power, Place, and Preeminence.

The fact that His name is not mentioned does not mean the book is unimportant. It is part of the inspired word and: "All scripture is given by inspiration" (2 Tim. 3:16). The name of the Lord is not mentioned in Esther, yet the workings of God are clearly manifested by the king suffering from insomnia (Est. 6:1); the reading of the chronicles (Est. 6:1-2); the never before honoring of Mordecai (Est. 6:3); and the coming in of Haman (Est. 6:4). The contents of 3rd John are similar to Philemon where the doctrines are manifested in the lives of the saints, namely Gaius and Demetrius. Sadly, the doctrine of sin is manifested in Diotrephes. There is something far more precious to God than the holding of doctrines. It is the outliving of them. The church at Ephesus was doctrinally right but they had left their first love, thus their spiritual condition was sharply different from their lifestyle.

At first reading this book seems to be the biography of three men, but it is more. It is the character of three men and the assessment of their spirituality, consequently, it is giving a foreshowing of the Judgement Seat. In school we had mid term exams to show our weakness and where changes had to be made, etc. This is an illustration of a mid term spiritual exam and giving the report on three men.

- 1) It showed where Diotrephes\* needed to radically change. His marks for love, hospitality, and helpfulness were "minus" in the examination.  
*\*Diotrephes and the Nicolaitian's.*  
*The name "Nicolaitian" comes from the Greek words "nikao" which means to overcome, and "laos" the people. They are those who suppress their teachings on others, who by their actions rule the people of God. This ruling can be done openly or can be done by adherence to the practices of the churches around, thus, from peer pressure.*
- 2) It showed where Gaius and Demetrius were "excellent" in their virtues and were "plus" in the examination.
- 3) However, the Judgment Seat goes further in that many more matters are examined and the motives and goals as well (1 Cor. 4:5).

In reading the messages to the seven churches in Asia, that which impresses one is the matter of imbalance. Ephesus was all truth and no love (Rev. 2:2-4); Thyatira was all love but no truth (Rev. 2:19-23). God wants balance and consistency, unless it is consistently repulsive as Laodicea was (Rev. 3:16). So in this church there was imbalance, in Gaius there was the extent of fellowship (v.5), but in Diotrephes there was the wickedness of exclusivism (v.9).

It is a fact that seeing an individual saved is only the beginning. We are to make disciples, not just see saved (Matt. 28:19-20) Through Acts there is constant repetition of the Kingdom of God, that is, the rule of God in the life which produces holiness is failed to be really taught.

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### The Author

While the author does not mention his name, few would disagree that it was John the apostle. He was a man marked by intolerance to that which he saw as error (Mk. 9:37); rashness in judgment (Lk. 9:54); readiness for activity (Mk. 10:35-37); his closeness to the Lord (Jn. 13:23); and his dependability (Jn. 19:26).

### The Background Of The Book Being Written

It is important to understand the chronology of 3<sup>rd</sup> John. A letter had been written by John to the church and sent by ministering brethren (v.9), however, Diotrephes refused them acceptance into the assembly and forbade anyone from so doing (vv.9 -10). Despite this, Gaius not only accepted them, but showed hospitality and helped them financially (vv.5-7). In time the Apostle John is given the report of the happenings (v.3) and he wrote this letter (v.1).

### To Whom The Book Was Written

It was written to Gaius who was one of possibly four so called individuals in the New Testament. There was a brother called Gaius in Corinth (Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 1:14), another in Macedonia (Acts 19:29), and in Derbe (Acts 20:4-5). Since this was a very common name, there is no way in which we can know if the man to whom this book was written was one of them.

### Contrasts and Similarities Between 2nd and 3rd John

There are a series of contrasts between the second and third epistles:

Subject	2 <sup>nd</sup> Epistle	3 <sup>rd</sup> Epistle
<b>Hospitality toward the saints</b>	A woman (v.10)	A man (v.6)
<b>Name</b>	Unknown	Gaius (v.1)
<b>The children</b>	Some of another's physical children are walking in truth (v.4)	Some of his own spiritual children are walking in truth (v.4)
<b>Reception</b>	The danger of receiving into the home those who should not be received (v.10)	The evilness of not receiving into the assembly those who should be received (v.9-10)
<b>Witnessing</b>	John and others bear witness to the character of the lady (v.1)	The brethren bore witness to Gaius on two levels (v. 5-6)
<b>Hospitality</b>	Warns again hospitality to the enemies of the truth (v.10)  To have shown hospitality to such, this lady would have been fellowshiping with satanic doctrine and not with God.	Encourages hospitality to those who walk and work for the truth (v.6)  To not show fellowship to these men would have been a lack of fellowship with God and fellowship with Satan.

These are also similarities:

Subject	2 <sup>nd</sup> Epistle	3 <sup>rd</sup> Epistle
<b>Love</b>	4 references (vv.1, 3, 5, 6)	5 references Love (v.1) Beloved (v.2, 5, 11) Charity (v.6)
<b>Truth</b>	5 references (vv.1, 2, 3, 4)	6 references (vv.1, 3, 4, 8, 12)
<b>Those He loves and how</b>	To the elect lady: “Whom I love in the truth” (v.1)	To Gaius: “Whom I love in the truth” (v.1)
<b>His joy</b>	“I rejoiced greatly” (v.4), having heard of her children who walk in the truth.	“I rejoiced greatly” (v.3), having heard from the brethren that his children walked in the truth.
<b>Thought flow</b>	Commendation (vv.1-7) followed by rebuke (8-11)	Commendation (vv.1-8) followed by rebuke (vv.9-11)
<b>Condemnation</b>	Of bad doctrine (v.9, 11)	Of bad conduct (v. 9-10)
<b>Both have mention of writing instruments</b>	Paper and ink (v.12)	Ink and pen (v.13)
<b>Both mention face to face</b>	Verse 12	Verse 14

### Theological Perspective

God is good and therefore any activity which is beneficial to the saints is of God. This assembly was no longer God’s assembly, but Diotrephes, in the same way that the Feasts of the Lord had become a feast of the Jews (Lev. 23:2; Jn. 5:1). God was displaced, and a man usurping the place of Christ as the head of the church locally, and rejecting all forms of biblical government with elders and deacons, ruled “as lords over God’s heritage” (1 Pet. 5:3).

### Keys

- 1) Key verse:
  - a) “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.” (v.11)
- 2) Key words:
  - a) Church (vv.6, 9 10)
  - b) Beloved (vv. 2, 5, 11)
  - c) Truth (vv.1, 3, 4, 8, 12)
- 3) Key concepts:
  - a) The reassessing of life now in view of the Judgment Seat by the evaluation of the three men mentioned.

- b) The carefulness needed in determining who is allowed to function as leaders in an assembly. Many assemblies are "directed by one man", and because of "seniority", he has the last say. Often this would not be admitted, but it is a reality.
- c) The consideration of on what grounds can someone be not allowed into the fellowship.
- d) Hospitality in the face of opposition from the "ruler" of the assembly. Hospitality was a major activity of early believers, and mention is made of several who showed this characteristic.
  - i) A man called Gaius was called "mine host" (Rom. 16:23).
  - ii) Paul writes of this in Rom. 12:13
  - iii) It ought to be a characteristic of the elders (1 Tim. 3:2)
  - iv) It is a work widows can do (1 Tim. 5:10)
  - v) It is endorsed in Heb. 13:2 and 1 Pet. 4:9
  - vi) Lydia did it (Acts 16:14-15)
  - vii) The jailor did it (Acts 16:34)
  - viii) Full time preachers are to do it (Acts 21:8)
  - ix) As well Publius (Acts 28:7), and he was not even a saved man

All this goes to show how far from God Diotrephes was.

### Words Which Are Peculiar To Third John

This epistle has only two words peculiar to it.

- 1) "Loveth to have the preeminence" (v. 9)
- 2) "Prating against" (v.10)

### Structures and Outlines

The epistle is based on three men"

Man	Reference	Characteristic
<b>Gaius</b>	Verses 2-8	Kindness and hospitality
<b>Diotrephes</b>	Verses 9-10	Evilness and sectarianism
<b>Demetrius</b>	Verses 11-12	Goodness

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**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.  
John 16:13**

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