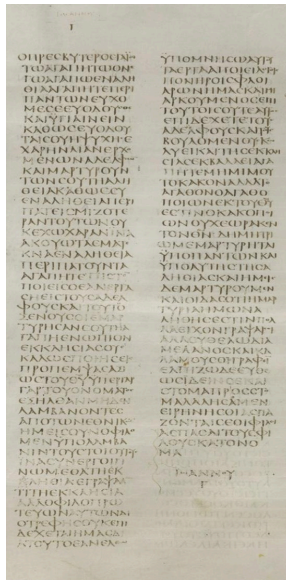


3 JOHN

Walking in the Truth

AUTHOR	The elder, the same writer as 2 John. Most of the early church said John the apostle; some think John the Elder of Papias. See What Papias Wrote in 2 John.
WRITTEN FROM	Probably Ephesus, near the end of the first century.
DATE WRITTEN	About AD 85 to 95, around the same time as 1 and 2 John.
WRITTEN TO	Gaius, a believer John loved, probably a leader with a home open to travelers. Nothing else is known about him for sure.
WHY HE WROTE	To thank Gaius for hosting missionaries, to deal with Diotrephes, who refused them, and to recommend Demetrius.
KEY VERSE	3 John 1:4. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.



3 JOHN IN CODEX SINAITICUS

Codex Sinaiticus, copied about AD 330 to 360. These two columns hold all of 3 John, from The elder, to Gaius at the top to the words Ioannou G at the bottom, meaning John's third letter. Kept at the British Library, London. Public domain.

THE OLDEST COPIES. 3 John is the shortest book in the Bible, so it rarely shows up on old scraps. The oldest copies are the two great Bibles of the 300s, Codex Sinaiticus, shown here, and Codex Vaticanus. Codex Alexandrinus follows in the 400s.

HOW IT WAS FOUND. Constantin von Tischendorf found Codex Sinaiticus at St. Catherine's Monastery at the foot of Mount Sinai in 1844 and 1859. In 1933 the British Museum bought most of it from the Soviet government for 100,000 pounds.

SLOW TO BE ACCEPTED. About AD 325 Eusebius listed 2 and 3 John among the books some still questioned, though most churches used them (Church History 3.25). The old Syriac Bible, the Peshitta, about AD 400, left out 2 and 3 John, 2 Peter, Jude and Revelation.

Historical Setting

2 John told a church not to host false teachers. 3 John is the other side of the coin: host the true ones. Missionaries went from town to town living on the kindness of believers, because they would not take money from pagans, verse 7. Gaius opened his home. But in one church a man named Diotrephes had taken charge. He would not read John's letter to the church, he spread rumors about John, and he threw out anyone who welcomed the traveling brothers. So the old apostle writes a personal note to his friend: you are doing it right, Diotrephes is not, and I am coming.

What Was Going Wrong

A CHURCH BOSS. Diotrephes loved to be first and would not accept John's letter, verse 9. **GOSSIP.** He spread wicked talk about John and the others, verse 10. **CLOSED DOORS.** He refused to welcome the missionaries and stopped others from doing it, verse 10. **KICKED OUT.** He put out of the church anyone who helped them, verse 10.

The Idiot Proof Summary

3 John is a short thank you note with a warning inside. It shows the church at ground level: real names, a guest room, a power trip, and an old pastor who just wants his kids to keep walking in the truth. It also gives the Bible's clearest word on supporting missionaries: when you send them and pay their way, you become fellow workers for the truth.

3 John at a Glance

CH 1:1 to 4	NO GREATER JOY Prayer for Gaius, walking in the truth.
CH 1:5 to 8	FELLOW WORKERS Send missionaries on their way in a manner worthy of God.
CH 1:9 to 11	DIOTREPHEs Loves to be first; do not imitate what is evil.
CH 1:12 to 14	DEMETRIUS A good report, pen and ink, face to face.

Where Jesus Shows Up

- 3 JOHN 1:7 They went out for the sake of the Name, the name of Jesus, Acts 5:41.
- 3 JOHN 1:11 Whoever does good is of God; whoever does evil has not seen God.

What to Watch for in 3 John

DEMONIC	1:11
NOTABLE	1:2, 1:4, 1:7-8
JESUS SPEAKING	Words in red are Jesus speaking, or God the Father speaking from heaven.

Cool Stuff Most People Miss

FEWEST WORDS

About 219 Greek words, the shortest book in the Bible by word count. 2 John has fewer verses.

NO JESUS BY NAME

The only New Testament book that never says Jesus or Christ. He is called the Name, verse 7.

CHURCH POLITICS

In verses 9 to 10 a local leader shuts out an apostle. Even John had a church boss problem.

TWIN ENDINGS

Verses 13 to 14 almost repeat 2 John 12. See Paper and Ink in 2 John.

A FAMOUS VERSE

Verse 2 helped launch the health and wealth movement. See the Big Question pages.

What Happened Next?

We never hear about Gaius, Diotrephes or Demetrius again in the Bible. Like 2 John, this little letter was doubted by some churches for a while, but it was accepted widely and listed by Athanasius in AD 367 among the 27 New Testament books. Nearly 1900 years later its second verse became one of the most quoted verses in the world; see Health and Wealth?

DEMONIC NOTABLE

1

CHAPTER 1 IN 30 SECONDS

The elder writes to his friend Gaius and prays he is doing as well in body as he is in soul. Gaius has been taking in traveling missionaries, and John says keep it up: helping them makes you part of the work. Then there is Diotrephes, a church boss who loves to be first, trashes John, turns the missionaries away and kicks out anyone who helps them. John says copy what is good, not what is evil, puts in a good word for Demetrius, and saves the rest for a face to face talk.

A GREETING FROM THE ELDER // 2 JOHN 1:1-3

¹The elder,

To the beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth:

²Beloved, I pray that in every way you may prosper and enjoy good health, as your soul also prospers. ³For I was overjoyed when the brothers came and testified about your devotion to the truth, in which you continue to walk. ⁴I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

GAIUS COMMENDED FOR HOSPITALITY

⁵Beloved, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, and especially since they are strangers to you. ⁶They have testified to the church about your love. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. ⁷For they went out on behalf of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. ⁸Therefore we ought to support such men, so that we may be fellow workers for the truth.

■ **3JN 1:1 [NOTE]** GAIUS. A common Roman name. This Gaius is not known from anywhere else for sure. THE ELDER. The same writer as 2 John.

■ **3JN 1:2 [NOTABLE]** A loving prayer for a friend. Is it a promise of health and wealth for every believer? See the Big Question pages in 3 John.

■ **3JN 1:2 [NOTE]** PROSPER. Does this promise health and wealth to every believer? See the Big Question pages, Health and Wealth?

■ **3JN 1:4 [NOTABLE]** What makes a spiritual father happiest is not size or money but kids who keep walking with God.

■ **3JN 1:7 [NOTABLE]** The people who send and pay for missionaries share in their work.

■ **3JN 1:7 [NOTE]** THE NAME. The name of Jesus, Acts 5:41. Gentiles here means pagans: the missionaries took no money from unbelievers, so no one could say they were selling the gospel.

DIOTREPHES AND DEMETRIUS

⁹I have written to the church about this, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will not accept our instruction. ¹⁰So if I come, I will call attention to his malicious slander against us. And unsatisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers and forbids those who want to do so, even putting them out of the church.

¹¹Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. The one who does good is of God; the one who does evil has not seen God.

¹²Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself. We also testify for him, and you know that our testimony is true.

CONCLUSION // 2 JOHN 1:12-13

¹³I have many things to write to you, but I would prefer not to do so with pen and ink. ¹⁴Instead, I hope to see you soon and speak with you face to face.

Peace to you.

The friends here send you greetings.

Greet each of our friends there by name.

DEBATED THE BIG QUESTION

HEALTH AND WEALTH?

The History of 3 John 2

3 JOHN 1:2 · DEUTERONOMY 8:18 · 2 CORINTHIANS 8:9 · 1 TIMOTHY 6:5 TO 10

THE QUESTION

Beloved, I pray that in every way you may prosper and enjoy good health, as your soul also prospers, verse 2. The KJV says I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health. Is this a promise that God wants every believer healthy and rich?

THE WORDS

Prosper is euodoo, literally to have a good road, to go well. Paul uses it for a trip going well, Romans 1:10, and for money set aside as each one prospers, 1

■ **3JN 1:9 [NOTE]** DIOTREPHES. A church leader who loved to be first. See the Field Notes page Diotrephes.

■ **3JN 1:11 [DEMONIC]** Do not imitate what is evil; whoever does evil has not seen God

■ **3JN 1:12 [NOTE]** DEMETRIUS. Probably the man carrying this letter. John vouches for him, like a letter of recommendation.

Corinthians 16:2. Be in health is hygiaino, the word our hygiene comes from.

AN EVERYDAY GREETING

Hundreds of private letters on papyrus from Roman Egypt open with almost the same line: a prayer that the reader is well. Many scholars think John is using that normal greeting, warmed up with as your soul prospers.

THE EARLY CHURCH

In the early church many believers were poor or persecuted, and wealth was more often seen as a danger than a goal, 1 Timothy 6:9 to 10.

THE 1900S

E. W. Kenyon, who died in 1948, taught that believers can speak faith into reality. In the late 1940s Oral Roberts said his Bible fell open to 3 John 2, and the verse became the heart of his ministry. He taught seed faith: give to God, and expect Him to multiply it back.

WORD OF FAITH

Kenneth Hagin, who opened Rhema Bible Training Center in 1974, and Kenneth Copeland spread the teaching that health and wealth are every believer's right, received by faith and spoken confession. It grew huge on Christian TV, then worldwide.

PUSHBACK

Gordon Fee, a Pentecostal scholar and Assemblies of God minister, wrote *The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels* in 1985. In 2008 and 2009 an African working group of the Lausanne Movement, meeting in Akropong, Ghana, called its strongest forms a false gospel.

TODAY

Pew Research surveys in 2006, in ten countries across Africa, Latin America, Asia and the United States, found that belief in God's promise of health and prosperity is very common among Pentecostals and charismatics.

Is 3 John 2 a Promise?

3 JOHN 1:2 · ISAIAH 53:5 · PHILIPPIANS 4:11 TO 13 · 2 CORINTHIANS 12:7 TO 10

VIEW 1: HEALTH AND WEALTH FOR EVERY BELIEVER

Word of Faith and many prosperity teachers. God wants you well and well off; poverty and sickness are part of the curse Jesus broke. Key verses: 3 John 2; Deuteronomy 8:18, He gives you power to get wealth; Malachi 3:10; Mark 10:29 to 30; 2 Corinthians 8:9, He became poor so you might become rich; Isaiah 53:5, by His stripes we are healed. Best case: God is a good Father, and the Bible is full of blessing on the obedient.

VIEW 2: BLESSING, BUT NO GUARANTEE

Many Pentecostals, charismatics and other believers. It is right to pray for health and success, and God often answers, but He does not owe it. Key verses: 3 John 2; Proverbs 30:8 to 9, neither poverty nor riches; Philippians 4:11 to 13, content in plenty and in want; James 5:14 to 15. Best case: it keeps both the prayer and the cross.

VIEW 3: A GREETING, NOT A PROMISE

Most Bible scholars and many church traditions. John is wishing a friend well, like letters of his day did. Turning it into a law for everyone reads too much in. Key verses: Paul was sick, Galatians 4:13; he left Trophimus sick, 2 Timothy 4:20; Timothy had a weak stomach, 1 Timothy 5:23; the thorn, 2 Corinthians 12:7 to 10; godliness is not a means of gain, 1 Timothy 6:5 to 10; believers who were poor and suffered, Hebrews 11:36 to 38. Best case: it fits the plain grammar and the whole Bible.

THE TENT MAKER ANGLE

Paul worked with his hands so he would not be a burden, Acts 18:3 and 2 Thessalonians 3:8, and he also said workers in the gospel deserve support, 1 Corinthians 9:14. Hard work and giving are both in the Bible; giving as a way to get rich is the part that is argued.

WHAT ALL AGREE ON

God cares about the whole person, body and soul. It is good to pray for a friend's health and success. John puts the soul

first: as your soul prospers. Nobody has to buy a blessing.

FIELD NOTES

DIOTREPHESES

Who Loves to Be First

3 JOHN 1:9 TO 11 · MARK 10:42 TO 45 · 1 PETER 5:2 TO 3

WHO HE WAS

A leader in a church John knew, maybe the man whose house the church met in. He is named only here. His name means raised by Zeus, a rare name found in some noble Greek families, so he may have been a man of money and standing.

LOVES TO BE FIRST

The Greek is one word, philoproteuon, first loving. It shows up nowhere else in the New Testament. Jesus said whoever wants to be first must be slave of all, Mark 10:44.

WHAT HE DID

He would not accept John's letter, he spread wicked talk about John, he refused to take in the traveling brothers, and he threw out the people who did, verses 9 to 10. That is four sins in two verses.

WHY DID HE DO IT?

Most readers think it was plain pride and control. In 1897 the historian Adolf von Harnack suggested Diotrephe was one of the first single bishops in charge of a city, pushing back against outside missionaries. In 1951 Ernst Kasemann turned it around and said Diotrephe thought the elder was the troublemaker. Neither idea can be proved; the letter gives only John's side.

JOHN'S PLAN

No secret meeting and no new rule. If I come, I will bring up what he is doing, verse 10, in the open, before the church.

GAIUS AND DEMETRIUS

Gaius was a very common Roman name; there are three other men named Gaius in the New Testament, Acts 19:29, Acts 20:4 and Romans 16:23. Demetrius may have carried this letter. Some guess he was the Ephesus silversmith of Acts 19:24 after he came to faith, but there is no proof.

WHY IT MATTERS

Church fights are not new. John's answer is short: do not imitate what is evil, but what is good, verse 11. Shepherd the flock, not as lords over them, but as examples, 1 Peter 5:3.