

INTRODUCTION TO THE THIRD EPISTLE OF JOHN

by

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Note: Author's introduction in *Notes Explanatory and Practical on the General Epistles of James, Peter, John and Jude* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1860). The text has not been modified, except that punctuation has been modernized and long paragraphs have been divided.

ANALYSIS OF THE EPISTLE

This brief epistle written to a Christian whose name was Gaius, of whom nothing more is known (Comp. Notes on ver. 1), and in respect to which the time and place of writing it are equally unknown, embraces the following subjects:

I. The address, with an expression of tender attachment and an earnest wish for his welfare and happiness (vs. 1,2)

II. A commendation of his character and doings, as the writer had learned it from some brethren who had visited him, particularly for his attachment to the truth, and for his kindness shown to the members of his own church and to strangers who had gone forth to some work of charity (vs. 3-8).

III. The writer then adverts to the fact that he had written on this subject to the church, commending these strangers to their attention, but that Diotrephes would not acknowledge his authority or receive those whom he introduced to them. This conduct, he said, demanded rebuke, and he says that when he himself came he would take proper measures to assert his own authority, and show to him and to the church the duty of receiving Christian brethren commended to them from abroad (vs. 9,10).

IV. He exhorts Gaius to persevere in that which was good--in a life of love and kindness in an imitation of the benevolent God (ver. 11).

V. Of another person--Demetrius--who, it would seem, had been associated with Gaius in the honourable course which he had pursued in opposition to what the church had done, he also speaks in terms of commendation, and says that the same honourable testimony had been borne of him which had been of Gaius (ver. 12).

VI. As in the second epistle, he says in the close that there were many things which he would be glad to say to him, but there were reasons why they should not be set down "in black and white," but he hoped soon to confer with him freely on those subjects face to face; and the epistle is closed by kind salutations (vs. 13,14).

The *occasion* on which the epistle was written is no farther known than appears from the epistle itself. From this the following facts are all that can now be ascertained:

1. That Gaius was a Christian man and evidently a member of the church, but of what church is unknown.
2. That there were certain persons known to the writer of the epistle, and who either lived where

he did or who had been commended to him by others, who proposed to travel to the place where Gaius lived. Their particular *object* is not known further than that it is said (v. 7) that they "went for his name's sake"; that is, in the cause of religion. It further appears that they had resolved not to be dependent on the heathen for their support but wished the favour and friendship of the church, perhaps designing to preach to the heathen and yet apprehending that if they desired their maintenance from them it would be charged on them that they were mercenary in their ends.

3. In these circumstances and with this view, the author of this epistle wrote to the church commending these brethren to their kind and fraternal regards.

4. This recommendation, so far as appears, would have been successful had it not been for one man, Diotrephes, who had so much influence and who made such violent opposition that the church refused to receive them and they became dependent on private charity. The *ground* of the opposition of Diotrephes is not fully stated, but it seems to have arisen from two sources: (a) a desire to rule in the church, and (b) a particular opposition to the writer of this epistle, and a denial of any obligation to recognize his instruction or commendations as binding. The idea seems to have been that the church was entirely independent and might receive or reject any whom it pleased, though they were commended to them by an apostle.

5. In these circumstances, Gaius, as an individual and against the action of the church, received and hospitably entertained these strangers, and aided them in the prosecution of their work. In this office of hospitality another member of the church, Demetrius, also shared. And to commend them for this work, particularly Gaius at whose house, probably, they were entertained, is the design of this epistle.

6. After having returned to the writer of this epistle, who had formerly commended them to the church, and having borne honourable testimony to the hospitality of Gaius, it would seem that they resolved to repeat their journey for the same purpose, and that the writer of the epistle commended them now to the renewed hospitality of Gaius. On this occasion, probably, they bore this epistle to him. See Notes on vs. 6,7.

Of Diotrephes nothing more is known than is here specified. Erasmus and Bede supposed that he was the author of a new sect. But of this there is no evidence, and if he had been, it is probable that John would have cautioned Gaius against his influence. Many have supposed that he was a bishop or pastor in the church where he resided. But there is no evidence of this, and as John wrote to "*the church*," commending the strangers to *them*, this would seem to be hardly probable. Comp. Rev. 2:1,8,12,18; 3:1,7,14. Others have supposed that he was a deacon and had charge of the funds of the church, and that he refused to furnish to these strangers the aid out of the public treasury which they needed, and that by so doing he hindered them in the prosecution of their object. But all this is mere conjecture, and it is now impossible to ascertain what office he held, if he held any. That he was a man of influence is apparent. That he was proud, ambitious, and desirous of ruling is equally clear. And that he prevailed on the church *not* to receive the strangers commended to them by the apostle is equally manifest.

Of the rank and standing of Demetrius nothing more is known. Benson supposes that he was the bearer of this letter and that he had gone with the brethren referred to to preach to the Gentiles. But it seems more probable that he was a member of the church to which Gaius belonged, and that he had concurred with him in rendering aid to the strangers who had been rejected by the influence of Diotrephes. If he had gone *with* these strangers and had carried this letter, it would have been noticed; and it would have been in accordance with the apostolic custom that he should have been commended to the favourable attention of Gaius. In regard to the authenticity and the canonical authority of this epistle, see the Introduction to the Second Epistle of John.