

# Introduction & Commentary on 2 and 3 John

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## I. Introductory Matters for 2 and 3 John

A. ***John’s Letters Form a Complementary Message.*** The letter of 1 John clearly explains the necessity of truth and love as the test of Christian fellowship. Stott describes this as “the doctrinal test” and the “social test” (*Epistles of John*. Tyndale. Stott. p. 55). The letters of 2 and 3 John apply these two principles to the practical life of the local church.

1. 2 John deals with the truth being compromised. The “elect lady,” seeks to express loving hospitality and is unwittingly supporting deceivers who are corrupting the truth about Christ. She has love, but is in danger of compromising the truth.
2. 3 John deals with love being compromised. Diotrephes is nowhere called a false teacher, but he is a false lover. His love is self-love, not brotherly love. If Gaius follows his example he is in danger of compromising love.

### 1 John

<p><b>The Need for Truth</b></p> <p>1 John 2:4,21-24; 3:7,22-24; 4:1-3, 6; 5:1-3, 10, 13, 20</p>	<p>Applied to the church</p> <p>→</p>	2 John	<b>Truth</b> must not be corrupted by false love.
<p><b>The Need for Love</b></p> <p>1 John 2:10; 3:10, 14, 16-21; 4:7-8, 11-12, 20-21; 5:16</p>	<p>Applied to the church</p> <p>→</p>	3 John	<b>Love</b> must not be corrupted by self-love.

3. These short letters of 2 and 3 John form a powerful testimony to the church of the pressing need to abide in the truth and express genuine love for the brethren.
4. In addition, the way 1, 2, and 3 John are addressed emphasizes the universality of their message. 1 John is general in nature – addressed to all. 2 John is addressed to a lady. 3 John is addressed to a man. This is a message for the entire church, every man and woman. Or, if it is believed that 2 John is addressed to a local church with the figure of an “elect lady,” then the letters are addressed to: 1 John (all); 2 John (the church), 3 John (an individual). Thus the message in these letters is for all, and needs to be applied collectively and individually.

B. ***A Message in the Flow of the Book.*** It is conjectured that 2 and 3 John were written at the same time, due to the similarity between their structure, their greetings and farewells, and because of the complimentary nature of their content. This is certainly possible. When I write a number of “thank you” notes at one sitting they do begin to sound alike. When the structure of 2 and 3 John are considered together a helpful pattern is seen. This pattern reveals a central principle upon which each letter hangs. This principle is first stated in the negative, then in the positive; and fellowship with God is at stake. Seeing the centrality of this principle allows the student to more clearly see the point John is seeking to drive home.

Elements	2 John	3 John
Greeting	:1-3	:1-4
Good qualities of the recipient	:4-6	:5-8
Evil actions of the adversaries of truth	:7-8	:9-10
Central Principle	<p>:9 – <i>Do not leave the doctrine of Christ, but abide in it. Fellowship with God depends on it.</i></p> <p><small>“Whoever runs ahead and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.” (2 John 9)</small></p>	<p>:11 – <i>Do not imitate evil, but what is good. Fellowship with God depends upon it!</i></p> <p><small>“Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God.”</small></p>
Good conduct/person is recommended	:10-11	:12
Farewell	:12-13	:13-15

*In 2 John the central principle is: Do not leave the doctrine of Christ, but abide in it, because your fellowship with God depends upon it.* It is first stated in the negative: “Whoever runs ahead and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ.” Then it is stated in the positive: “Whoever abides in the doctrine of Christ.” The choice one makes determines their fellowship with God, “has not God” or “has both the Father and the Son.” Therefore, the key to applying 2 John is having a proper desire to abide in the doctrine of Christ. This desire will help the “elect lady” refuse to support those who have left this doctrine.

*In 3 John the central principle is: Do not imitate what is evil, but what is good, because your fellowship with God depends upon it.* It is first stated in the negative: “Do not imitate what is evil.” Then it is stated in the positive: “but what is good.” Finally, the choice one makes determines their fellowship with God. Therefore, the key to applying 3 John is to be careful who you imitate. Gaius may be tempted to imitate the approach of Diotrephes and abandon his care for the brethren. However, such a choice would be a mistake and forfeit his fellowship with God.

C. ***Hospitality in the Early Church.*** The home is often the unseen yet necessary setting for the gospel story and the history of the early church. Trying to live out the implications of the gospel without the centrality of the home is like trying to bake a cake without sugar. You end up with a dry, crusty substance no one wants to touch. The role of the home in the expression of brotherly love is something the modern church has little experience with. Personal interactions take place in public spaces safely separated from where our real selves reside. There is little financial burden required to maintain the facilities for our communal meetings. A quick bill in the plate each Sunday keeps the lights on and the air-conditioners running. In the public space we are cleaned up, smiling, temporary travelers, who don’t have to reveal the grumpiness we hide in our homes. It is certainly time for the modern church to learn the meaning and application of the command to “show hospitality.”

1. *Hospitality and Meeting Needs.* Modern expressions of “hospitality” emphasize the pleasure of a party, sharing a holiday with friends or family, or letting people see the beauty of our house. Hospitality in the N.T. was about meeting needs. Someone needed a place to stay. They needed some food to eat. In fact, Jesus taught that when we have someone into our homes we shouldn’t just invite the people we like who can invite us back. Rather we are to invite those who have needs and who can’t pay us back (Luke 14:12-14).
2. *Hospitality and Love.* In addition, hospitality in the N.T. was an expression of Christian love. It was an activity especially practiced toward believers. “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another ... distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality” (Rom. 12:10,13). “Above all things have fervent love for one another...be hospitable” (1 Pet. 4:8-9). In the early church it was impossible to think of a person who loved the Lord’s people who didn’t open their home to them. That is why hospitality was required for shepherds who lead and widows who were supported (1 Tim. 3:2; 5:9). This connection between hospitality and love is essential to understanding 2 and 3 John.
3. *Hospitality and Kingdom Growth.* In the N.T. the home was the launching pad for the gospel into the world. There were not many safe and moral lodgings for traveling evangelists in the ancient world. So, for the gospel to be spread to all nations, the people of God had to open their homes. The home is where believers were cared for and fellowship was deepened. There is still no substitute for the home in the strengthening of the saints and the spread of the gospel.
  - a. In the book of Acts it was Simon the Tanner who opened his home to Peter and became the base for spreading the gospel in Joppa (Acts 9:43).
  - b. Lydia opened her home to the church and the gospel preachers to establish the loving fellowship in Philippi (Acts 16:15).
  - c. Philip opened his home to Paul and his friends in Caesarea (Acts 21:8).
  - d. Mnason of Cyprus also opened his home to Paul (Acts 21:16).
  - e. Paul asked Philemon to “prepare a guest room for him” (Philemon 22), and Paul expected Philemon would be happy to do so.
  - f. The unnamed “lady” in 2 John, and Gaius in 3 John were in the habit of opening up their homes for the believers so the gospel could spread.
4. *Hospitality Today.* Today we have hotels for traveling evangelists and we have public buildings for the worship of the church, so opportunities for hospitality are somewhat different. But when we look at the purpose of hospitality in the N.T. we find the needs still exist. Hospitality expresses love to believers in need. We can still use our homes to help believers who are in financial, emotional, or spiritual need. Hospitality was done to advance the work of the kingdom. We can still use our homes to edify believers, have Bible studies, and share the gospel with our neighbors. When we open our homes we need to ask, “What will this do for the Lord’s cause?” It is time for the modern church to rediscover, or may I even say, obey the command to “show hospitality.”

## II. 2 John – Introductory Matters

- A. ***Similarities between 1 & 2 John.*** Even the casual reader detects a number of similarities in the vocabulary, tone and theme of 1 and 2 John. Smalley writes, “The theological ideas of 2 John resemble those of 1 John very closely; so that, for example, the four conditions set out in 1 John for walking in the light and living as God’s children are echoed in 2 John (renunciation of sin, cf. vv 10–11; obedience to the love command, cf. vv 5–6; rejection of worldliness, cf. v 7; maintenance of the faith, cf. vv 1–2, 4, 9). Only in vv 10–11 is a new theme introduced.” (1, 2, 3 John. Smalley. Word. p. 315) . Kruse, in the *Pillar Commentary*, notes four similarities between 1 & 2 John.
1. *The same historical situation.* False teachers have left faithful teaches to spread errors about the nature of Jesus. “They went out from us” (1 John 2:19, 22-23 / 2 John 7)
  2. *False teaches are called “antichrist.”* (1 John 2:18, 22 / 2 John 7)
  3. *Love is commanded.* (1 John 2:7-8, “new / old command” / 2 John 4-6; see also 1 John 3:11, 23, 4:7,21; 5:1-4)
  4. *Joy in seeing believers walking in truth.* (1 John 1:3-4 / 2 John 4)
- B. ***The Deceivers of 2 John.*** The deceivers John deals with in his second letter are most likely the “false teachers” he warns about in the first letter. Both teachers seceded from the church (1 John 2:19; 2 John 7) and denied the Christ “came in the flesh” (1 John 4:2; 2 John 7). In addition, these deceivers weakened the believer’s responsibility to keep God’s commandments (1 John 2:4), and love the brethren (1 John 3:23). They tried to influence the faithful churches by intenerate preaching (1 John 2:18-19, 26; 2 John 10). They also challenged the sufficiency of apostolic teaching (1 John 5:13), and claimed to have a special anointing of the Holy Spirit which gave them further revelation (1 John 2:20, 27). In addition, they seem to treat sin lightly (1 John 1:8, 10; 3:6, 8, 10). As a result they seem to be materialist (1 John 2:15-17; 3:17). Their deceptive teaching resulted in a false view of the incarnation and vicarious death of Christ, and deemphasized the commands of Christ and the need to love fellow believers.
- C. ***Structural Considerations.*** John’s second letter is simply comprised of three parts:

A greeting – (:1-3)

A body – (:4-11)

A farewell – (:12-13)

1. *Centrality of “Truth and Love” to the Message of the Letter.* Structurally the first two sections are connected by the repeated themes of truth and love. [Love 3X and Truth 5X (:1-3) and Love/Commandment 6X and Truth/Commandment(s)/Doctrine 6X (:4-11)] The existence of truth and love presented in the greeting (:1-3), is applied to the presence of deceptive and heretical teaching in the body of the letter (:4-11).

In addition the first section (:1-3) is bracketed with “truth” and “love” being found in reverse order in verses 1, 3 “whom I love in truth” ... “in truth and love.” This inclusion emphasizes the centrality of these concepts in John’s message.

2. *The “Joy” of John’s Letter.* Structurally the second and third sections are bound together with an inclusion of “joy.” John’s present condition of “great joy” (:4) will be “made full” at their future meeting (:12). This inclusion reveals that the result of the “truth” and “love” message is the experience of Christian joy.

D. What follows is a brief outline and analysis of the text of 2 John.

### III. 2 John – A Brief Textual Analysis

A. **Opening Greeting (:1-3).** John begins with the typical A, B, Greeting found in many ancient letters. Where *A* represents the author, *B* represents the recipients of the letter, and the *Greeting* expresses the author’s well-wishes for the recipient, which is often in the form of a prayer in Biblical letters.

1. *The Author: “The Elder” (:1a).* The term “elder” refers to someone of advanced years, literally “an old person.” The presence of the article “the” reflects the unique position of the author. Elsewhere in the N.T. the term “elder” is used in the plural to refer to the leaders of a community (Matt. 28:12) or a local church (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5).
  - a. Some suppose the term “the elder” reflects the rise of a “governing bishop” who exercised oversight over a community of churches. This theory is without N.T. command or precedent.
  - b. It is more likely that John uses this term for two reasons. First, by the end of the first century the term *apostle* was commonly used for any missionary who went out in the name of Christ, therefore John’s title distinguishes his unique position. Second, the term “The elder” connects John to the earliest days of the Christian message, thus providing His message a ring of authority (note the beginning of 1 John.).
  - c. Therefore, the term “The Elder” communicates to the reader the same authority that the title “apostle” carried in the letters of Paul.
  - d. John’s choice of the title also reflects that he was well-known to the recipient.
  - e. For the identity of John as the author of this letter see the many linguistic similarities between John’s gospel and His letters, and the multiple extra-Biblical testimonies which can be found in almost any commentary. The unnamed letters of the N.T. are Hebrews, 1, 2, 3 John. While the identity of Hebrew’s author has always been in question, the authorship of John’s letters has not.
2. *The Recipients: “The elect lady and her children” (:1b)* The identity of the recipients depends on if this phrase is taken *literally* or *figuratively*.
  - a. *Literal.* This letter is addressed to a Christian lady and her children. She is evidently a widow or her husband is an unbeliever. However she uses her home for the support of gospel preachers. She is most likely unnamed, however some ascribe to her the name “Kyria” from “lady” the equivalent to “Martha” in Aramaic; others believe her name was “Electa” from the word translated “elect.”
  - b. *Figurative.* If figurative, this phrase refers to a local church collectively as an “elect lady,” and the members of the church individually as “her children.” Thus, the believer had the double identification as part of an elect lady and at

the same time being her child. It is often noted that the church is described with feminine metaphors in the N.T (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:22-33; 1 Pet. 5:13) and has precedent in O.T. references to Israel (Isa. 54-18; Lam. 1:1-7; Ezek. 23). The figurative language could protect the identity of the church in a time of persecution (yet, 3 John uses names). However, this is John! He knows how to use figurative language (see Revelation).

c. *Summary & Suggestion.* I have stood firmly on both sides and ridiculed those who stood across the interpretive gap. I refuse to do this any longer for two reasons.

- 1) First, there is simply not enough data for certainty. Commentaries present dozens of “reasons” to accept either conclusion. The large amount of differing speculation is due to the scarcity of information.
- 2) Second, it doesn’t make any difference! If written to an individual it still has authoritative application to the church, consider 1, 2 Timothy, Titus and Philemon. If written to a local church it still has authoritative application to individual families, see Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians.
- 3) Too often the message of 2 John is obscured by a meaningless debate over its original recipients. Perhaps it is best to simply refer to her as “the elect lady” throughout a study and allow the student to assign identity as he/she sees fit.
- 4) Yet, this fundamental aspect of Biblical interpretation should be at least considered: *Understand a phrase as literal unless the context requires a figurative reading.* The student who takes this phrase figuratively needs to supply some textual, theological, or historical context for their conclusion. (Note: The presence of singular and plural verbs in 2 John can be explained by the singular “elect lady” and the plural “children,” or the author’s intent for the letter to be shared with the church, as with 1,2, Timothy and Titus.)

3. *The Greeting (:1c-3).* The greeting can be divided into two sections: John’s affection for the recipients (:1c-2), and John’s hope for the recipients (:3).

a. *The Message in the Greeting.* The student cannot miss John’s emphasis on “truth,” found four times in three verses. Here “truth” does not have the meaning of “truly” or “sincerely,” but rather the truth of God revealed in the gospel that forms the basis of Christian fellowship. John is modeling how *truth* is the basis of his relationship with the lady’s family and *truth* must be the basis of the lady’s relationship with other believers because many deceivers have gone out (:7). Any fellowship that is not based on the truth is not Christian fellowship.

b. *John’s Affection for the Recipients (:1c-2).*

- 1) *John’s Affection.* John’s love for the lady and her family is based in the truth, “whom I love in truth.” The truth is what brought them into fellowship with each other and then informs them how to live in love.
- 2) *Others’ Affection.* John is not alone in his love, “also all those who have known the truth” love the chosen lady and her family. Fellowship is experienced among all those who know the truth and is expressed in love.

3) *Reason for the Affection.* “because” (*dia*) The glue of Christian fellowship is “truth.” It is when the “truth abides in us” that we are bound together. The family of God is not defined by names on buildings, or allegiances to ideologies. Those who abide in the truth abide in each other. In addition, the truth determines the expression of our love. We express a special love for those who abide in the truth, and those who seek to pervert the truth we treat differently (a key message in this letter). Wonderfully, this fellowship and love will last forever, because the truth “will be with us forever.”

c. *John’s Hope for the Recipients (:3).*

- 1) *The Content.* In light of the message of 2 John this common “prayer,” carries two important thoughts to carry forward. First, the “grace and mercy” needed should also be extended. Any reading of 2 John which excludes the expression of grace and mercy to God’s people violates John’s hope. Second, peace is a hope that is sometimes only experienced in our relationship with God. John will call for “conflict” not “peace” with the deceivers who have gone out. Thus, peace between people must be based upon the truth.
- 2) *The Source.* The unity between the Father and “the Son of the Father,” is essential in John’s writings to show that Jesus is both flesh and divine.
- 3) *The Sphere.* The Sphere in which “grace, mercy and peace” is enjoyed is “in truth and love.” The truth teaches us about God’s grace and mercy and instructs us on how to live at peace with God and others. The result is a quality of love unsurpassed by any earthly expression. Those who live in truth and love will know the fullness of God’s blessings toward them, of which John lists just three.

B. *The Body – Walk in Truth and Love (:4-11).* The body of John’s letter can be divided into five sections. The first two describe John’s actions, “I rejoice...” and “I plead...” The last two describe the lady’s actions, “Look to yourselves...” and “Do not receive.” In the middle is the problem, “many deceivers have gone out.” It may be outlined as,

I rejoice you walk in truth (:4)

I plead you will walk in love (:5-6)

Deceivers have gone out (:7)

You do not be deceived (:8-9)

You do not receive the deceivers (:10-11)

John’s instructions are to be balanced by the believer’s obedience, and this is especially vital in view of the presence of false teaching that can separate a soul from God.

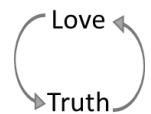
1. *Walk in Truth (:4).* Like the Lord Jesus before him, John did not derive his greatest joy from crowds, but from people’s commitment to the truth. The fact that John found “some” walking in the truth stands in contrast to “many” deceivers who have gone out (:7). This may reflect the same “few” and “many” Jesus expressed at the end of the Sermon on the Mount in the context of false teaching (Matt. 7:12-23). It is important to note that “walking in truth” is the “commandment from the Father.” In other words, walking in truth is more than

a thing believed, but a commandment obeyed. That commandment has as its source and authority, “the Father.” *The joy of gospel teachers and the identifying mark of the Father’s children is that they walk in truth.*

2. *Walk in Love (:5-6)*. Interestingly enough, “walking in truth” is not the intellectual skill of one’s mind, but the relational expression of one’s love. Thus, “walking in truth” (:4) must express itself in “walking in love” (:6).
  - a. *Plead For Love (:5)*. The priceless currency of love is worth begging for. We have difficulty expressing love in the right amount, to the right people, at the right time, and the constant pleading voice of God’s word through His servants helps us do it right.
  - b. *Love is Not New (:5)*. The law and prophets hung on the centrality of love (Matt. 22:40), its commandment is certainly not new. However, John most likely refers to how when they first believed they were commanded to love each other. You cannot learn the gospel without understanding love and expressing it. The force of John’s words are basically, “Love is fundamental to who you are in Christ, without it you cease to exist in Christ.” (See John 13:34 for the “new command” to love, which by John’s time was the old command they learned when they first believed.)
  - c. *Love One Another (:5)*. It is highly instructive that John emphasizes “loving one another,” in a period of doctrinal error. Love is always the mark of those who are Jesus’ true disciples (John 13:35). It is a family love that exists because we accept and act on the same truth that binds us together with the same Father and His Son. It is love, not of feeling only, but of the faith. A starting point for what it means to “love one another” is to express the 20 plus “one another” commands found in the N.T.
  - d. *Love Is Expressed By Keeping His Commandments (:6)*. In light of the doctrinal threat, one might think John would emphasize truth here, not love. Yet, John shows truth and love are inseparably tied together. All true love will be expressed through obedience to God’s commands. Thus, to corrupt God’s commands, i.e. teaching error, will corrupt love. Love is defined by the truth, and truth is put into action by love. There is no antagonism between love and law. Love brings law into practical expression (Matt. 22:34-39; Rom. 13:8-10; See the 10 Commandments, 1-4 how to love God; 5-10, how to love others). Love is never enhanced by laying down truth, and truth is never possessed until it expresses itself in acts of love.

Truth and love are not in opposition to one another. They work in concert with one another. Truth forms the notes which the instruments of love play and the resulting symphony bears the distinctive signature of the Composer.

- 1) The relationship between love and truth is circular. The truth teaches me how to love, and to express love rightly I’m driven back to the truth. This is why John goes back and forth between “the commandment” to love (:5,6b), and “the commandments” that come from the Father (:4,6a note plural in verse 6a). *The* commandment to love, requires obedience to the *all* the commandments, i.e. the truth, of the Father.





- 2) The relationship between truth and love are essential for the elect lady to understand, because John is about to ask her to refuse hospitality to some who claim to be disciples. On the surface this seems to be an unloving act. Yet, love is defined by the truth. When the truth is corrupted by the deceivers it is not loving to them, to the church, to the world, nor to God to aid them in their evil work. Doctrinal errors often come in the name of “love,” i.e. “This is the most loving thing to do, to believe.” Yet, a thing is only loving when it is consistent with the truth.
  - 3) Finally, it should be noted that this love is not in word, or feeling, John says we are to “walk in it” (:6). It is expressed by daily behavior. In the context of 2 and 3 John that daily behavior centered on the use of the home to encourage and support the work of the kingdom. Home is where loving one another begins.
3. *The Deceivers* (:7). John places the adversary at the center of the body of his letter. They are the problem he seeks to address with the elect lady and her children.
    - a. *Their Number*. There are “many” deceivers in contrast to “some” children in verse 4, and this requires those in God to be strong and alert, like a mouse surrounded by traps.
    - b. *Their Description*. Twice they are depicted as “deceivers.” They teach lies that deceive people into wrong ideas about Jesus. (See Gen. 3:13) They may well believe what they are teaching, but it is a lie when compared to the truth of the gospel. Those who corrupt the message of the gospel today often do so through engaging smiles, winsome words, and beautiful facilities which deceive the hearer. John says they are “antichrist,” they are acting in opposition to Christ. They spoke of Him, but what they said did not reflect the truth of who He is. The article, “the” is placed before “deceiver” and “antichrist” as an intensifier, as someone might say, “He is *the* very devil, himself.” (Other descriptions in John’s letters, Liars (1 John 2:22) False prophets (1 John 4:1), deceivers (1 John 2:26; 2 John 7), Antichrist (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7).)
    - c. *Their Mission*. “gone out into the world” This was a phrase used to describe missionary work. In 3 John a similar phrase is used to describe the evangelistic work of spreading the gospel (3 John 7; see Matt. 28:19-20). Their zealous dissimulation of error must be met with an equally energetic expression of truth and love in order to extinguish it.
    - d. *Their Message*. “do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh.” This is the same error John confronts in his first letter, where Jesus’ incarnation is a central message from first to last (1 John 1:1-4; 5:6-8), and is the defining mark of the spirit of Antichrist (1 John 4:3).
      - 1) However, in this text the present participle is used which would normally be used of a future coming, i.e. “Jesus Christ is coming in the flesh.” Yet, historically we know of no controversy about Jesus returning in the flesh. Additionally, there is no strong Biblical teaching about Jesus returning in the flesh (in fact the opposite, 1 Cor. 15:46-50). Finally, the deception John faced was a denial of the incarnation of Jesus, which started at birth and lasted through the cross. Therefore, this present participle would carry

the idea that the incarnation of Jesus was and is a living truth—this the deceivers denied.

- 2) Please note the incarnation of Jesus is a central doctrine. The action John will require of the lady and her family is not over disputable matters or a difference in application. The deceivers are corrupting the very heart of the gospel, they must not be supported.
4. *Do Not Be Deceived (:8-9)*. John expects those who “walk in truth” to have two reactions to doctrinal error. The first response is inward, the second outward; the first recognizes our own vulnerability to deception, the second calls for the courage of confrontation and removal. The order is important! Remember the “speck” and “plank” of Jesus’ illustration of judgment (Matt. 7:1-5).
    - a. *Look to Yourselves*. This was Paul’s advice to the Ephesian elders when they were told that “wolves” would arise “not sparing the flock to draw away disciples” (Acts 20:28). A good defense against false teaching is a careful examination of the genuineness of our own faith. Where pride, lust, or ignorance resides in us, error will have a way in.
    - b. *Don’t Lose Out*. In a contrastive parallel John emphasizes the danger of accepting error. It will cause one to lose work, and not receive reward. In view of the next verse this means to “not have God,” i.e. lose one’s relationship with God. (Some versions have “we” others “your.” “Your” is most likely, however the apostolic “we” is used in 1 John 1:4, and may have a parallel to 1 Cor. 3:5-15, where the Corinthians’ defection from the faith would cause Paul and Apollos loss on the day of judgment.)
    - c. *Fellowship with God is at Stake (:9)*. Verse 9 is the central principle of the letter. It is the truth everything has led up to. When someone leaves the realm of truth they leave fellowship with God, who is Truth (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 17:17).
      - 1) There is much written about the meaning of “doctrine of Christ.” If it is taken in the subjective genitive, it means “teaching Christ gave,” or in the objective genitive, it means, “teaching about Christ.” While both are grammatically acceptable most students agree in the context of John’s letters it is most certainly the teachings of Jesus through His inspired apostles and prophets. Contextually, it is equivalent to “the commandment from the Father” (:4), and “His commandments” (:6), “the commandment you heard from the beginning” (:5,6), and “the truth” in which they walked and lived (:2,3,4). Elsewhere you find the same grammatical construction with the “doctrine of the Pharisees” (Matt. 16:2); “teaching of Balaam” (Rev. 2:14); “doctrine of the Nicolaitans” (Rev. 2:15), and “the teaching of the apostles (Acts 2:42), in each case the meaning is the teaching that came from a person(s) and not the teaching about that person(s).
      - 2) “transgresses” in NKJV is better translated “runs ahead” and should be understood in light of the parallel “does not abide in the doctrine.” It simply means to teach something that is not found in the teaching from Christ (i.e. Cerinthianism, the spirit of Christ descended upon Jesus at His baptism and left the body of Jesus prior to the cross; or Docetism, Christ just seemed to have flesh).

- 3) “do not confess” These deceivers are not pictured as outright contradicting Jesus’ incarnation...they just don’t confess it. But their lack of teaching about it reveals their true belief. In other words, what we don’t talk about says something about what we believe! In addition, it may reflect the deceptive nature of these false teachers.
- 4) Believers have often struggled with this verse because of the fellowship implications introduced in verse 10, “do not receive...greet him.” Whenever a disagreement arises accusations of “transgressing” are made and fellowship is refused. When such times arise remember two things.
  - a) First, the issue John is dealing with are people who deny the incarnation of Jesus. It is hard to get more fundamental to the gospel, for without the incarnation there is no atoning sacrifice. John demanded refusal of fellowship from those who were corrupting the heart of the gospel message. This should create a bit of caution about who we declare “does not have God.” In addition, in 3 John we are taught that if we do not fellowship people who are in fellowship with God we are doing “what is evil” and we have “not seen God” (3 John 11). The latter should concern us as much as the former!
  - b) Secondly, contextually and Biblically, it would be a mistake to restrict John’s rule on fellowship only to those who deny Jesus’ incarnation. Contextually, “walking in truth” is essential for fellowship with believers and blessings from God (:1-4). Additionally, the lady is commanded to “walk in love,” which according to 1 John 4:7-8, is essential to have fellowship with God. Furthermore, throughout the N.T. believers are told to avoid fellowship with believers who are doctrinally (Rom. 16:17; Titus 3:9-11) and morally (1 Cor. 5:13; 2 Thess. 3:6-15) in error. However, such separation of fellowship was only after the preventative measures of instruction, the corrective measures of rebuke, and long hours of “patience with all” (1 Thess. 5:14). Much preferred is the work of “turning a sinner from the error of his ways” (James 5:20). However, any teaching that is not the truth; that is not commanded by the Father, will not result in Biblical love and should not be supported by the blessings of fellowship.
5. *Do Not Receive Deceivers (10-11)*. [See above for “who” these deceivers are]
  - a. *Examine the Messengers (:10)*. Since “many” deceivers have gone out, John advises them to examine what the messengers believe about the incarnation. This is the same advice given in 1 John 4:1-3. Such examination is what any good Berean listener should do (Acts 17:11). We must make sure our evaluation is according to the truth revealed, and not on our opinion, application, or texts that are “hard to understand” (2 Pet. 3:16). These require humility and patience in order to arrive at truth and maintain unity.
  - b. *Do Not Receive Them (:10)*. John has in mind here N.T. “hospitality;” giving someone a home and provisions so they can promote their message. Such activity is rarely done in the modern church in America where traveling evangelism is rarely done and hotels are easily secured and checks written. So, what application does this have today? It seems to me that any personal support of a deceiver should be avoided. However, attending a lecture or

buying a book need not be the same as “personal support.” Yet, great caution should be exercised, because those who stand in the path of sinners, end up sitting in the seat of the scornful (Psalm 1:1). This why John warns us to consider our associations.

- c. *Do Not Greet (:10)*. “greet” is probably more than a repetition of the previous phrase, but a completion of it. “Receive” has to do with the initial contact, and “greet” here with the final contact. It can be thought of as “good-bye” “well-wishes for your journey,” and probably included provisions.
- d. *The Reason (:11)*. John provides this memorable axiom as motivation for protecting our fellowship: “he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.” Again, “greet” is not a simple “hello,” but a “well-wishing” and providing that allows the deceiver to carry on his evil deeds. There is a principle in the N.T. that those who share material possessions with a preacher shares in that preachers’ work...be it good or evil (see Phil. 1:5; 4:15).

C. ***A Farewell (:12-13)***. After asking the elect lady to restrict her farewell, John offers her a farewell, which is a sign of their loving fellowship in the truth.

1. *Many Things Left to Say (:12)*. The work of instruction is never over.
2. *I Want to Say It in Person (:12)*. Instruction often does the most good when it is “face to face” or literally, “mouth to mouth.” The pulpit is grand, sitting on the front porch also has its place!
3. *Joy May Be Full (:12)*. When truth is held and lived; when love is expressed and received; a wonderful joy results. John will write in 3 John 4, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.” Loving, truthful living is what makes a godly person truly joyful (see Phil. 2:1-5). The “joy” in verse 12 forms an inclusion and completion of the “great joy” introduced in verse 4.
4. *Family Greeting (13)*. If literal, the nieces and nephews of the elect lady worship where John is living and he sends on family greetings. If figurative, the members of the church where John lives passes on greetings to the church to whom John writes. In either case, a loving fellowship of believers is celebrated at the end of a letter where error and deception has torn the family of God apart.

## IV. 3 John – Introductory Matters

[See “Introductory Matters for 2 and 3 John” above]

A. ***Centrality of “Truth and Love” to the Message of the Letter***. As with 2 John, truth expressed in love for the brethren is central to the message of 3 John.

1. Gaius is “loved in the truth” and is “of the truth” and “walks in the truth” (:1-4). And his faithfulness to the truth is seen in how he loves the brethren (:6), particularly in the area of showing hospitality to believers he did not know.
2. Conversely, Diotrephes is also a man of love, but his is self-love, which results not in loving action toward the brethren, but in rejecting them and excommunicating them.
3. Gaius, and the church, are left to choose between the good example and the evil example, and prove themselves by the way Demetrius is accepted.

B. **Structural Considerations.** John's third letter is a bit more complex in structure from his second letter. It contains five sections:

A greeting – (:1-4)

Gaius Receives Brethren – (:5-8)

Diotrephes Rejects Brethren – (:9-11)

Demetrius Needs Reception (:12)

A farewell – (:12-13)

The central place Diotrephes occupies in the structure of the letter reveals that John is concerned about the impact / influence this divisive, self-promoter might have on Gaius. John does not want Gaius to be *intimidated* by Diotrephes (3 John 10), nor does he want Gaius to *imitate* Diotrephes (3 John 11).

C. What follows is a brief outline and analysis of the text of 3 John.

#### IV. 3 John – A Brief Textual Analysis

- A. **Opening Greeting (:1-3).** John begins with the typical A, B, Greeting found in many ancient letters. Where *A* represents the author, *B* represents the recipients of the letter, and the *Greeting* expresses the author's well-wishes for the recipient, which is often in the form of a prayer in Biblical letters.
1. *The Author: "The Elder" (:1a).* For a brief explanation of this term, see comments above on 2 John 1.
  2. *The Recipient: "To the beloved Gaius"* Most commentaries chase down all the "Gaius" in the N.T. This is a fruitless activity for Gaius was as popular in John's day, as the name "John" is today. The Gaius of 3 John is most likely a faithful believer unknown elsewhere in Scripture, but known to the apostle John.
    - a. "Beloved" (*agapeto*) This could refer to John's feelings toward Gaius, "I love you," or as the NIV translates "my dear friend." However John states his love for Gaius in the next phrase, so this is unlikely. This could describe how others feel about Gaius, "He is loved by the church." This certainly makes sense in light of verse 3. A third option, which I think is most likely, is it describes God's attitude toward Gaius, "He is loved by God." In this way, "beloved" is comparable with "elect" in John's second letter. The lady is God's elect (2 John 1), and Gaius is God's beloved (3 John 1). This is the real reason they are special.
    - b. "Who I love in truth." This could simply mean, "John truly, sincerely loves Gaius." However, in John's gospel "truth" rarely, if ever, is used as an intensifier, but rather it refers to "God's truth." John and Gaius have a common appreciation for the truth; the truth is in them and they walk in it (3 John 3). This common commitment to truth creates a special love between them (See notes on 2 John 1-2).
  3. *John's Prayer.* "Beloved," is now clear this is John's attitude toward Gaius. John's prayer is that Gaius would "prosper," which is a word which literally means, "to be led along a good road," and is translated in the ESV as "go well with you." John prays for Gaius' journey through life to go well, and then he will ask Gaius to send the missionaries on their journey in such a way that their work goes well (3 John 6).

- a. “and be in health.” So many prayers for health are devoid of any spiritual goals. For a believer, good health is not an end, but a means. It is the means by which God’s work can be accomplished. John prays for Gaius’ health because (“for” v. 3) he is walking in truth, and then gives Gaius a task—care for the brethren (:6). Prayers for health should always be followed by the phrase, “so that...” kingdom work can be accomplished. The Gnostic scorn for the body is not shared by John.
  - b. “as your soul prospers.” Hiebert contains this gem, “The order is noteworthy: the spiritual is the standard of measurement for the physical! How many today, even among those who profess the name of Christ, would be willing to have this standard applied to them?” (*The Epistles of John*. Hiebert. p. 325).
4. *John’s Joy*. “I rejoiced greatly.” The body of John’s second letter is bracketed with joy—“I rejoice greatly...that our joy may be full” (2 John 4, 12). So, now John begins with a couplet of joy, “I rejoiced greatly...I have no greater joy” (3 John 3, 4). There is a connection between “truth,” “love” and “joy,” in John’s life, and there is an importance in the order. When believers are committed to “the truth” of God, this causes them to act in “love for the brethren,” and this makes true disciples very joyful.
- a. “when brethren came and testified.” Good gossip is a great thing! Joy is produced when the faithful service of saints is shared with other believers. This is contrasted with Diotrephes who is “talking wicked nonsense against” the brethren (3 John 10). How we talk about the brethren says a lot about our character!
  - b. “of the truth that is in you.” These brethren received hospitality from Gaius, and later they will “testify of [Gaius] love” (:6). However, first they witness to Gaius’ commitment to the truth. It is truth that guides love rightly, so it is of primary interest.
  - c. “just as you walk in truth.” Truth is not simply a doctrine held, but a life lived—particularly in loving service to the brethren. Oh, this is a lesson the church needs to live!
  - d. “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.” What was said specifically is now generalized. God’s workers are not joyful just because their churches are large, or their reputations are famous. Their greatest joy is to see that their influence allows people to walk in the truth. Gospel workers must get their joy from the right place. [“my children” is used throughout John’s letters and reflects John’s age, or his authority over his readers, or perhaps his identity as the one who taught them the gospel.]

## B. *Gaius Receives Brethren (:5-8).*

1. *The Body of the Letter*. The body of the text is divided into three sections, inhabited by three characters who play very different roles.

Gaius Receives Brethren – (:5-8)

Diotrephes Rejects Brethren – (:9-10)

Central Principle: Do not imitate evil, but good (:11)

Demetrius Needs Reception (:12)

The central principle of the letter is contained in verse 11, “Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good.” This gives us the interpretive key for the

letter. Gaius must be careful who he imitates. Diotrephes is an “evil” man and must not be mimicked. The coming of Demetrius will give Gaius an opportunity to show that he will imitate what is good. Therefore, “Choosing good role models” is an important lesson of this letter.

2. *The Structure of the Gaius Section.* In verses 5 - 8 John alternates between the believer’s *responsibility* toward traveling evangelists, and the *report / work* of the traveling evangelists. The flow of the section is as follows:

Gaius’ responsibility (past) (:5)

Evangelists’ Report (:6a)

Gaius responsibility (future) (:6b)

Evangelists’ Work (:7)

Believer’s responsibility (:8)

Seeing this alternating pattern allows the student to see that John is describing two major groups: The *Supporters* (Gaius and all believers) and the *Evangelists*. The comments below collect John’s teaching under these two categories.

3. *The Evangelists – Workers for the Truth.* John tells us four things regarding these traveling evangelists.
- a. *They were strangers to Gaius.* Verse 5 is literally, “brother strangers” (*adelphous xenous* – what a wonderful phrase! Brothers (intimate/cherished) who I do not know.). This phrase describes one group, not two (i.e. “brothers and strangers” NKJV). The ESV translates, “brothers, strangers as they are.” Traveling evangelists were often not known to the people who housed them. This is why the “elect lady” is told to be careful about showing hospitality. She must first check a teacher’s doctrine before giving them support (2 John 10). In this case, the love of Gaius is intensified by how he supported those who he did not know, because they knew Christ.
  - b. *They spoke well of Gaius.* They spoke of Gaius’ commitment to truth in verse 3, now they “have borne witness of [Gaius’] love” (:6). This certainly refers to the hospitality Gaius showed them, and may also include the love Gaius showed toward the believers in his local church. The traveling evangelists shared the good news of Gaius love “before the church” (:6). Good gossip is a N.T. activity! It creates joy in those who hear it, and it provides a model for others to imitate. For example, Paul bragged about the generosity of the Corinthian church to spur on greater generosity among the Macedonian churches (2 Cor. 9:2). In turn, Paul bragged about the Macedonian generosity to spur on the Corinthians’ giving (2 Cor. 8:1). We need more “bragging” (“good gossip”) about the good character and works of God’s people!
  - c. *They went out for Christ’s sake.* The traveling evangelists were not motivated by personal advancement, nor was their primary motivation the sinner’s salvation. They “went forth for His name’s sake” (:7). Christ is worthy of our praise, love, and confession. His glory is our greatest concern. So Paul wrote the purpose of his apostleship was, “for the obedience to the faith among all nations for His name” (Rom. 1:5; see “name” in Acts 3:6; 4:7, 10, 12, 17, 18, 30; 5:40, 41). Evangelists do well to put their priority in the right place—Christ’s glory—else they will corrupt the message or be discouraged in their service.

- d. *They took nothing from the Gentiles.* False teachers go out for the sake of money (1 Tim. 6:3-10). Yet, these faithful evangelists would not take money from the “Gentiles,” here meaning “pagans / unbelievers.” This removes the temptation to change the message in order to appeal to unbelievers. In addition, it allows the unbeliever to see the purity of motives of the evangelists. Paul took it even a step further. He had the right to be supported by believers for preaching the gospel (1 Cor. 9), but he denied himself that right lest he “hinder the gospel of Christ” (1 Cor. 9:12) by causing unbelievers to think he was “peddling the word of God” (2 Cor. 2:17). This is the self-sacrifice evangelists willingly accept to preach the gospel in all sincerity. This commitment should cause believers to support them even more readily.
4. *The Supporters – Fellow Workers for the Truth.* John describes the work of supporting the gospel by giving Gaius and an example (:5, 6 “you”), and then he gives a general command (:8 “we”)
- a. *Be motivated by faith.* Gaius’ support was “a faithful thing” (*piston ho*). It was the result of his commitment to God and His people. Conversely Diotrephes’ commitment was first to himself (:9). This is why he had no support for evangelists, because it didn’t do him any good. Again we see that “faith” / “truth” is the launching pad for actions of love.
- b. *Be motivated by love.* The evangelist testified of Gaius’ “love before the church” (:6). Gaius’ love was for others. Diotrephes’ love was for self. One love will support the gospel, the other love will ridicule the support of the gospel. Note that loving provision for those in need is a mark of a true disciple in 1 John (1 John 4:16-19, “Whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?”)
- c. *Warmly receive the evangelists.* “We ought to receive such” (:8). Let them have a place beside you. Treat him as a brother. This is in contrast with Diotrephes who “does not receive us” (:9). How people receive brothers they do not know says something about their commitment to truth and love; or whether they are self-centered.
- d. *Give the evangelists what they need for the future.* “If you send them forward on their journey” (:6). The phrase, “If you send” is an idiom which means “do,” or “it is your duty” (Louw & Nida. V1 p. 803). It is the responsibility of hospitality, not only to provide for the evangelist while he is with you, but also to provide for his needs so he can make the journey to his next destination. There is no tight fistness here!
- e. *Treat them as you would treat God.* “in a manner worthy of God” (:6). This phrase could mean “treat the evangelists as God has taught you.” God knows and will hold us accountable for how we treat evangelists. Or, it could mean, “Treat them in the way God would treat them.” However, it may be more accurate, and more powerful, to understand this phrase as saying, “Treat these evangelists like you would treat God Himself!” After all, they are children in His family, members of His body, and citizens in His kingdom. How we treat them says something about how we feel about God (see Luke 20:9-19, the parable of the wicked tenants).



- f. *You then become fellow workers for the truth.* “that we may become fellow workers for the truth” (:8). What a wonderful truth! Worker and supporter form one battering ram against the battlements of error and sin. This is why we must not support false teaching, “for he who greets [a false teacher] shares in his evil deeds” (2 John 11). The supporter is a fellow worker with the worker. This is a principle Jesus taught in Matthew 10:40,

“<sup>40</sup>He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. <sup>41</sup>He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward.” (Matt. 10:40-41)

This fellowship between supporter and worker goes beyond the effort itself, to the reward that effort receives from God. Now, that puts some excitement in supporting those who preach the gospel. (Note: The Philippian church’s support of Paul made them his “partners,” and resulted in worship to God and reward from God (Phil. 1:5; 4:14-20).)

- C. ***Diotrephes Rejects Brethren (:9-11).*** Gaius is the recipient of this letter, but Diotrephes is the problem. It is hard to tell if Diotrephes is a part of the local church where Gaius was a member, or whether he was in a neighboring church. In either case, John is concerned about the impact Diotrephes will have on Gaius (thus the warning in verse 11). Perhaps John is concerned that Gaius will be *intimidated* by Diotrephes into rejecting the evangelists who come from John. Or, perhaps Gaius could *imitate* Diotrephes’ terrible example.

There are two characters in this section: John and Diotrephes (with the implied presence of traveling evangelists “does not receive us” :9). Three verbs describe John’s activity toward the problem:

“I wrote...”

“I will come...”

“I will call to mind...”

In addition, John describes Diotrephes’ attitude (“loves to have the preeminence”) and actions (*words* – malicious gossip; *deeds* – rejection of brethren and excommunication of opponents.).

1. *John’s Actions of Correction.* John’s actions are divided into two parts, his *past* letter, and his *future* visit. John is not surrendering God’s people to a tyrant.
  - a. *An ineffective letter.* “I wrote to the church,” we have no record of this letter, most likely because Diotrephes disposed of it. “but Diotrephes ... does not receive us.” The letter John wrote was for “the church,” but one man made it ineffective for all. How could the church let this happen? This not only shows Diotrephes’ disrespect for apostolic authority, but it shows the churches “feared men more than God” (Matt. 10:27-30). It should be noted that John’s first approach was measured. If Diotrephes had a “good” heart he would respond to the written word—the same is still true today.
  - b. *A revealing visit.* “I will come...I will call to mind.” Blatant disobedience demands a stronger approach. For John it meant coming in person and exposing Diotrephes’ evil deeds. In the same way, Paul had to “come in

person” to confront the arrogance in the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 4:18). There is no substitute for face to face communication for solving a problem. May God’s people have the courage for such an approach (Matt. 18:15-20)

2. *Diotrephes Shameful Behavior*. John identifies the ambition and the actions of a divisive person.
  - a. *The Ambition of a Divisive Person*. “but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence.” Much is written about how Diotrephes’ name indicates he came from an aristocratic background, and this accounts for his thirst for power. This line of reasoning is speculative and meaningless. Diotrephes was not a victim of his social circumstances. He was a sinner. His problem doesn’t seem to be doctrinal, else John would certainly expose his error and counsel his removal (1 John 2:19; 2 John 10). Diotrephes error was moral, of the worst kind. He twisted love! Instead of directing love toward God or neighbor, he aimed it inward for the purpose of self-glorification. Part of the compound word “love the preeminence” (*philo(love) proteuon(first)*), is also found in Colossians 1:18 where it says Christ is “the head of the church...that in everything he might be pre eminent.” By rejecting apostolic authority and rejecting faithful evangelists Diotrephes set himself in the place of Christ in the church. Nothing is more repulsive than spiritual arrogance. Yet, God’s cause has often been afflicted with those who seek power and fame in the name of religion; and like Caiaphas before them they are willing to crucify Christ to maintain their position (John 18:14). Look carefully, for beneath every divided church lurks the ugly sin of arrogance that exalts self above the cause of Christ.
  - b. *The Actions of a Divisive Person*. Diotrephes displayed three methods of division. It begins with *words* and then goes to *deeds*.
    - 1) *First, a divisive person speaks harshly and critically of godly workers*. Diotrephes used “malicious gossip.” The word means here “empty words,” which are intended to destroy one’s reputation. The divisive person gets “credibility” by tearing down others. There is a wicked thirst among some to make a name for themselves by tearing down the reputation of others.
    - 2) *Second, a divisive person rejects fellowship with those who are in fellowship with God*. Diotrephes not only rejected John’s apostolic writings, he also rejected the men John sent to help him. “He himself does not receive the brethren” (:10). Diotrephes is disobedient to the commandment of hospitality and Christian love. But a divisive person will not allow any rivals. He/she will not yield the teaching to another. He/she will not allow others to lead.
    - 3) *Third, they use intimidation to control people*. Diotrephes put anybody who questioned him, “out of the church” (:10). Did he do this through trumped up charges and dis-fellowshipped them publicly, or did he just bully them out? The gospel is never forced upon a person. Godly teachers use careful and patient persuasion to the truth as their means of influence. Conversely the divisive person seeks to control through intimidation, like the Pharisees who kicked the former blind man out of the synagogue (John 9:13-34). But remember he was “cast out” into the arms of Jesus (John 9:35-41)! (Consider Abimelech’s willingness to kill his brothers so he can lead – Judges 9:1-6)

- c. John shows us that the church must not be inactive toward the divisive person. Many churches act quickly to remove the drunk or the adulterer, but they let the divisive person go unchallenged and the churches slowly dies. Those who love to have the power, need to have that power taken away! That is not how it works in the Kingdom of God, where only servants are meant to lead (Mark 10:35-45).
3. *Central Principle: Watch Who You Imitate (:11)*. (See “A Message in the Flow of the Book” in the introduction.) John now pauses to grab Gaius’ attention, “Beloved!” Out of love John gives Gaius a principle to live by. This principle is stated in a chiasmic format.

A – Do not imitate what is evil,  
 B – But what is good.  
 B’ – He who does good is of God,  
 A’ – He who does evil has not seen God.

John is concerned that the actions of Diotrephes will have a negative effect on Gaius. Perhaps he is concerned Diotrephes will *intimidate* Gaius into not helping the traveling evangelist. Or even worse, maybe Gaius will begin to *imitate* the arrogant ways of Diotrephes. John gives Gaius two bits of advice to steer clear of the divisive spirit.

- a. *Watch who you imitate*. “imitate” (:11). We all learn through example, therefore we need to be very careful whose example we follow. We are to be imitators of God (Eph. 5:1) and of godly people (1 Cor. 11:1). John seems to supply a good example for Gaius in Demetrius who “has a good testimony from everyone” (:12).
- b. *Your role-models will affect your relationship with God*. It probably seemed foolish not to follow the way of Diotrephes. He had the power and the popularity. But, He did not have God! Only those who do “good” show they come from God. Those who “do evil” have not even seen God. The first requirement for a good role model is, “Do they have a living, genuine relationship with God expressed through good works?” Find that person and learn from them.

D. ***Demetrius Needs Reception (:12)***. Demetrius is given as an example worthy of Gaius’ imitation. With the introduction of Demetrius John brackets his letter with “truth.” This again shows us that “truth” is an essential element in Christian fellowship.

<b>Witness</b>	<b>Gaius (:3)</b>	<b>Demetrius (:12)</b>
The Truth	“truth in you”	“from the truth itself”
The Brethren	“the brethren testified of your truth”	“good testimony from all”
John	“I rejoice that you walk in truth”	“we also bear (true) witness”

Most likely, John is recommending Demetrius, not only for imitation, but as the object of hospitality (:5-8). John is asking Gaius to receive Demetrius and help him, and not follow the example of Diotrephes. John offers three witnesses to the quality of Demetrius’ faith.

1. *Good Reputation from All.* The “all” here refers to all those who are faithful. Clearly Diotrephes would not have a favorable attitude toward him (:9). In addition, Jesus promised that the world would not have a positive attitude toward believers (Matt. 5:11-12). However, among believers who love the truth and walk in the truth Demetrius had a good reputation.
2. *Good Reputation from the Truth.* “and from the truth itself.” This is the most important witness to Demetrius’ character. His life and attitude was in line with the truth God revealed. You could see a reflection of the gospel in Demetrius’ life.
3. *Good Reputation from John.* “We also bear witness, and you know that our testimony is true.” John is staking his reputation on the quality of Demetrius’ life. Again, we see John’s commitment to truth, and this reflects the way John ended his gospel, “This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true” (John 21:24).

E. **A Farewell (:13-15).** The farewell is nearly identical to 2 John.

1. *Many Things Left to Say (:13).* The work of instruction is never over.
2. *I Want to Say It in Person (:14).* Instruction often does the most good when it is “face to face” or literally, “mouth to mouth.” The pulpit is grand, sitting on the front porch also has its place!
3. *Peace to You (:15).* The farewell of 3 John differs from 2 John with this phrase, “peace to you.” What a wonderful and needed prayer for Gaius who faces the influence of a divisive man. Those who have dealt with spiritual arrogance and division know the need for praying for peace.
4. *The Friends (:15).* John now shifts from the authoritative position of calling the believers “children” (3 John 4), to the close and friendly position of being a fellow “friend.” Similarly, Jesus was truly the Master to His disciples, and yet He graciously said, “You are my friends if you do whatever I command you...I called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you” (John 15:14-15). John has given Gaius some commands, now Gaius gets to prove his friendship. “by name” is probably an idiom that means, “every one of them.”