

3 John – Study Notes

Contextual Summary

3 John focuses on the believer's responsibility to support truth-centered ministry and to discern between faithful servants and self-promoting leaders. Addressed to Gaius, a beloved believer known for hospitality and generosity, the letter contrasts his godly example with the pride of Diotrephes, who rejected apostolic authority. John also commends Demetrius as a man of proven integrity. The epistle reveals that cooperation in gospel ministry is a matter of fellowship and reward, not salvation. Faithful support of truth-bearers honors God and secures eternal fruit.

1–2. “The elder unto the wellbeloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth. Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.”

“The elder” (ho presbyteros) is again John. His love “in the truth” (en alētheia) reflects genuine fellowship rooted in doctrine. John prays that Gaius’s physical well-being match his spiritual vitality—a reminder that grace cares for body and soul. “Prosper” (euodousthai) means to succeed in one’s journey, not material excess.

3–4. “For I rejoiced greatly... when the brethren testified of the truth that is in thee...”

Gaius’s consistent walk in truth (peripateis en tē alētheia) brought John joy. Spiritual maturity is shown by faithfulness in doctrine and conduct. Verse 4 highlights pastoral joy: “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.” This reveals fellowship fruit, not conditions for salvation.

5–8. “Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers...”

Gaius’s hospitality (philoxenia) extended to traveling ministers of the gospel. Supporting them made him a “fellow helper to the truth” (synergoi tē alētheia). Verse 8 underscores partnership: those who give to faithful servants share in their eternal reward (cf. Matt. 10:41–42).

9–10. “I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not.”

Diotrephes (philoprōteuōn—“loving to be first”) exemplifies prideful leadership that rejects apostolic authority. His actions—slander, exclusion, and abuse of influence—show self-promotion, not service. John exposes him as divisive, not unsaved, illustrating how pride destroys fellowship and witness.

11. “Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good...”

Imitation (mimou) of goodness reflects divine fellowship. The one “doing good” (ho agathopoōn) demonstrates alignment with God, while the one “doing evil” acts apart from fellowship—not necessarily unsaved, but walking carnally.

12. “Demetrius hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself...”

Demetrius’s life harmonized with doctrine. “Good report” (memartyrētai hypo pantōn) means he was universally recognized for integrity. His witness “of the truth itself” indicates that his behavior mirrored gospel consistency. John personally vouches for him, reinforcing the standard of character in ministry.

13–14. “I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee...”

John prefers personal fellowship (stoma pros stoma—“face to face”). The letter ends with mutual greetings—“Peace be to thee. Our friends salute thee.” The closing reflects affectionate partnership in grace and shared commitment to truth.

Koine Greek Linguistic Notes

Ho presbyteros (Gk., v.1): “the elder.”

En alētheia (Gk., v.1): “in truth.”

Euodousthai (Gk., v.2): “to prosper, succeed in journey.”

Peripateis en tē alētheia (Gk., v.3): “walk in the truth.”

Philoxenia (Gk., v.5): “hospitality, love for strangers.”

Synergoi tē alētheia (Gk., v.8): “fellow workers in the truth.”

Philoprōteuōn (Gk., v.9): “loving to be first, seeking preeminence.”

Mimou (Gk., v.11): “imitate, follow.”

Ho agathopoōn (Gk., v.11): “the one doing good.”

Memartyrētai hypo pantōn (Gk., v.12): “well spoken of by all.”

Stoma pros stoma (Gk., v.14): “face to face, mouth to mouth.”

Doctrinal Insight

3 John highlights cooperation in truth as a grace privilege. Faithful believers like Gaius model humility and partnership; prideful figures like Diotrophes distort ministry for self-glory. God measures service by faithfulness, not position. Supporting sound doctrine and its messengers earns eternal reward, while obstructing them invites discipline. Fellowship is maintained by aligning with truth, love, and humble service to Christ.

Free Grace Summary

Fellowship thrives where truth and love unite.

Hospitality to truth-bearers is service to God Himself.

Pride and control destroy spiritual harmony but never cancel salvation.

Partnership in ministry produces eternal reward.

God honors faithfulness over prominence.

Walking in truth guarantees inner peace and lasting joy.

The believer's calling: love the brethren, support the truth, and guard the simplicity of grace.