

PROVIDING TRUE HOSPITALITY

Please do not read these comments until you have read the Scriptures for this lesson. Begin by letting the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

Summary and Historical Background

The Apostle John wrote his Third Epistle to a friend of his, named Gaius, who was very dear to John (he called him “well beloved” in v. 1, and addressed him as “beloved” in vv. 2, 5, 11). He was a source of deep joy to John because he walked in the truth (vv. 3, 4). He was well known for his generosity and faithful hospitality to itinerant preachers (missionary evangelists) who stopped at his home (vv. 5-8).

John wrote to Gaius to encourage him to continue his hospitality and to warn him about Diotrephes who opposed any show of hospitality to these itinerant preachers. His opposition to hospitality was an attack against John as well as against the truth. John did not want Gaius to be corrupted by imitating the evil example of this wicked man, but to carry on with his good work (vv. 9-11). He then recommended Demetrius to him as one who was worthy of his hospitality (v. 12).

A key phrase in this Epistle is “the truth” (vv. 1, 3, 4, 8, 12), which has primary reference to the Scriptures, the revelation of truth from God. The Scriptures instruct believers to be hospitable as an excellent way of showing love to the brethren (Rom. 12:13; Heb. 13:1-2; 1 Tim. 5:10). Hospitality to itinerant preachers was vital to the spread of the Gospel throughout the Roman Empire because of the terrible conditions of the inns in that day. By receiving these preachers of the Gospel into one’s home and feeding them, a Christian became a partner in the spread of the Gospel (v. 8).

I. Salutation of John – 1:1-2

1:1 – “Elder” – The Apostle John used the title of his church office rather than that of his apostolic office.

“The well beloved Gaius” – John wrote to a man that was loved by many, especially those who had stayed at his home when traveling through his city as missionary evangelists. Gaius was a popular name in the Roman Empire at that time, so it is impossible to identify him. There are three men with this name in the New Testament (Acts 19:29; 20:4; Romans 16:23; 1 Cor. 1:14).

“Whom I love” – John used an emphatic word for “I.” Gaius may not have been loved by some (like Diotrephes), but he was certainly loved by John.

“In the truth” – The truth refers to the Scriptures - see the introductory notes for helpful insights,

1:2 – “I wish” – Probably should be considered a prayer of John, more than a wish.

“Above all things” – Better to translate it, “in all things.” John prayed that in all things he might prosper – physically as well as spiritually.

“Prosper” – Literally, “to be helped on one’s journey” (cf. Rom 1:10). Here it is taken in the metaphorical sense of having wealth (cf. 1 Cor. 16:2). His spiritual life was the pattern for the

wealth and health of his physical life. This shows it is correct to pray for the temporal blessings of others. Jesus also showed that kind of interest in others by healing so many people.

II. Commendation of Gaius – 1:3-8

1:3 – “Rejoiced greatly” – The reports of the prosperous health of Gaius’ soul gave John great joy (cf. v. 4). This reaction showed the spiritual health of John’s soul.

“Came and testified” – These are present participles which indicate the brethren came and witnessed to John repeatedly of the good conduct that Gaius showed them when he gave them his hospitality.

“The truth that is in you” – This refers to the Scriptural doctrine that Gaius believed; it was his creed for living his Christian life.

“Walk in the truth” – Gaius walked in the truth of God’s Word when he loved the brethren by providing financial help and hospitality to itinerant preachers that came to his home.

1:4 – “I have no greater joy” – This refers to the reports that John received. John could not have greater joy than to receive reports of his children walking in love by obeying God’s Word.

“My children” – May indicate that Gaius was John’s personal convert. Paul used this kind of terminology to refer to his converts (1 Cor. 4:14; Gal. 4:19).

“In truth” – The article is found in the Greek text and so it should be translated, “in the truth.” This strongly implies that the other references to “truth” in this Epistle are also definite and refer to the truth of the Scriptures.

1:5 – “You do faithfully” – Gaius was faithful in performing his hospitality to missionary evangelists. It was a work that grew out of the truth that was in him.

“Whatever you do” – Actually, it should read, “you work.”

“To the brethren and to strangers” – It may be that Gaius ministered to two classes of people: brethren who were strangers to him. He showed them hospitality by giving them food and shelter for a few days and possibly some money and supplies to help them get to their next preaching point. It was a work of love based upon his knowledge of the truth. The fact that these brethren were strangers to Gaius may have galled some men like Diotrophes. It seems they may have put pressure on him to stop such a practice, or be put out of the church (cf. v. 10).

1:6 – “Which have borne witness” – These brethren who were strangers to Gaius did not forget his love. Instead they gave a good report about his hospitality before the church.

“The church” – This was the church in Ephesus where John was an elder (this fact is known from historical records written shortly after John died).

“If you bring forward on their journey” – This refers to sending missionaries forward to their next place of ministry by providing them the necessary supplies for their journey.

“After a godly sort” – Gaius was to treat these missionaries in a manner that was worthy of God. Their work was God’s work, and he was to treat it as such.

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“You shall do well” – Gaius had done well in the past; now he was encouraged to do well in the future. He was not to let Diotrephes deter him from a ministry of hospitality to missionaries, even though Diotrephes opposed it.

1:7 – Two reasons are given in this verse for providing hospitality to missionaries and another reason in verse 8.

“For His Name’s sake they went forth” – These missionaries went forth on a special evangelistic mission in the name of Jesus Christ. Therefore, they were worthy of receiving hospitality from those who also love Jesus Christ. They were brethren and should help one another.

“Taking nothing of the Gentiles’ – The second reason for helping these missionaries was due to their practice of not taking (present tense) any help from the pagan Gentiles. This made it necessary for believers to help them because they had no other source for support.

1:8 – “Ought to receive such” – Believers were morally obligated to help these missionaries by giving them hospitality in their homes.

“That we might be fellow helpers to the truth” – This is the third reason for giving hospitality to missionaries. By so doing they participated in sending forth the Gospel truth as revealed in the Scriptures. This is a privilege as well as an obligation.

III. Condemnation of Diotrephes – 1:9-10

1:9 – “Wrote to the church” – John wrote to the church of which Diotrephes was a member and a leader. Some even suggest that he was the pastor of the church, but it is only conjecture. It appears that John wrote to the church to instruct the members concerning their duty to give hospitality to the missionaries who were traveling through their city. For personal reasons Diotrephes took this opportunity to oppose John’s leadership and authority in the church. Gaius seems to have been a member in this church too, but the fact that John had to inform him about the activities of Diotrephes in the church has caused some to question it. Even so, it seems more plausible to think of Gaius as a member of the church, who favored John, but was swayed by Diotrephes and his dictatorial control in the church. Fear may have blinded Gaius from the truth about Diotrephes and John was opening his eyes.

“Who loves to have the preeminence among them” – Diotrephes had a sinful ambition to be first in the church. It seems he was trying to become the most influential leader by putting down the authority of John. He loved himself rather than the Lord. He did those things that promoted himself, rather than those things that promoted Christ.

“Receives us not” – Diotrephes received not the message that John sent in the letter. He rejected John’s authority. He may have intercepted the letter before it was read to the church and destroyed it.

1:10 – “If I come” – John had every intention to come to this church and deal with the problem that Diotrephes had created (cf. v. 14). The apostle of love would not let holiness be destroyed by “love.” He would deal with the sin of Diotrephes, which is real love.

“I will remember his deeds” – When John would come, he would remind the church of the deeds of Diotrephes so that he would have to face the consequences of his sin. John named four charges against him in this verse.

“Prating against us with malicious words” – The first charge against Diotrephes was the use of his wicked tongue. “Prating” literally means to “talk nonsense.” He said things against John that were not true. His “malicious words” were wicked and vicious words.

“Neither does he himself receive the brethren” – He refused to practice hospitality. This was the second charge against Diotrephes.

“Forbids them that would” – This refers to any kind of hindrance Diotrephes could think of to stop the members of his church from showing hospitality to the brethren missionaries. This was the third charge.

“Casts them out of the church” – Diotrephes was so bold that he actually cast members out of the church for showing hospitality to the missionaries. He felt that the use of such power would make him preeminent in the church. People would follow him out of fear. This was John’s final charge.

IV. Exhortation to Gaius – 1:11

1:11 – “Follow not that which is evil” – “Follow not” is literally “stop following” or “stop imitating.” Whether Gaius had gone so far that he actually was following Diotrephes outwardly is not certain, but John must have had some reason to think that Gaius was contemplating such a move. John commanded him not to follow or imitate that evil man.

“But that which is good” – Gaius was to follow his own good example for which he was so highly loved (cf. vv. 2-8).

“Of God” – Literally, “out of God.” The person who does good works demonstrates that he is born of God. It is God’s nature in him that produces the good works (cf. 1 John 2:29). Truth (vv. 3, 4), love (v. 6), and goodness or righteousness (v. 11) are evidences of the new birth.

“Has not seen God” – This means he has not met God in a spiritual sense; he has not been born of God if he does evil works (cf. 1 John 3:6, 10).

V. Recommendation of Demetrius – 1:12

1:12 – Demetrius has a good report” – John contrasts the evil Diotrephes with the good Demetrius. Nothing for certain is known about his man’s relationship to Gaius, but he is highly recommended to him as an example of goodness. He may have been one of those members who was put out of the church by Diotrephes, but it is more likely that he was the bearer of the letter to Gaius and was a missionary on his way to his field of service. John recommended to Gaius that hospitality be given to him. He had three witnesses to his goodness: (1) all men; (2) the truth; and (3) John.

VI. Conclusion of John – 1:13-14

1:13 – “I had many things to write, but I will not” – John concluded his Second Epistle in the same manner (v. 12), and his Gospel in a similar vein of thought (21:25).

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“Pen” – The pen literally was called a “reed.”

1:14 – “Speak face to face” – John favored a personal talk over letter writing (see 2 John 12). One is more certain to get his message across correctly by talking personally.

“Friends” – An unusual designation for Christians, though not absolutely foreign to John (see John 15:15). John wanted his friends to be greeted personally, that is, “by name.”