

**IMITATE ONLY THE GOOD**  
**PREACHING THROUGH THE BIBLE: III JOHN**  
**III John 11**

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

### **A. BRIEF DESCRIPTION**

In his first letter, John reminded believers how to live in fellowship with God through Jesus Christ, warned them of coming false teachers, and encouraged them to give evidence of their eternal life by loving one another. His second letter again addressed the problem of heresy and emphasized that their fellowship with God and one another necessitated clear-cut rejection of false teachers. In his third letter, John returns to the issue of fellowship with Christians. We demonstrate this love by walking in the truth and showing hospitality to those who proclaim the gospel. There is no room in the body of Christ for the kind of pride, slander, and inhospitable spirit exhibited by Diotrephes. Instead, we show our godly character by being like Gaius and Demetrius, who imitate the good and are loyal to the truth.

### **B. TITLE**

- GREEK = **Ιοαννου Γ**—Third of John’ [gamma is the third letter in the Greek alphabet]
- LATIN = **3 Ioannis**

### **C. PLACE IN BIBLE**

- SEVENTH OF EIGHT NON-PAULINE EPISTLES
- POPULARLY [BUT INACCURATELY] KNOWN AS ‘CATHOLIC EPISTLES’
  - Because James, I Peter, and II and III John were sent to specific addressees

### **D. AUTHORSHIP**

1. NOWHERE IN THE LETTER IS THE NAME OF THE AUTHOR IDENTIFIED
2. ATTRIBUTION—‘THE ELDER’

Verse 1— *The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.*

3. TRADITIONAL VIEW—JOHN THE APOSTLE

See arguments regarding II John.

4. CHALLENGES TO JOHANNINE AUTHORSHIP

See arguments regarding II John.

### **E. JOHN THE AUTHOR**

- SEE BACKGROUND OF I JOHN

## F. SETTING

### 1. DATE AND LOCATION—CANNOT BE DETERMINED

- Probably from Ephesus—about 90 AD—shortly after **I and II John**

### 2. JOHN'S INFLUENCE

- Apparently, John oversees the churches in Asia near Ephesus
- He sends missionaries to preach the gospel and strengthen the churches

### 3. RECIPIENT—GAIUS

- A faithful and hospitable member of one of the churches John oversees

## G. STYLE

### 1. EPISTOLARY—CLASSIC STRUCTURE OF ANCIENT LETTER

- Salutation—**v1**
- Body—**vv2-12**
- Conclusion/Closing Greetings—**vv13-15**

### 2. INTIMATE—PERSONAL

- Written to a singular recipient—Gaius
- Written mostly in first person singular—eight times—**vv 1, 2, 3, 4, 9, 10, 13, 14**
- 'Dear Friend'—Beloved—**αγαπητε/αγαπητος**—**vv1, 2, 5, 11**

## H. BIBLICAL CONTEXT

### 1. COMPARISON/CONTRAST WITH II JOHN

#### a. **Similarities** (verse references are to III John)

- Both authored by 'the elder'—v1
- Recipients are those he 'loves in the truth'—v1
- Recipients cause author 'great rejoicing'—v3
- Recipients 'walk in the truth'—vv3, 5
- Each letter contains a warning
  - II Jn 7-8—beware false teachers; guard what you have
  - III Jn 9-10—beware Diotrophes and his sinful ways
- Author desires to see recipient face to face—v14
- Others send greetings—v14
- Themes of truth, love, and joy are similar

9. Structure and style are similar

**b. Differences**

<b>II John</b>	<b>III John</b>
1. Written to a woman	Written to a man
2. Written also to ‘children’	Written only to an individual
3. Some walk in the truth	Gaius and elder’s children walk in truth
4. Problem: many deceivers	Problem: one person—Diotrephes
5. Don’t welcome false teachers	It is good that you welcome strangers
6. No personal names	3 personal names: Gaius, Diotrephes, Demetrius

2. THE ONLY NT BOOK THAT DOES NO MENTION ‘JESUS’ OR ‘CHRIST’

- Only reference is indirect—to ‘the Name’—[v7](#)

3. SHORTEST BOOK IN BIBLE—[WORD COUNT IN ORIGINAL LANGUAGE]

- II John = 245 words—has fewer verses (13) than III John
- III John = 219 words—has more verses (14 or 15 depending on ms) than II John

**I. FOUR PERSONALITIES**

1. THE ‘ELDER’—[v1](#)

- The author—apparently John the Apostle

2. GAIUS—[v1](#)

- a. Common name in first century Roman Empire
- b. Three other persons in NT with this name
  - Gaius who hosted Paul in Corinth—baptized by Paul—[Rom 16:23](#); [I Cor 1:14](#)
  - Gaius of Macedonia—traveling companion of Paul—[Acts 19:29](#)
  - Gaius of Derbe—accompanied Paul into Asia—[Acts 20:4](#)
- c. Commended as a faithful member of church—[vv2-8](#)
  - Has adhered to the truth
  - Has shown hospitality to teacher(s) sent by John

3. DIOTREPHEs—[vv9-10](#)

- Arrogant church member who has tried to take over the church
- Who has been inhospitable to traveling teacher(s) sent by John
- Who has defied John’s leadership probably by rejecting a previous letter from him

4. DEMETRIUS—[vv11-12](#)

- Probably the bearer of this letter

- Commended by John to Gaius—Demetrius’s example is worthy to emulate
- The *Apostolical Constitutions* say John later appointed him Bishop of Philadelphia

## J. THEMES

### 1. WALK IN TRUTH—vv3-4

- Truth is mentioned seven times—vv 1, 3 (twice), 4, 8 12 (twice)

### 2. SHOW HOSPITALITY TO GOSPEL TEACHERS—vv5-8

### 3. IMITATE THE GOOD—vv11-12

### 4. CONCERN FOR THE CHURCH

- d. Beside Revelation—this is the only Johannine literature that mentions the ‘church’
- e. **ἐκκλησία**—mentioned three times—vv 6, 9, 10

## K. OUTLINE

SALUTATION—v1

COMMENDATION OF GAIUS—vv2-8

Walking in the truth—vv2-4

Showing hospitality to gospel teachers—vv5-8

REBUKE OF DIOTREPHES—vv9-10

IMITAGTE THE GOOD EXAMPLE OF DEMETRIUS—vv11-12

CLOSING—vv13-15

Desire to visit in person—vv13-14

Closing greeting—v15

## II. BIBLICAL TEXT

**1** *The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth. 2 Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers. 3 For I was very glad when brethren came and testified to your truth, that is, how you are walking in truth. 4 I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth. 5 Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and especially when they are strangers; 6 and they have testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. 7 For they went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. 8 Therefore we ought to support such men, so that we may be fellow workers with the truth. 9 I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. 10 For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, he himself does not receive the brethren, either, and he forbids those who desire to do so and puts them out of the church. 11 Beloved, 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. 12 Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself; and we*

*add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true. 13 I had many things to write to you, but I am not willing to write them to you with pen and ink; 14 but I hope to see you shortly, and we will speak face to face. 15 Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.*

### III. EXPOSITION

**11** *Beloved, 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.*

#### A. AN IMPERATIVE WITH DOUBLE EMPHASIS

##### 1. THE FIRST IMPERATIVE IN THE LETTER—“IMITATE!”

- The only other imperative is in the closing—**v15**—*Greet the friends by name.*

##### 2. MEANING

a. **μιμεομαι** = mimic—follow

b. In light of his earlier commendation of Gaius’s behavior

- It does not mean to *start* this—instead—*keep on* imitating the good

##### 3. DOUBLE MEANING

a. First—do not imitate what is evil—second—but [do imitate] what is good

b. Order is important

1. First imperative—points back to previous bad example

- Do not imitate—Diotrephes

2. Second imperative—points forward to good example

- Do imitate—Demetrius

#### B. IMITATION OF THE ‘GOOD’ AND NOT ‘EVIL’

##### 1. NOTICE—THIS IS NOT IMITATE THE ‘RIGHT’—AND NOT THE ‘WRONG’

- Doing ‘right’—is the emphasis of I John—see 3:7-10

##### 2. III JOHN FOCUSES MORE ON ‘GOOD’ AND ‘EVIL’

- The adjective ‘good’—and verb ‘do good’—are found only here—in Johannine letters

##### 3. ‘GOOD’ IS SIMILAR—BUT NOT THE SAME AS—‘RIGHT’

a. The ‘good’—is the result of **doing** what is ‘right’ in principle

b. It is a result—evidence—tangible proof—of being ‘right’ inside

c. It is not enough to ‘be right’—we must *act* in such a way as to produce ‘good’

- So we can benefit others—and accomplish God’s ‘good’ will
- d. When we imitate—we follow something we can see
1. We cannot follow ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ intentions—that are unseen
  2. We can only follow the example of ‘good’ or ‘evil’ actions
- e. When we set a ‘good’ example for others
1. They do not see our right/wrong intentions—our convictions
  2. They see *actions* that are either ‘good’ or ‘evil’—that *reflect* our convictions

#### 4. JOHN GIVES TWO EXAMPLES

a. Diotrephes was ‘wrong’ inside—but imitating him would be to follow his ‘evil’ example

1. Evil example—arrogantly taking over
  - Wrong principle—pride
2. Evil example—opposing/repudiating John
  - Wrong principle—rebellion
3. Evil example—rejecting teachers
  - Wrong principle—unloving/selfish/inhospitable

b. Demetrius

1. Was ‘right’ inside—imitating him would be to follow his ‘good’ example
  - Good example—good testimonies
  - Right principle—living by the truth
2. Evidence—testimony/witness—of Demetrius’s ‘goodness’
  - a. John uses the word ‘witness’ three times—in **verse 12**
    - ⤴ Demetrius has a ‘good testimony’ from everyone
    - ⤴ We add our ‘testimony’
    - ⤴ You know our ‘testimony’ is true

b. Explicit evidence

- ⤴ The testimony of everyone who knows him
- ⤴ The evidence of ‘truth’—that he embodies
- ⤴ The testimony of the ‘elder’ himself

#### 5. THREE ACTIONS—IN THIS LETTER—TO IMITATE

- Walk in the truth—**vv3-4**
- Love [before the church]—**v6**

- Support fellow workers—**v8**

## 6. OTHER EXAMPLES

- a. Paul exhorts readers to follow his example

**I Cor 4:16**—*Be imitators of me*—see also **II Th 3:7, 9**

- b. The supreme example—Jesus Christ

**I Cor 11:1**—*Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ*

### *The Imitation of Christ (1418-1427)*

By Thomas a Kempis (1380-1471)—*Devotio Moderna*

Most widely read devotional book next to the Bible—over 2000 editions

Translated into more languages than any other book beside the Bible

Influenced most of the Protestant Reformers through the Brethren of Common Life

## C. THE ONE WHO DOES GOOD IS OF GOD

### 1. PARALLELS SIMILAR PASSAGES IN I AND II JOHN

**1 Jn 2:29**—*everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.*

**I Jn 3:6**—*No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him.*

**I Jn 4:6**—*We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.*

**II Jn 9**—*the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son*

### 2. IMITATION OF THE GOOD IS IMPORTANT

- a. Not only to produce good effects
- b. But to give evidence that one's spiritual relationship with God is 'right'