

3 John: Notes to Gaius, A Trusted Friend

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Abstract

In this lecture on 3 John, Dr. Robert Yarbrough examines the briefest book of the New Testament through a two-step interpretive framework focusing on historical observation and contemporary application. He explores the personal dynamics between the apostle John and three key individuals: Gaius, commended for his spiritual health and hospitality toward traveling gospel workers; Diotrephes, rebuked for his self-exalting pride and defiance of apostolic authority; and Demetrius, held up as a trustworthy model of Christian integrity. Yarbrough highlights how active, faithful discipling creates a rich relational network and legacy within the church, serving as a vital antidote to modern isolation and spiritual anxiety.

Outline

I. Introduction to 3 John and Canonical Context

- A. Overview of 3 John as personal correspondence to Gaius
- B. Place of 3 John in the broader Christian canon (66 books: 39 OT, 27 NT)
- C. The P-M-E-E-C biblical framework:
 - 1. Preparation (Old Testament): Foreshadows and prepares for Christ
 - 2. Manifestation (Four Gospels): Reveals the incarnation and work of Jesus
 - 3. Expansion (Acts): Traces the growth and spread of the Gospel
 - 4. Explanation (Epistles): Demonstrates practical Christian life in community
 - 5. Consummation (Revelation): Portrays ultimate fulfillment into eternity
- D. Assurance of God's flawless Word and divine protection (Proverbs 30:5)

II. Two-Step Interpretive Framework

- A. Step 1: See (Observe the "Then and There" historical context of scripture)
- B. Step 2: Say (State conclusions faithful to history for the "Here and Now")

III. Greeting and Commendation of Gaius (3 John 1–4)

- A. Analysis of the writer's self-designation as "the elder"
 - 1. Humility of leadership: Numbers himself among church elders without self-exaltation

2. Comparison to Peter's usage in 1 Peter 5:1

B. The "Agape Force Field" and relational thickness

1. Expression of affection ("Beloved", "love in truth")
2. Interplay of love and prayer as calling cards of believers

C. Holistic concern for well-being

1. Rejoicing in both physical health and spiritual soul-health
2. Rejection of prosperity/health-and-wealth gospel extrapolations

D. Joy in spiritual integrity and children walking in truth

1. Delight in hearing of Gaius's fidelity to Christ
2. Building a legacy of faithful discipleship across decades
3. Reflection on personal inheritance of faith and long-term perseverance

IV. Commendation of Hospitality and Support for Missionaries (3 John 5–8)

A. Practical support for traveling ministers (propempo)

1. Welcoming brothers who travel for the sake of "the Name"
2. Provision of food, lodging, and financial resources worthy of God

B. Rejection of support from non-believers (Gentiles)

C. Shared missionary mandate

1. Supporting gospel workers makes believers fellow workers for the truth
2. Discernment in supporting legitimate, vetted Christian ministries

V. Confronting Toxicity: Dealing with Diotrephes (3 John 9–10)

A. Profile of Diotrephes

1. "The one who loves being first" (auton Diotrephes / prominence-seeking leader)
2. Open rejection and defiance of apostolic authority
3. Spreading wicked nonsense and false accusations against John

B. Destructive behavior in congregation

1. Refusal to show hospitality to traveling brothers
2. Forbidding others from welcoming ministers
3. Excommunicating and casting faithful believers out of the church

C. Historical and modern implications of toxic leadership

1. Reality of unregenerate or power-hungry individuals assuming church leadership
2. Impairment of Christ's dominical mission by rival human authorities
3. Necessity of biblical church discipline and doctrinal accountability
4. Refutation of modern critical views painting John as the aggressor

VI. Model of Integrity: Commendation of Demetrius (3 John 11–12)

A. Exhortation to imitate good, not evil

1. Moral test of discipleship: Good conduct reflects origin in God
2. Warning against falling under Diotrephes's harmful influence

B. Threefold testimony confirming Demetrius

1. Testimony from the general Christian community
2. Testimony from the truth itself (life aligned with Gospel)
3. Personal apostolic testimony of John

VII. Concluding Remarks and Final Greetings (3 John 13–14)

- A. Preference for personal, face-to-face communion over pen and ink
- B. Pronouncement of peace (shalom) and mutual greetings among "friends"
- C. Gospel fellowship as an antidote to modern anxiety, loneliness, and digital isolation
- D. Lasting power of Christ's presence in sustaining interpersonal connection for God's glory