

International Bible Lessons Commentary

3 John 1:1-15

English Standard Version

International Bible Lessons

Sunday, May 3, 2015

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The [**International Bible Lesson**](#) (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, May 3, 2015**, is from **3 John 1:1-15**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** discusses *Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further* to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [*International Bible Lessons Commentary*](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. A podcast for this commentary is also available at the [*International Bible Lesson Forum*](#).

International Bible Lesson Commentary

3 John 1:1-15

(3 John 1:1) The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.

John's letter reveals the difference that one person can make for good or evil in the church and world. The only details about Gaius that we can learn are from this letter by John. John obviously loved Gaius in the Lord and as an exemplary and trustworthy Christian in the church, who as a leader did and would do what some refused to do. John gave a reason for his love of Gaius; they both loved the truth and lived in truth.

(3 John 1:2) Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul.

John knew that Gaius was spiritually mature and in a right relationship with Jesus Christ as his Lord, Whom Gaius loved and obeyed. Knowing Gaius was morally and spiritually healthy, John prayed for Gaius' physical health and total well-being in all areas of his life. Since the letter was probably on a small scroll or because the letter followed the format of lengthy letters, the letter began by identifying the sender and a prayer for the named recipient that revealed something about their relationship.

(3 John 1:3) For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth.

“The friends” was a respected name or title that John used in his letter to describe a group who came to visit him at his church. They came from the church where Gaius was respected by them. John knew that Gaius would be a reliable person to complete any assigned tasks, because Gaius was faithful to the truth and his way of life was consistent with the truth, especially as Jesus Christ was the truth. Witnesses testified to this with a testimony that could be accepted according to biblical standards or a court of law.

(3 John 1:4) I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

John’s gospel and letters reveal the great joy he felt when he learned that a person or church were living consistent Christian lives; when they were learning the truth of Jesus Christ and the Christian faith and then conforming their thoughts, their spiritual life, and their everyday life in the world to the truth as quickly as they learned the truth.

(3 John 1:5) Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are,

In a time when it might have been dangerous to openly identify some person or group as “Christian,” the use of the title “friends,” would not alarm hostile authorities. Christians knew Jesus in “the truth,” but to the unbeliever “walking in the truth” might only seem to be a philosophical or ethical ideal. When a group identified themselves as “friends” or “friends of the truth,” even though they were strangers, Gaius showed them hospitality and did for them what ever needed to be done as faithfully as he could in every situation. Notice what John wrote in his gospel about Jesus calling His true followers “friends:” “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father” (John 15:13-15).

(3 John 1:6) who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God.

Again, John used a legal term, “testified.” He wrote that the friends “testified” as witnesses that Gaius loved the church. Gaius did what he could to help the church and those who visited him and his church from other churches, even though he did not know many of them personally. Since Gaius walked in the truth, John encouraged him to send the friends on (perhaps as traveling missionaries) with the needed resources that were worthy of a gift from God, the one who provided all that believers need to serve Him. They were not to be given merely the leftovers, but to be treated as God would treat them through His people.

(3 John 1:7) For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles.

“The friends” were most likely traveling evangelists or missionaries that were, perhaps, sent out by John himself. “The friends” sent John reports or came back to him and “testified” to what they did and how they were treated by the churches and towns they visited. They served God and others “for the sake of Christ,” and not for “the sake of money” or other selfish reasons. They relied on Christ and His followers to meet their needs rather than take any support from non-Christians (non-believers).

(3 John 1:8) Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.

Those who rely on Christ alone and prayer alone for their support as they work hard for the sake of Christ need to be helped by the church and other Christians – not by giving them what they would normally cast-off as unfit for use by themselves, but by giving in a manner that God himself would give if He appeared and gave personally. By supporting Christian workers, believers can become co-workers “with the truth,” “with Christ,” and “with other Christians” in leading people to become Christians and in helping Christians do the work of God in the world. John emphasized the crucial goal of being a co-worker “with the truth” and not just with anyone who wants our support or claims to be a Christian, because some are self-centered deceivers instead of Christ-centered.

(3 John 1:9) I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority.

Diotrephes was the bad example in John’s letter. Diotrephes “put himself first” or made himself more important than Jesus Christ and other believers. Since Diotrephes intercepted John’s letter to the church to prevent it from being read to the church, we know that Diotrephes was a recognized leader or elder in the church with the power to block John and other Christian leaders from communicating with the church. Diotrephes refused to acknowledge the authority of anyone but himself, even the authority of Christ and His Word, because he “put himself first.” Therefore, John wrote his letter to Gaius and wanted to visit Gaius and the church personally to solve this problem.

(3 John 1:10) So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.

John’s letter shows the importance of needing to confront a leader or teacher in a church who is conducting leadership for himself first instead of for the sake of Christ. John wrote what he would do when he came to the church, so we can find good guidance

here for similar situations. In his letter, John wrote that he would call attention to or reveal the fact that Diotrephes was spreading false charges (lies) against him and others. He would point out the fact that Diotrephes even expelled from the church those he did not like or who believed and walked in the truth as John did. Diotrephes put himself in a more important place than Jesus Christ. Diotrephes was telling lies about those who were truly following Christ and living and giving by faith in Jesus Christ. Diotrephes had become a dictator in the church and a traitor to the Lord Jesus Christ by preventing the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ, by afflicting those who promoted the truth of Jesus Christ, and by casting the faithful followers of Jesus Christ out of the church. John said he would come and confront this false leader or teacher. In the meantime, he wrote Gaius and warned him about Diotrephes. Probably neither the church nor Gaius knew what evils Diotrephes was involved in, and John probably did not learn about them until the traveling evangelists reported back to John, which prompted his letter to Gaius as a trustworthy follower of Jesus Christ in the truth.

(3 John 1:11) Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God.

John commanded that Diotrephes should not be imitated; his evil should not be repaid with evil, but he needed to be disciplined for the evil he was doing and for the sake of Christ and His Church. People in the church needed to learn that Diotrephes was putting himself first ahead of Christ, and they needed to follow Christ and walk in the truth instead of in the misleading steps of someone who put themselves first. Imitating what was good and speaking the truth about Diotrephes telling lies and hindering people from coming to Christ was the beginning of the discipline that he might need. Hopefully, he would repent and put Christ first. You can tell whether someone who claims to be a Christian is truly from God by evaluating their behavior. Jesus taught, “You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles?” (Matthew 7:16).

(3 John 1:12) Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself. We also add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true.

In contrast to Diotrephes, Demetrius was an example of a good Christian and possibly a potential church leader to replace Diotrephes. John hoped to come soon to bring about the changes in the church that were needed. John used the words “testified” and “testimony” again because what was said about Demetrius was true and could be relied upon even in a court of law or during a trial. Demetrius was from God and the truth about him was so obvious through his good behavior that “the truth itself” testified favorably for him and so did John and other evangelists – and Gaius knew they spoke

the truth, unlike Diotrephes, the liar who defamed the character of John and others by spreading false charges against them.

(3 John 1:13) I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink.

John had much to write about the situation facing the church under the leadership of Diotrephes, who may have been the chief preacher or teacher in the church. However, John did not want Gaius and others in the church to discipline Diotrephes without John being present. He hoped to restore love and truth under the Lordship of Christ in the church; therefore, he needed to demonstrate some of the best ways to discipline a church leader or member who was doing evil by being present with them.

(3 John 1:14) I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face.

Diotrephes was not just adversely treating John in a personal way; he was adversely mistreating the entire church and the mission of the traveling evangelists and missionaries; therefore, John hoped to travel soon to see Gaius and by talking together face to face they could pray, plan, and prepare to solve the problems the church faced as Diotrephes put himself first above Christ, the church, and respected church leaders.

(3 John 1:15) Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends, each by name.

Letters often concluded with a prayer for peace for the recipient. John's prayer for peace was particularly appropriate for Gaius and his fellow Christians because of the hostile situation in their church and perhaps because of persecution by enemies of Christ outside the Church. The friends who had returned to John from Gaius' church sent their greetings to Gaius. And John wanted Gaius to greet all of the friends of Christ who knew John by name personally. The Bible does not tell us what happened as a consequence of John's visit or how the situation regarding Diotrephes was resolved.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Give some reasons John loved Gaius.
2. Why do you suppose it was well with Gaius' soul?
3. What gave John "no greater joy"?
4. How did "the friends" conduct their ministry?
5. When we support true Christian workers, what do we become?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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