



## 3 John

3 John has the feel of a much more personal letter than 2 John. It is written by someone simply called the elder (whom we assume to be John the elder) to his friend Gaius. In the letter John begs for Gaius' help in tackling Diotrephes who was refusing to acknowledge John's authority. John appears to be asking for Gaius' help – or at least for his loyalty against Diotrephes.



### How long will it take?

**Reading time:** 2 mins  
**Short of time?** It's only 15 verses, why not read it all!



### Genre

Epistle



### Inspiring quotes

I have no greater joy than this, to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

*(3 John 1.4)*

Beloved, do not imitate what is evil but imitate what is good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God.

*(3 John 1.11)*



### Anything tricky?

Not so much tricky for us as for John. The question of authority in the early Church was a difficult one. In particular how you know who to trust and who not to trust, in the days before the New Testament

was written and accepted as canon and before there were any creeds, how would you know who to trust and who not to trust? You can feel this issue lurking behind 3 John.



## About the Author

3 John states that it is a letter from 'the elder'. We assume that this is John the elder as in 2 John but who he was is not very clear. In the first century, as now, the name John was very common.

Debates about the authorship of the Johannine material (i.e. John's Gospel, 1, 2 and 3 John and Revelation) are extensive and marked by a lack of agreement.

- Some, though not many, think the same author wrote all 5 books
- Others think that one author wrote the Gospel and Epistles but another wrote Revelation
- Others again think that one author wrote the Gospel and 1 John; another wrote 2 and 3 John and another again wrote Revelation

It is interesting to read all 5 books together and see what you think!

### *What do we know about him?*

**John the apostle.** If this is the John, then, he was the brother of James, called by Jesus to follow him early in his ministry. He is often thought to be the beloved disciple of John's Gospel, if he was then Jesus handed over care for his mother to him on the cross. Christian tradition states that he took her to live in Ephesus, where he lived to a ripe old age (around 100).

**John the elder.** In other words a different John who was an elder and prophet in the early church but not John the apostle. If it is this John we know very little about him other than this.



## About the times

Given the uncertainty about dating it is hard to know when 2 John might have been written. Most scholars would argue that it dates from the late 1st century ad, probably in the 90s ad.

### *What were people feeling?*

Behind this letter lies the question of authority. John was frustrated that Diotrephes refused to accept his authority – the challenge of the early church was how to know who to trust and who not to trust.



## How is it structured?

1	Opening
2-8	Reflections on walking in the truth and on hospitality
9-12	The problem posed by Diotrephes
13-15	John's travel plans



## What kind of Book is it?

An epistle. 3 John is a personal letter in every way. 'The elder' felt bruised by Diotrephes refusal to accept his leadership.



## Look out for...

As in 2 John the theme of truth and living in the truth is important in 3 John, look out for the theme and ask yourself what it means to John. Hospitality is another key theme – keep an eye open for it.

Ask yourself who Diotrephes might have been (hint no one really knows!) from what you read see if you can piece together something about the conflict between him and John.



## What could this mean for me?

From what John says about hospitality is there anything for us to learn about how we should offer hospitality today?



## Discussion group questions

- Were there any parts of the book that you particularly liked or which inspired you?
- Were there any parts of the book that you disliked or which troubled you?
- What did *you* think the book was about?
- Imagine you are a member of Gaius' congregation and you see John and Diotrephes in conflict about who has authority in the community. How would you go about deciding who to trust?
- Hospitality was a crucial theme for the early Christians – how good are we at hospitality today and what might we need to do to become better at it?
- 'do not imitate what is evil but imitate what is good' (3 John 1:11). Talk about this – what do you think it might mean in practice?
- Did you read anything in the book that touched you, expanded your faith or made you think more deeply about your life and how you live it?



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