

**Lesson 8**  
**3 John**  
**IT'S THE TRUTH**

**Memory verse:** Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of Him who is the head, that is, Christ." (Ephesians 4:15 NIV)

The writer of this book identifies himself simply as the Elder. Presumably, the first readers knew who this was, and from the earliest times, Christians have understood that this was the Apostle John writing, the same John who wrote the Gospel of John, 1 and 2 John, and the Book of Revelation.

Perhaps he does not directly refer to himself for the same reason he does not directly refer to his readers in 2 John - the threat of persecution may be making direct reference unwise; and of course, unnecessary.

The battle for truth and against apostasy is fought not only in the home (2 John) but especially in the local church, and that is where 3 John comes in. This little letter (the shortest New Testament epistle in the original Greek) gives us a glimpse into an early assembly, its people, and its problems. As you read this brief letter, you find yourself saying, "Times have not changed very much!" We have similar people and problems today!

It is a short epistle and is it important?

"But it has been the lot both of the minor prophets and the minor epistles to be generally neglected; for with many readers bulk is everything; and, no magnitude, no goodness."  
(Adam Clarke, on the shorter books of the Bible)

One of the key words in this letter is witness (3 John 3, "testified"; 3 John 6, 12, "report, bear record, record"). It means not only the words that we say but the lives that we live. Each Christian is a witness, either a good one or a bad one. We are either helping the truth (3 John 8) or hindering it.

This letter was addressed to Gaius, one of the leaders of the assembly. We don't know if this specific Gaius is connected with the other men by this name mentioned in the New Testament (Acts 19:29, 20:4; 1 Corinthians 1:14; Romans 16:23). The identification is difficult because Gaius was a very common name in the Roman Empire.

But John also discussed two other men in these verses—Diotrephes and Demetrius. Wherever there are people, there are problems—and the potential for solving problems. Each of us must honestly face the question, "Am I a part of the problem or a part of the answer?"

How important it is to walk "in truth and love" (2 John 3) and hold the truth in love (Eph. 4:15)! To claim to love the truth and yet hate the brethren is to confess ignorance of what the Christian life is all about.

When God's people love Him, the truth, and one another, then the Spirit of God can work in that assembly to glorify Jesus Christ. But when any member of that assembly, including the pastor, becomes proud and tries to have "the pre-eminence," then the Spirit is grieved and He cannot bless. The church may outwardly appear successful, but inwardly it will lack the true unity of the Spirit that makes for a healthy fellowship. What then is a healthy fellowship?

Things to learn: 1) An encouraging believer 2) A dictatorial believer 3) An exemplary believer

**Discussion questions:**

1) What insight did John give in verses 1 to 8 about this person Gaius as an example for all believers?  
(15 mins)

2) What can we learn about the characters of Diotrephes and Demetrius in verses 9 to 14?  
(20 mins)

3) Share what you have learned from 3 John and contrast that with the theme of 2 John.  
(10 mins).