

Notes on the Greek New Testament Day 341 – December 7th – 3 John

Works frequently referenced in these notes on John's Epistles

Marshall, I Howard	<i>The Epistles of John</i> , The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1978
Smalley, Stephen S	<i>1, 2, 3 John</i> , Word Biblical Commentary, Vol 51, Word Books, Dallas, 1984
Stott, John R.W.	<i>Epistles of John</i> , Tyndale Commentary, IVF, London, 1964
Westcott, B.F	<i>The Epistles of St John</i> , MacMillan & Co, Cambridge & London, 1886

Verse 1

Ὁ πρεσβύτερος Γαῖω τῷ ἀγαπητῷ, ὃν ἐγὼ ἀγαπῶ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ.

πρεσβυτερος, α, ον see 2 John 1

"The name 'Gaius' (Caius) occurs Acts 19:29 (a 'Macedonian'); 20:4 ('of Derbe'); 1 Cor 1:14 (a Corinthian). There is nothing to identify this Gaius with any one of these." Westcott.

ἀγαπητος, η, ον beloved

Cf. 2 Jn 1. The phrase ἐν ἀληθείᾳ probably means 'in the truth'. "In other words, the presbyter is claiming that he is a fellow-believer with Gaius in the truth of God which has been made known by Jesus... The truth, moreover, is the essential sphere of reality in which mutual love (vv 1–2) exists." Smalley.

Verse 2

Ἀγαπητέ, περὶ πάντων εὐχομαί σε εὐδοῦσθαι καὶ ὑγιαίνειν, καθὼς εὐδοοῦταί σου ἡ ψυχή.

Westcott says that περὶ παντων is to be understood as 'in all things' rather than 'above all things'.

εὐχομαι pray, wish, long

σε Pronoun, acc s συ

εὐδοῦσθαι Verb, pres pass infin εὐδοομαι
have things go well (for oneself)

Cf. 1 Cor 16:2; Rom 1:10.

ὑγαινω be sound, be in good health
ψυχη, ης f self, inmost being, 'soul'

Here the sense is 'soul' as opposed to body. "The conclusion of v 2 expresses the elder's hope that the spiritual progress of Gaius will be matched by his physical health and well-being." Smalley.

Verse 3

Ἐχάρην γὰρ λίαν ἐρχομένων ἀδελφῶν καὶ μαρτυρούντων σου τῇ ἀληθείᾳ, καθὼς σὺ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ περιπατεῖς.

ἐχάρην see 2 John 4

Several witnesses omit γαρ, probably because later copyists could not see any clear connection between this verse and the previous. The verse, however, supplies the reason for the elder's confidence of Gaius' spiritual progress.

λιαν see 2 John 4

ἐρχομένων suggests more than one occasion. Smalley comments, "The word 'brothers' (also in vv 5 and 10) may contain technical overtones, and refer to Christian (ministerial) workers... However, ἀδελφός ('brother') is normally used by NT writers in the context of Christian believers in general (e.g. 1 Thess 1:4; 2:1, 14, 17). Thus John is probably speaking of itinerant members of the Johannine community who acted as missionaries. It is not impossible that they were members of the presbyter's own congregation, who had visited the church to which Gaius belonged, in view of its problems (vv 9–11), to plead for love and truth (see also v 7). While their information about Diotrephes would necessarily be unpleasant, they would have come back to the presbyter with an encouragingly positive report on the character of Gaius... In the case of Gaius, adherence to the truth of Christ was practically expressed in terms of loving hospitality (vv 5–6)."

μαρτυρω bear witness, testify

"They witnessed to your truth, even how you walk in the truth' The present tense suggests continuous action.

"The emphatic pronoun (συ) suggests a contrast with others as (for example) Diotrephes." Westcott.

περιπατω walk, live

Verse 4

μειζότεραν τούτων οὐκ ἔχω χαράν, ἵνα ἀκούω τὰ ἐμὰ τέκνα ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ περιπατοῦντα.

μειζων, ον and μειζοτερος, α, ον greater
χαρα, ας f see 2 Jn 12

Westcott prefers the reading *χαριν* (B etc.) saying that it means 'I have no greater token of the divine favour than this ...' Metzger writes, "Although the reading *χάριν* may seem to be intrinsically superior ... the Committee considered it to be a transcriptional modification and preferred the more Johannine *χαράν*, which is strongly supported."

ἔμος, η, ον 1st pers possessive adj *my, mine*
τεκνον, ου n *child*

May suggest that Gaius had been converted through the elder's ministry, cf. 1 Cor 4:14; Gal 4:19; Phil 2:22.

Verse 5

Αγαπητέ, πιστόν ποιεῖς ὃ ἐὰν ἐργάσῃ εἰς τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς καὶ τοῦτο ξένους,

πιστος, η, ον *faithful, trustworthy*

"The phrase is commonly interpreted: 'thou doest a faithful work,' a work which answers to thy faith... No parallel is quoted in support of such a sense of *πιστος*. The more natural rendering is rather 'thou makest sure'; that is, such an act will not be lost, will not fail of its due issue and reward (Apoc. 21:5). This sense falls in well with the context (comp.

Apoc.14:13), and explains the use of the two verbs, *ποιειν*, *ἐργάζεσθαι*, which are combined also in Col. 3:23." Westcott.

This view receives little contemporary support. Marshall thinks that the phrase *πιστόν ποιεῖς* simply means 'you are faithful'. Smally translates it 'you are acting loyally', adding, "The natural sense is that the loyalty of Gaius to the truth was constantly (*ποιεῖς* is in the present) demonstrated in loving service... Gaius was thus seen to be in fellowship with all those who knew and lived in the truth (cf. 2 John 1), in marked contrast to the character of Diotrephes (vv 9–10)."

ὃ ἐὰν *whatever*

ἐργάσῃ *Verb, aor midd dep subj, 2 s*

ἐργαζομαι *work, do, perform*

ξενος, η, ον *strange, foreign; ὁ ξ. stranger, foreigner*

I.e. Christians previously unknown to him. Cf. Heb 13:1-2.

Verse 6

οἱ ἐμαρτύρησάν σου τῇ ἀγάπῃ ἐνώπιον ἐκκλησίας, οὓς καλῶς ποιήσεις προπέμψας ἀξίως τοῦ θεοῦ·

μαρτυρεω *see v.3*

ἐνώπιον *prep with gen before, in the presence of, in front of*

ἐκκλησια, ας f *congregation, church*

"Those who in one particular case experienced the habitual hospitality of Gaius bore open testimony to his character in a public assembly of the church where the writer was, gathered together, as it may seem, to receive their report: comp Acts 14:26ff." Westcott.

καλως *adv well*

"Those who had before found help from Gaius now again required it for a special work. The future implies a wish which, it is assumed, will at once be fulfilled. Comp. Rom 6:14." Westcott.

προπέμψας *Verb, aor act ptc, m nom s*
προπεμπω *send on one's way, help on one's way*

Cf. Acts 21:1-3.

ἀξίως *adv (from ἀξιος) worthily*

"Worthily of their dedication to the service of God." Westcott. Marshall comments, "While Christian missionaries needed to beware of the temptation to make a good thing out of their work, and churches had to beware of being taken in by charlatans, it was perhaps more important to remind the churches not to treat the missionaries like beggars and so bring discredit on the name of the God to whom they were looking for their support."

Verse 7

ὑπὲρ γὰρ τοῦ ὀνόματος ἐξῆλθον μηδὲν λαμβάνοντες ἀπὸ τῶν ἐθνικῶν.

ὄνομα, τος n *name*

Used absolutely, cf. Acts 5:41.

μηδεις, μηδεμια, μηδεν *no one, nothing*
ἐθνικος, η, ον *pagan, heathen, Gentile*

They had refused to accept hospitality from those who were unconverted, i.e. those to whom they ministered (c.f. 1 Cor 9:11f.). They looked to the churches for support (cf. 2 Cor 6:1).

Verse 8

ἡμεῖς οὖν ὀφείλομεν ὑπολαμβάνειν τοὺς τοιούτους, ἵνα συνεργοὶ γινώμεθα τῇ ἀληθείᾳ.

ὀφειλω *owe, ought, must*

ὑπολαμβάνω *support*

τοιουτος, αυτη, ουτον *correlative pronoun and adjective such, of such kind*

συνεργος, ου m *fellow-worker*

"The phrase is ambiguous. The fellowship may be either with the teachers: 'that we may be fellow-workers with them in support of the truth'; or with the truth, the substance of their teaching: 'that we may help the truth which is effective through them'." Westcott.

Smalley prefers the latter and argues that the phrase ἵνα συνεργοὶ γινώμεθα τῇ ἀληθείᾳ means 'so that we may prove ourselves to be fellow-workers in the cause of the truth' – ἵνα ... γινώμεθα means '(that) we may prove to be' rather than '(that) we may be', cf. John 15:8 'showing yourselves to be my disciples.'

Smalley adds, "The admonition to support Christian ministers 'in the cause of the truth' is not incompatible with a 'tent-making ministry' (Acts 18:1–4). So Paul was ready to receive his living from the gospel (1 Cor 9:14); but he also tried not to be a 'burden to anyone' while he preached the gospel of God to them (1 Thess 2:9)."

Verse 9

Ἔγραψά τι τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ· ἀλλ' ὁ φιλοπρωτεύων αὐτῶν Διοτρέφης οὐκ ἐπιδέχεται ἡμᾶς.

A well-attested reading, supported by κ^* A (B) 048 1241 1739 (cop^{sa,bo}) is ἔγραψά τι ('I wrote/I have written something'). This best explains the variants ἔγραψα ἄν ('I would have written,' as read by κ^{33} 81 Vg, et al.), which was introduced to prevent the suggestion that an apostolic letter had been lost, and ἔγραψά (omitting τ ; so C K L P Ψ most minuscules, followed by TR), which indicates an attempt on the part of copyists to avoid the deprecation of apostolic authority.

ἐκκλησία, ας f see v.6

φιλοπρωτεύω desire to lead or to be first

"It is of interest to compare the two sources of failure noticed in the two Epistles, προαγεῖν (2 John 9) and φιλοπρωτεύειν, the undue claims to intellectual progress and to personal authority. There is nothing to indicate that Diotrephes held false opinions: his ambition only is blamed." Westcott.

Marshall comments, "It was a danger that had arisen in Jesus' own lifetime, and the Gospels contain warnings against love of position which were especially relevant for such a situation as this (Mt 23:5-12; cf. 24:20-28)."

ἐπιδεχομαι receive, welcome; pay attention to, recognize

By the use of ἡμᾶς John removes the issue from the sphere of the personal.

Marshall comments, "This must mean that Diotrephes was refusing to accept whatever was said in the letter, and possibly also that when the letter came into his hands he did his best to suppress it. The letter must have contained some commendation of the travelling preachers." Marshall says that the letter may have been 2 John, but more probably has been lost. Smalley suggests that the letter was 1 John.

Verse 10

διὰ τοῦτο, ἐὰν ἔλθω, ὑπομνήσω αὐτοῦ τὰ ἔργα ἃ ποιεῖ, λόγοις πονηροῖς φλυαρῶν ἡμᾶς, καὶ μὴ ἀρκούμενος ἐπὶ τοῦτοις οὔτε αὐτὸς ἐπιδέχεται τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς καὶ τοὺς βουλομένους κωλύει καὶ ἐκ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἐκβάλλει.

ἔλθω Verb, aor act subj, 1 s ἔρχομαι

ὑπομνήσω Verb, fut act indic, 1 s

ὑπομνησκω remind

The sense here is 'take up the issue...'

πονηρος, α, ον evil, bad, wicked

φλυαρεω slander, accuse

The word means literally 'babbling' or 'talking nonsense' and is used here to emphasise the emptiness of the accusations made by Diotrephes.

ἄρκεω be enough, be sufficient; pass. be content, be satisfied

οὔτε not, nor, neither

ἐπιδεχομαι see v.9

βουλομαι want, desire, wish, intend, plan

κωλυω hinder, prevent, forbid

ἐκβαλλω throw out, expel, cast out

Smalley comments, "The verb ἐκβάλλει, in the present tense again (literally, 'he throws out'), need not imply formal excommunication from the Church, as this became known later. Cf. Matt 18:17; Luke 6:22; John 9:34–35; 1 Cor 5:2. On the other hand, it seems as if Diotrephes had already arrogated to himself the task of 'expulsion,' and was actually driving people out of the congregation (as he had refused to welcome the brothers) rather than merely desiring to do so."

Verse 11

Ἀγαπητέ, μὴ μιμοῦ τὸ κακὸν ἀλλὰ τὸ ἀγαθόν. ὁ ἀγαθοποιῶν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν· ὁ κακοποιῶν οὐχ ἑώρακεν τὸν θεόν.

ἀγαπητος, η, ον see v.1

μιμεομαι imitate, follow another's example

κακος, η, ον evil, bad, wrong

ἀγαθος, η, ον good, useful, fitting

ἀγαθοποιεω do good

κακοποιεω do evil, do wrong

The implication is that Diotrophes is one such *κακοποιῶν*.

ὄραω see, observe

"It is likely that here, as elsewhere, St John points to men who professed to have deeper insight into truth and disparaged the importance of virtuous action." Westcott. Cf. 1 Jn 3:9; John 14:9.

Verse 12

Δημητρίῳ μεμαρτύρηται ὑπὸ πάντων καὶ ὑπὸ αὐτῆς τῆς ἀληθείας· καὶ ἡμεῖς δὲ μαρτυροῦμεν, καὶ οἶδας ὅτι ἡ μαρτυρία ἡμῶν ἀληθῆς ἐστίν.

Westcott thinks it probable that Demetrius was the bearer of the letter, a suggestion which Marshall says is 'virtually certain'. Here, in contrast with Diotrophes, is an example to copy.

μεμαρτύρηται Verb, perf pass indic, 3 s

μαρτυρεω bear witness, testify

ἀληθεια, ας f truth, reality

οἶδα know

μαρτυρια, ας f testimony, witness

ἀληθης, ες true, truthful, honest, genuine

A threefold witness: *by all* – i.e. by all those who knew him, particularly the church; *by the truth* – i.e. the character of his life displayed the reality of the gospel; *by us* – i.e. by the apostle and his circle.

Verse 13

Πολλὰ εἶχον γράψαι σοι, ἀλλ' οὐ θέλω διὰ μέλανος καὶ καλάμου σοι γράφειν·

This verse (and the next) are similar to 2 John 12.

θέλω wish, will

μελας, αινα, αν see 2 Jn 12

καλαμος, ου m reed, pen

Verse 14

ἐπιζῶ δὲ εὐθέως σε ἰδεῖν, καὶ στόμα πρὸς στόμα λαλήσομεν.

ἐπιζῶ hope

σε Pronoun, acc s συ

εὐθεως here bears the sense 'shortly', 'soon'

ἰδεῖν Verb, aor act infin ὄραω see

στομα, τος n see 2 Jn 12

Verse 15

Εἰρήνη σοι. ἀσπάζονται σε οἱ φίλοι. ἀσπάζου τοὺς φίλους κατ' ὄνομα.

εἰρηνη, ης f peace

ἀσπαζομαι greet

φίλος, ου m and φιλη, ης f friend

ὄνομα, τος n name, person

Several later witnesses add at the end the common liturgical ἀμήν.

Postscript

Smalley concludes his commentary on John's letters as follows, "It has been our thesis throughout this commentary that the letters of John, together with the Fourth Gospel, record and reflect the spiritual history of the Johannine community itself... The fourth evangelist's appeal to his circle for a balanced christology met with a limited response, for heterodoxy (of more than one kind) persisted. This led to secessionist moves, as we know from 1 John, and the withdrawal from the community of some of its members (headed, perhaps, by those with a docetic understanding of the person of Jesus), as 2 John indicates. By the time 3 John was written further problems had arisen, and the initial situation had been turned on its head. For the Johannine Christians who were loyal to the Christian truth as they had received it were now being excluded from the church (v 9) by Diotrophes in association with his supporters (v 10). The views of this latter group were disturbingly independent, and called into question its basic allegiance to the gospel truth. 'Heterodoxy,' that is to say, now threatened the very survival of 'orthodoxy.' Furthermore, dangers of this theological as well as practical nature signalled the gradual disintegration of the Johannine community, and possibly heralded its final dissolution...

"Thus neither the Gospel nor the letters of John solved immediately the problems of the Johannine churches in their own day. But both contain theological, ethical and practical truths which are fundamental to the Christian position in every age: that Jesus is one with God as well as one with us; that love and righteousness are indispensable to the believer who seeks as a child of God to walk in the light; and that unity, however flexible, is a demand laid upon the whole Church at all times."