

Once again, we see in John what we recognize in all of the writings of the Apostles, that they are constantly reinforcing the centrality of Yeshua in all aspects of our faith.

12 Though I have many things to write to you, I do not want to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, so that your joy may be made full.

We may speculate that John has written such a brief letter because there was some urgency to communicate with this community which was “sister” to the community to which he addressed his first epistle. It also sounds reasonable to surmise that those whom John indicates he had met, who were from the community to which he addresses his second epistle, had informed him about false teachers who were seeking an audience with the community with the hopes of persuading them to accept their false messages about Yeshua. So in the conclusion to this epistles, he makes it clear that its brevity is not to be received as though he only has words of warning and stern exhortations. He makes it clear that he has far more to communicate, but that he wants to do so in person rather than through writing. We all know that speaking together is often a far better way to communicate our thoughts, for the written word can, at times, be misconstrued or misunderstood, and this is all the more the case when dealing with sensitive issues which may even require stern warnings, exhortations, or even rebukes.

The way that John concludes 2John is very similar to his next epistle, 3John. Note 3John 1:13–14.

I had many things to write to you, but I am not willing to write them to you with pen and ink; but I hope to see you shortly, and we will speak face to face. (3Jn 1:13-14)

What we know as 3John is addressed to an individual by the name of Gaius, indicating that John is writing to a different community than the one he addresses in 2John. As such, the similarities between these two epistles would strengthen the idea that they were written close together without much of a time gap between. It likewise seems reasonable that John intended to visit both communities on the same journey.

John makes known that he desired his further communication to be in person rather than with “paper and ink.” Obviously our English translation “paper” is used to convey generally a common writing material. In John’s day, it was papyrus (*χάρτης, xartēs*), made from a rush-like or grass-like plant of the genus *Carex*, growing in wet places.

Ancient records indicate that this plant grew throughout all the Nile valley, the Delta, as well as in Syria. The stem of the reed is cut in strips which are

“woven” on a board moistened with water from the Nile, muddy liquid supplying the effect of glue. First an upright layer is smeared on to the table, using the full length of papyrus available after the trimmings have been cut off at both ends, and afterwards cross strips complete the latticework. The next step is to press it in presses, and the sheets are dried in the sun and then joined together.... Smoothed by pumice and hammered hard, the papyrus provided a writing material that was almost indestructible if kept dry.¹

A short epistle like 2John would fit on one papyrus sheet of normal size.²

The ink (*μέλας*, *melas*, which also means “black”) was made of soot or black carbon. It was mixed with gum or oil for use on parchment, or with a metallic substance for use on papyrus.³

We find “ink” mentioned two other times in the Apostolic Scriptures (2Cor 3:3; 3John 1:13). The fact that John uses it here to describe his writing of the epistle may seem like a small and relatively unimportant notice in this sacred text. But it is important, because it clearly characterizes the word of God which came through the written word, penned by “men moved by the Holy Spirit *who* spoke from God” (2Pet 2:21). Thus, by God’s good providence, evidence of the early written Scriptures can be found from the 3rd Century BCE and on. And this includes evidence of the Apostolic Scriptures even from the 1st Century CE.

In fact, that the Scriptures were regularly written down and not simply passed on orally, insured that the writings of those who were superintended by the Ruach HaKodesh remained stable in distinction from oral traditions which underwent significant changes through the centuries before being committed to writing.

...but I hope to come to you and speak face to face – We are given no indication of the location of this community to which John writes, nor how far the journey would be for John as he made his trip to fellowship with them. But it is clear that he is physically able to make the journey.

1 Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, “Papyrus,” Vol. 4, pp. 589–90.

2 F. F. Bruce, 2John, p. 143.

3 Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, “Ink,” Vol. 3, p. 279.

The phrase “face to face” is actually “mouth to mouth” (στόμα πρὸς στόμα, *stoma pros stoma*), the same phrase used when God speaks with Moses.

He said, “Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream. Not so, with My servant Moses, he is faithful in all My household; With him I speak mouth to mouth, even openly, and not in dark sayings, and he beholds the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid To speak against My servant, against Moses?” (Num 12:6–8)

The only other time in the Apostolic Scriptures that we find this phrase, “mouth to mouth,” is in the parallel text of 3John 1:14. It is only speculation, but one wonders if John, being the last remaining Apostle of Yeshua, is using this phrase to indicate that his words as he writes his Gospel and these epistles are the very words of inspired scripture.

... so that your joy may be made full. – There is a variant in this verse. Some manuscripts read “your joy” while other have “our joy.” Though the NASB has “your joy,” the majority of other contemporary English version decided for “our joy” (NET, ESV, NIV, HCSB), and it seems that this is the reading that has the greater weight of internal as well as external evidence.¹ In favor of this reading we may also note 1Jn 1:4 as offering a hint at John’s common wording: “These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.”

These final words of John indicate not only that he anticipates his readers to fully comply with his exhortations and to take to heart his words as that of one who loves them dearly in the Lord, but that life’s greatest and lasting joy is to walk in the footsteps of Yeshua and to grow in one’s faith in Him and His having secured eternal redemption for all who are in Him.

Of course, John is also letting them know that nothing would bring him more joy than to know that they are also walking in the truth as were those whom he had met from their community. To walk in the

1 In the opinion of a majority of the Committee, the reading ἡμῶν, which is supported by ⳨ K L P Ψ 614 Byz Lect syr^{ph}, ^h arm *al*, is quite in harmony with the author’s generous spirit in associating himself with his readers (cf. ἡμῶν in 1Jn 1.4). The reading ὑμῶν, which is widely supported by several generally superior witnesses (A B 33 81 1739 vg cop^{bo}), appears to have arisen by scribal assimilation to ὑμῖν and ὑμᾶς earlier in the sentence. (Metzger, *Textual Commentary on the Greek NT*, p. 653.)

truth means to walk in the truth as revealed in Yeshua, for He is the full revelation of the Father (Heb 1:3). This is a good model for all who have leadership roles in their respective communities, that the fruit of their labors should be seen in the steadfast lives of faith of those they lead.

13 The children of your chosen sister greet you.

Following the interpretation that the opening of the letter is using cryptic language to refer to the believing community, the *ekklesia* to which John is writing, it seems clear that the “children of your chosen sister” refers to the community of faith in which John was presently residing.

The phrase “your chosen sister” (τῆς ἀδελφῆς σου τῆς ἐκλεκτῆς) could just as well be translated “your elect sister.” John ends this short epistle by reminding his readers, and us, that our life in the Messiah was initiated by God through His gracious and sovereign love. It is when we are constantly reminded that we belong to Him, and that as a result, He is also ours, that we are strengthened in our faith to live for the goal of sanctifying His Name in our world.

...the one who abides in the teaching,
he has both the Father and the Son.
2Jn 1:9

3John

INTRODUCTION

The obvious close relationship between this Epistle and the second Epistle means that much of what has been established in the Introduction to 2John will likewise apply here. Both have the common characteristics of a letter, including the title of the sender, the addressees, the greeting, a personal message, and the salutations or closings of the letter at the end.

Author

As noted in the Introduction to 2John, there are modern scholars who have questioned whether the author of 2John and 3John is the same author as 1John and the Gospel of John,¹ but the vast majority of evangelical scholars clearly affirm that John was the author of all three epistles.

The internal evidence supports the view that John, the author of 1John was also the author of 2John and 3John. He identifies himself as “The Elder” (Ὁ πρεσβύτερος, *ho presbuteros*) both in 2John and 3John. This is not simply a designation denoting the author as old in age, for the fact that it includes the article, *The Elder*, indicates both a position of authority (we will discuss this in more detail below) as well as one who is senior. In fact, Papias, 60–130 CE (as quoted by Eusebius) uses the designation “elder” to refer to a number of the Apostles.

However, the history of the reception of John’s third epistle in terms of external evidence, i.e., its being received as inspired Scripture by early Church Fathers, is not quite as strong as it is for 2John. The Muratorian Canon, which is dated as early as the late 2nd Century CE by some scholars, and as late as the early 4th Century CE by others, is fragmented, but does refer to two epistles of John as being received by the whole *ekklesia*.² Whether this reference refers to 2 and 3John, or 1

1 For the discussion of whether the author of the Gospel of John is the author of 1John, see the Introduction to the 1John commentary. For one scholar who questions the Johannine authorship of these epistles, see C. H. Dodd, *The Johannine Epistles* in *Moffat’s New Testament Commentary* (Harper & Row, 1946).

2 “Epistola sane Iudae et superscripti Iohannis duae in catholica habentur et Sapientia ab amicis Salomonis in honorem ipsius.”

and 2John, is debated. Origen (185–253 CE) lists 3John as being debated regarding its canonicity, as does Eusebius (260–340 CE). However, Athanasius (296–373 CE) refers to 3John as being widely received as Scripture. Regarding the external evidence for 3John, Guthrie writes:

But the absence of early attestation is not very surprising in view of the character of its contents.¹

The similarities as well as the differences between 3John and 2John add to the evidence that both were written by the same author, i.e., John. Both epistles lay much stress on the “truth,” though in 3John there is not as much emphasis put upon the truth described by noting the particular error that is being countered. It seems that in both, however, the issue of errant teaching is in the mind of the author. Both epistles refer to the *mitzvah* of hospitality, but each from a different vantage point. In 2John, the author sternly prohibits offering hospitality of any sort to a known false teacher (2Jn 1:10-11), while in 3John hospitality is commended and to be offered to teachers who bear the teaching of the apostles. Likewise, in both epistles, the author rejoices over those who walk in the truth: in 2John he refers to the children of the “elect lady” (2Jn 1:4) while in 3John similar commendation is given to a man named Gaius (3Jn 1:3). In both epistles the author indicates that he intends to visit the recipients (2Jn 1:12; 3Jn 1:13) and that he would rather speak face to face rather than writing with “paper and ink” (2Jn 1:12) or with “pen and ink” (3Jn 1:13).

Given these clear similarities, the conclusion seems obvious that both 2John and 3John were written by the same author, i.e., the Apostle John. For as noted in the introduction to 2John, that epistle’s similarity with 1John, which likewise bears many parallels to the Gospel of John, shows that the author of both are the same, and when 3John shows marked similarities with 2John, the conclusion seems obvious that John is the author of all three epistles.

Some would point to the divergence of subject matter between 2John and 3John as casting doubt upon whether both were penned by the same author. But as Guthrie notes:

scripta. “In the whole *Church*, which enjoy the two of John, the letter of Jude, and the superscribed Wisdom, written by the friends of Solomon in his honor.” For the reconstructed text, see F. W. Grosheide, ed., *Some Early Lists of the Books of the New Testament* (E. J. Brill, 1948), p. 11.

1 Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (IVP, 1970), p. 895.

The more specific occasion of 3John accounts naturally for the diversity in subject-matter and for the closer conformity of this Epistle to the form of a genuine private letter. There would, in fact, be less grounds for disputing 3John than 2John on the basis of literary form.¹

Date

While there are no clear references in any of the Johannine epistles by which the date of writing can be firmly fixed, as noted in the introduction to the 2John commentary, it seems very probable that 2John and 3John were written very close to the same time. It seems quite likely that John intended to visit both the communities addressed in 2John and 3John on the same journey.² This would indicate that both epistles were written close together so that both could be carried by the same carrier and be delivered to each of the communities before John's arrival.

Given the close connection between 2John and 3John, conservative scholars place them both as being written between 80–90 CE. Some scholars suggest that the letter referred to in 3Jn 1:9 is in fact 2John, and if this were the case, then this would establish a sequence of the two epistles rather than being written close together and sent at the same time. But it is unlikely that the letter referred to in 3John is actually 2John because the recipients of 2John do not seem to be dealing with the problem John emphasizes in this epistle, that is, the divisive activities of Diotrephes. Rather, most conservative scholars consider the letter referred to in v. 9 of 3John as having been lost, and therefore not ever considered by the wider *ekklesia* as having been inspired Scripture.

Recipients

Unlike 2John, 3John is written specifically to an individual who is named Gaius (Γάϊος, *Gaios*), and two other individuals are likewise named: Diotrephes (Διοτρέφης, *Diotrophēs*) and Demetrius (Δημήτριος, *Dēmētrios*). It is possible that Diotrephes had put himself forward as leader of the faction which had left the community to which John wrote his first epistle, and that a community of those who had denied Yeshua had formed around him as their leader. As such, Diotrephes had proclaimed himself the teacher of truth and had openly denied the apostolic authority of John, demanding those he was teaching not to follow

1 Ibid.

2 See the commentary on 2John 1:12.

John as a true apostle nor to accept his instructions and teaching as true. Thus, the general tenor of 3John deals specifically with those who have shown themselves to be false teachers and not so much with the actual content of their errant teachings. The primary message which John wants his readers to understand and put into practice is that they should give no credence whatsoever to any teacher who refuses to receive Yeshua's apostles and their teachings.

An Outline of the Epistle

I. Greeting – v. 1

- A. John refers to himself as “elder”
- B. Addressed to Gaius, who is
 - 1. beloved by John
 - 2. beloved in truth

II. John Greets the Community – vv. 2–4

- A. Beloved = of Gaius, (but perhaps also extending to the whole community in which he is a leader).
- B. John's prayer for Gaius:
 - 1. that he would prosper and be in good health.
 - 2. that he would prosper in physical health in the same manner in which John knows he has prospered spiritually.
- C. John has received a report about the community
 - 1. They walk in the truth.
 - 2. He counts them as his spiritual children.
 - 3. He rejoices that they remain steadfast in the truth.

III. John Commends Gaius and the Community – vv. 5–8

- A. They are faithful in receiving true teachers who have visited them.
- B. Those teachers to whom they showed true hospitality spoke well of them.
- C. They have spoken to other assemblies of the community's love.
- D. Admonition: when such teachers leave, send them on their way with ample support – that which would be worthy of God's blessing.
- E. The integrity of the visiting teacher:
 - 1. They were sent out with the mission to honor the Name.
 - 2. They did not accept pay from the Gentiles.
 - 3. Therefore they ought to be supported in their mission since they are workers of the truth.

IV. The Opposition of Diotrephes – vv. 9–10

- A. A previous epistle
 1. John refers to an epistle sent to the *ekklesia*
 2. Diotrephes usurped the position of authority in the *ekklesia*
 3. Diotrephes does not accept the teaching of the Apostles
- B. John's warning and description of Diotrephes
 1. When John comes, he will call attention to the deeds of Diotrephes.
 2. Diotrephes falsely accuses the Apostles with wicked words.
 3. Diotrephes loves a position of authority.
 4. Diotrephes does not receive the brethren, i.e., those who accept and follow the Apostolic teaching.
 5. Diotrephes forbids those who desire to follow the truth of the Apostles, and excommunicates those who do.

V. Exhortation to Shun Evil and Do Good – vv. 11–12

- A. Do not imitate what is evil, but rather what is good.
- B. The one who does good is of God.
- C. The one who does evil does not even know God.
- D. Demetrius – a true worker in God's kingdom
 1. He has a good report from the wider *ekklesia*.
 2. He continues in the truth.
 3. John and those who work with him give a good report regarding Demeterius.
 4. Thus, the testimony regarding Demetrius is to be received since it is true.

VI. Salutation – vv. 13–15

- A. John has much more to say, but does not want to do so with pen and ink.
- B. Thus, John intends to visit them shortly, to speak face to face.
- C. Closing of the letter:
 1. Shalom
 2. Their friends greet them.
 3. Greet John's friends by name.

The Primary Message of 3John

The overall theme of 3John is in concert with that of 2John, and it is important to read both epistles together if we are to ascertain the cohesive message which John intends us to know as he wrote these inspired words. Quite obviously, the issue at hand in both of these epistles is that of false teaching and false teachers. While 2John focuses primarily upon the content of the false teaching, i.e., that it denies Yeshua as the

divine Messiah come in the flesh, 3John emphasizes the need to carefully evaluate itinerant teachers and to do so based upon whether they accept Yeshua as the true, divine and incarnate Messiah, and thus the teachings of His Apostles. For Yeshua commissioned His Apostles to begin in earnest the ingathering of the elect from the nations and thus to expand the *ekklesia*, fulfilling the promise of the Abrahamic covenant that all the nations or families of the earth would be blessed in his Seed (cf. Matt 28:19–20; Acts 1:6–8; Gal 3:8)

We see how relevant John's exhortations are for us today. For in every age, the enemy of our souls would seek to turn us from the truth of the Scriptures and ultimately from the truth as it is in Yeshua, the true Messiah and the only Savior of mankind. And this same battle is evident in our day as well. For never before in the history of mankind has there been such an enterprise for teaching at the click of a button as we have it today with the worldwide internet. Today teachers, authors, writers, bloggers, etc., have a potential worldwide audience to which they can dispense their message. How relevant is this message of a 1st Century Apostle to our post-modern world! Surely the word of God remains applicable in every generation, for the weapons of our enemy remain the same, even if in our modern world they are enhanced by globalization as never before known.

How then are we to put into practice the ever-relevant exhortations of John, an Apostle of Yeshua Himself? We must know the Scriptures and we must constantly use them as the measuring rod for what can be received as God's revealed truth and what is not. As always, and perhaps even in greater ways in our day, the doctrine of *sola scriptura*, that the Bible is the final authority in all matters of faith and practice, must remain the foundation of our faith and practice. And thus the Bible must be the touchstone of truth as we read materials or listen to teachers who are seeking to tell us what the word of God says, what it means, and how it should be applied to our walk of faith in Yeshua. If their teaching does not align with the Scriptures, it is to be rejected.

3John

COMMENTARY

1 The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.

As in 2John,¹ so here, John refers to himself as “The elder” (Ὁ πρεσβύτερος, *ho presbuteros*). He does this, it would seem, to identify with other elders who lead and shepherd the assembly to which he is writing, as one together with them who seek to guard and nourish the assembly in the truth. Just as we read in the opening of 2John, so here, he uses the definite article, “the elder,” to remind his readers that he is the last living Apostle of Yeshua, and that as such, he is carefully giving to them the very things that Yeshua taught as He disciplined His Apostles. If this understanding is correct, and it seems to be the best explanation for why he would refer to himself as “the elder,” then once again we, who live thousands of years later, are reminded that we have before us the very words of inspired Scripture, written by those who were superintended by the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit) and enabled thereby to write that which God Himself intended to reveal. As Peter teaches us:

But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (2Pet 1:20–21)

to the beloved Gaius – This is the only epistle of John addressed to an individual by name, and in this specific regard it parallels Paul’s epistle to Philemon.

John addresses this epistle to a man by the name of Gaius, a name that was very common in the Roman Empire of the 1st Century. It was one of 18 names from which parents could choose a *praenomen* (first name) for one of their sons.²

We find the name Gaius elsewhere in the Apostolic Scriptures as well. In Rom 16:23 we meet Gaius of Corinth, who was Paul’s host, who may also be the same Gaius who was one of the few who were baptized by Paul (1Cor 1:14). There is also a Gaius of Macedonia who

1 See the commentary on 2John 1:1 for further comments on John’s referring to himself as “the elder.”

2 F. F. Bruce, *3John*, p. 147.

was a traveling companion of Paul, and who along with Aristarchus was present with Paul in Ephesus at the confrontation with Demetrius and the silversmiths (Acts 19:29). Both Gaius and Aristarchus were dragged by the rioters into the theater, probably to be questioned concerning Paul's activities.

But thought other individuals mentioned in the Apostolic Scriptures had the name Gaius, there is no clear basis for associating the Gaius to whom John writes with them. Since the name was very common, it stands to reason that there would be more than just a few men with that name who were followers of Yeshua.

The NASB translation, "to the beloved Gaius," is accurate but could just as well be understood as parallel to our use of the word "Dear" in modern letter writing as an appropriate address. Thus we could understand this opening as does the NIV, "To my dear friend Gaius." This is not to diminish the very real possibility that John had a close relationship with this man named Gaius, and that he wishes to emphasize the close camaraderie that he may have had with him. But it is only to say that using similar language for a greeting in a letter was apparently common in the 1st Century Roman empire.

...whom I love in truth. – Note the parallel in 2John 1:1, "The elder to the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in truth..." The primary point to be made from this expression is that John has given himself to the encouragement, teaching, exhortation, and building up of Yeshua's people, and this is the true expression of love, for it is doing all in one's power to cause the eternal truth of God to blossom in the lives of those who confess Him as their Lord and Savior. "To love in truth" means not only to have a genuine love for them, but it also means to love them in full harmony with the truth as it is found in the self-revelation of God in the Scriptures and ultimately through His Son, Yeshua.

2 Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers.

Once again, "Beloved" (*Αγαπητέ, agapēte*) could be understood as "Dear friend," but obviously with true heartfelt meaning by the Apostle.

John prays that Gaius would prosper in all respects (*περὶ πάντων*, literally "in all things"), both in physical well-being as well as in spiritual matters. Bruce notes that it was, once again, common to wish one's reader good health at the beginning of a letter.

The convention of wishing one's reader good health at the

outset of a letter ('Hoping this finds you well...') is one of great antiquity. So regular was this sort of thing in Latin letters that it was customarily expressed by the use of initials, S V B E E V (*si uales, bene est; ego ualeo, 'If you are well, that is good; I am well!'*).¹

But John takes what was apparently a common opening in letter writing, and moves it further by coupling it with a statement about the soul, thus emphasizing the equal importance of one's spiritual health alongside of one's physical health. There is an important point to be emphasized in this: John does not diminish the importance of our physical well being, as though the physical is to be diminished in favor of the spiritual. In so doing, John has once again emphasized the error of the nascent gnosticism of his day, which deprecated the physical aspects of life as having some innate evil, and sought to find the so-called mystical realm of being as the *summum bonum*, the supreme or highest good of life. Such a worldview which pitted the material world against the so-called "spiritual" realm is what fueled the ascetic and monastic movement of the middle ages.

But note that in addressing Gaius this way, John has indicated his assurance that the soul of his beloved friend is indeed prospering (*εὐοδόω, euodoō*),² and that he therefore hopes that his body is equally in good health. There is something to ponder here: How often in our modern world do we pay far more attention to our physical well-being and at the same time neglect the necessary means of grace by which we grow and remain healthy in our walk with the Lord and with others?

Here, in the opening of this short epistle, John has reminded us, even if in subtle ways, that as we must be diligent to maintain good health for our bodies, we must likewise discipline ourselves to feed our souls from the word of God, ever drinking at the fountain of life to which the Ruach constantly urges us. This means having a constant diet of feeding on the word, being exercised in our times of prayer, and maintaining a regular commitment to fellowship with other believers in order to bear one another's burdens and to encourage each other to be witnesses for our Lord before a watching world.

1 F. F. Bruce, *3John*, p. 147.

2 The verb *εὐοδόω* is found only two other times in the Apostolic Scriptures: Rom 1:10; 1 Cor 16:2.