

3–4 For I was very glad when brethren came and testified to your truth, that is, how you are walking in truth. I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.

John has already indicated his love for Gaius and that Gaius is prospering in the inward reality of his faith, made manifest by his living out the truth of his faith. Now, in these next verses, John relates his on-going joy based upon the good report he has received from “brethren” regarding Gaius and the worthy manner in which he is honoring the Lord through his service to fellow believers.

I was very glad... – The past tense (aorist) verb, “was glad” (ἐχάρην < χαίρω) should be taken to mean that John’s joy has existed for some time, and the fact that he speaks of his joy in this epistle parallels his use of the same verb three times in 2John (1:4, 10-11). Further, this personal joy of which John speaks is not simply a passing feeling but something he describes as “great” (λίαν, *lian*) and therefore that which remains a settled reality and source of happiness.

when brethren came and testified to your truth... – Who were these “brethren” who came bearing the good report about Gaius? Many commentators understand these “brethren” to be itinerant teachers¹ or traveling missionaries.² But there is no reason to exclude the very real possibility that these “brethren” were simply traveling believers in Yeshua who sought lodging on their journey and were appraised of the believing community in which Gaius was one of the leaders.³ It may well have been that the “brethren” who gave the good report about Gaius included teachers, those sent out from various communities to evangelize, as well as believers in general who were traveling, since the Greek word ἀδελφός (*adelphos*, “brother”) is commonly used of believers in general.

The presbyter’s heightened “joy” was occasioned by the arrival of “some of the brothers,” and the happy tidings which they brought with them. The word “brothers” 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., 1Thess 1:4; 2:1, 14, 17).⁴

1 Akin, *3John*, p. 231; Kruse, *3John*, p. 221.

2 Marshall, *3John*, p. 83; Kistemaker, *3John*, p. 391.

3 So Brown, *3John*, p. 704; Yarbrough, *3John*, p. 367; Strecker, *3John*, p. 258; Marshall, *3John*, p. 83;

4 Smalley, *3John*, p. 346.

The first aspect of the character of Gaius which John mentions as a source of his joy is that the brethren gave witness to the fact that Gaius had remained faithful to the truth. The Greek could be more literally translated as “giving testimony of your truth.” The English “giving testimony or witness” better translates the Greek μαρτυρούντων (*marturoountōn*) since it is a present participle, describing an ongoing reality, i.e., a common characteristic of Gaius. The point is that those who were traveling and who likewise spent time with John, verified the fact that Gaius was known to be one who upheld “the truth” (τῆ ἀληθεία, *tē alētheia*). Moreover, the fact that the definite article is used would indicate that “the truth” by which Gaius was known was the very teaching regarding Yeshua as the true Messiah, the Son of God come in the flesh, mentioned by John in 2John 1:10.

If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; (2Jn 1:10)

Once again, the emphasis of John in his epistles as well as in his Gospel account, is that Yeshua is the very Son of God, the Messiah promised by Israel’s prophets, and therefore the center and very heart of the Gospel itself. And the very fact that John refers to “the truth” as “your truth,” gives the clear picture that Gaius had made the truth of Yeshua that which he personally owned. It was not some ethereal, philosophical axiom which he claimed to be true, but the historical reality of Yeshua’s death, resurrection, and ascension made personal by the work of the indwelling Spirit of God, the very fulfillment of Israel’s prophets who prophesied of the One Who was to come and procure eternal salvation for all who were given to Him.

just as how you are walking in truth. The NASB translates this phrase “*that is, how you are walking in truth.*” But the Greek word καθὼς (*kathōs*), while it can indicate a “cause” or the “extent” of something, most often indicates a “comparison of equality or likeness.” Thus, John is saying that the truth by which Gaius is known is not only through his words of confessing Yeshua but is equally demonstrated in his actions, and specifically in this case, his extending hospitality to those believers in Yeshua who were otherwise strangers to him. He is a disciple of Yeshua, who walks in His footsteps:

By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. (1Jn 1:5b–6)

That the Apostles regularly use the metaphor of “walking” to describe the life of faith is the very basis for the common word *halachah*, from the Hebrew הָלַךְ (*hālach*), “to walk.” Rather than nit-picking over the minutiae of the later rabbinic prescriptions, we should take pains to be sure that our *halachah*, our manner of “walking,” is patterned after the manner in which Yeshua walked.

Further, since in the phrase “*when brethren came*” we are once again met with a participle in the Greek (ἐρχομένων, *erxomenōn*), John is indicating that this was a common occurrence, i.e., that traveling believers regularly were greeted with open hospitality and received from Gaius and the community of which he was a member, a welcome that bespoke a genuine love for those who had confessed Yeshua to be the Messiah and their own personal Savior. While the Scriptures enjoin us to do good to all people, the “household of faith” must take a priority.

So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith. (Gal 6:10)

I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.
– John’s language here is reminiscent of his words in 2John.

I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth, just as we have received commandment to do from the Father. (2Jn 1:4)

It is interesting to note that the greatest joy that John experiences is that those who have come to faith and have grown through his teaching, continue to prove their genuine faith in Yeshua through the sanctified lives they live. This sets a valuable pattern for leaders and teachers within believing communities today. Rather than finding primary joy and satisfaction in multiplying programs, building bigger facilities, or counting the number of attendees, we do well to put our energies into the lives of people, helping them grow in their faith and teaching them how to live out that faith in life-to-life relationships.

Here, once again, John is describing faith that is real because it is demonstrated by one’s actions. He does not write about faith as merely an inward agreement with the truth, but as that which flows from the heart to one’s whole life: thought, word, and deed. As far as the Scriptures are concerned, faith without works is no faith at all.

But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? For just as the body without the

spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead. (James 2:20, 26)

In John's first two epistles, he refers to the recipients as "children"¹ as he does so here in our text. In 1John he sometimes refers to them as "little children,"² which is a term of endearment and not a pejorative term indicating immaturity.

Obviously John calls the believers to whom he is writing "children," not in the sense of physical descent but in regard to spiritual birth. It is not as though John was personally involved in giving the good news of the Gospel to each and every member of the various communities to which he writes, but that having given the Gospel message to some, and helping them to know and live out a true faith in God through Yeshua, these likewise have shared the Gospel with others who, having been granted the gift of repentance and faith, have also joined the community of believers in Yeshua. And in using the term "children" to describe those who made up the believing communities to which he is writing, John emphasizes the important fact that all who have put their faith in Yeshua are members of God's family and therefore of God's household.

Paul uses the same family metaphor when he refers to himself as the "father" of those who have come to faith through his words and teaching.

For if you were to have countless tutors in Messiah, yet you would not have many fathers, for in Messiah Yeshua I became your father through the gospel. (1Cor 4:15)

My children, with whom I am again in labor until Messiah is formed in you — but I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you. (Gal 4:19–20)

This is why community within a local assembly of believers is so important. Not only is community an integral means of God's grace by which believers grow in their personal sanctification, but it is when the watching world witnesses the believing community caring for each other in real life-to-life ways that the essence of being disciples of Yeshua is manifest.

1 13x in 1John; 3x in 2John.

2 1 John 2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21.

By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another. (Jn 13:35)

And this corresponds directly to what John wrote in his first epistle.

but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Yeshua His Son cleanses us from all sin. (1Jn 2:7)

The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. (1Jn 2:9)

A community of believers is not defined by its size. It can be relatively small or large, but true community requires more than two or three people yet changes its characteristics if it becomes too large. The Scriptures give no set parameters but practical measures show that when a local congregation grows too large, many aspects which characterize good community life are lost.

5 Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and especially when they are strangers;

John again addresses Gaius personally by calling him “Beloved” (*Αγαπητέ, agapēte*), just as he did in vv. 1-2. This endearing address is, as we have seen, John’s commendation for the ongoing faithfulness of Gaius to the truth of the Gospel and manner in which he lives out the truth in his work for the community of believers in which he labors. This is highlighted by the fact that the words “are acting” (*ποιεῖς, poieis*) are a present participle in the Greek, which describes current, ongoing action. The faith of Gaius, grounded in the truth, is seen in his manner of life as working faithfully for the good of the believers he serves.

His work within the community of faith is not summed up only in his hospitality for those who are visiting the community, for John writes “in whatever you accomplish for the brethren” (*ὃ ἐὰν ἐργάσῃ εἰς τοὺς ἀδελφούς*). Here, the verb “accomplish” (*ἐργάσῃ < ἐργάζομαι*) is in the aorist or past tense, but could just as well be used by John as a collective of all that Gaius has done for the believers, both those who form the community of which he was a part as well as those believers, teachers, etc., that in their travels visited the community and received welcomed hospitality. Given the fact that in 1John there is clear evidence of a faction among the believing community that had denied Yeshua and left, and were apparently acting in hostility to the community of believers, to offer hospitality to those people who remained firm in

their confession was an important thing to do in order to emphasize the unity of the faith within the bonds of the truth. It is the unity of the faith which Paul also emphasizes in his epistle to the Ephesians:

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Messiah; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Messiah. (Eph 4:11–13)

Here again, we see the emphasis put upon community for the process of sanctification in the life of each believer.

As is common in John's writings, he uses the term "brother" or "brethren" (ἀδελφός, ἀδελφοί, *adelphos, adelphoi*) as a family term to identify believers in Yeshua,¹ once again emphasizing the close community relationship that believers in Yeshua have. Though the noun "brother" or "brethren" is cast in the masculine gender, in the Apostolic Scriptures it is the general term that is often used of believers, both male and female.

...and especially when they are strangers. – The better Greek manuscripts cast this final phrase in three words: καὶ τοῦτο ξένους, literally "and this, strangers." While this "highly elliptical construction"² can carry the obvious meaning John intends, scribes feeling the elliptical nature of the clause apparently added the preposition εἰς (*eis*, "unto"), i.e., "and this unto strangers." Regardless of which reading was original, the meaning is clear: not only did Gaius and the community of which he was a member extend hospitality to traveling teachers and/or believers of whom they were acquainted, or who came with prior recommendations or approval, but they also welcomed in "strangers." The obvious question for us, however, is what did John intend to convey by this word which is translated in our English text (NASB) as "strangers"?

The Greek word is ξένος (*tzenos*) which carries the general sense of "foreigner," "one who is traveling outside of his or her native country," "non-citizen," "foreigner," etc.³ In the Lxx we find this word being used to translate נַכְרִי (*nokhri*, "foreigner," often used to denote a person from

1 15x in 1John; 3x in 3John;

2 See Culy, *1, 2, 3John: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Baylor Univ Press, 2004), p. 160.

3 See the extensive study of ξένος by Stählin in *TDNT*, 5.1–36.

a pagan nation who is viewed as an idolater or as coming from a people group known as worshiping idols) and גֵר (*ger*, “foreigner,” “sojourner,” someone traveling or residing outside of his or her own country). Interestingly, in the Tanach, both of these Hebrew words can be used of people who were formerly outside of the covenant people of Israel but who have come to believe in Israel’s God and who therefore have taken up residence among the people of Israel.

Most interesting is the use of ξένος in the Pauline epistles, and since John is writing his epistles well after Paul had written his letters, it is not out of reason to think that his use of the word might well have influenced John. Note the following passage from Ephesians in which Paul is addressing Gentile believers in Yeshua:

But now in Messiah Yeshua you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Messiah. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace... So then you are no longer strangers (ξένοι) and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household.... (Eph 2:13–15, 19)

It seems quite likely to me that when John speaks of Gaius and the community of which he was a part, giving hospitality to “strangers,” it may well be that John is describing Gentile believers in Yeshua who were being rejected by the traditional Jewish synagogue communities but who were received by the growing Messianic communities as the very fruit of the Gospel promised to Abraham (Gen 12:3, cf. Gal 3:8).

6 and they have testified to your love before the *ekklesia*. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God.

Those who had come to the community in which Gaius was a member and apparently one of the community leaders, had related to John as well as to the *ekklesia* at large how the reception they received was a very real expression of the love that exists between believers in Yeshua. The very fact that John emphasizes this to Gaius highlights the fact that the opposite must have been the case in some situations, that traveling teachers or believers in general were not being received by some communities because they had accepted the false teachings of those who had rejected “the teaching” about Yeshua the Messiah (cf. 2Jn 1:9) and