

a pagan nation who is viewed as an idolater or as coming from a people group known as worshipping 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

were therefore refusing to receive those who remained faithful to the Apostolic teaching, that Yeshua was the true Messiah promised by the prophets, and the only One through Whom eternal salvation was possible.

As noted above, I have suggested that these “strangers” may have been Gentile believers, whether designated as teachers or not. If this was the case, then there may have been a combined reason why some of the communities were refusing to accept them. Not only was their message of faith being challenged but the fact that they were Gentiles may have also contributed to the division. If there were communities that had rejected the Apostolic teaching about Yeshua, it would follow that they had also ceased looking to the Apostles’ teaching as having any authority. As such, the Apostolic decree as described in Acts 15 would have most likely been rejected as well. The very fact that John specifically denounces Diotrephes (v. 9), not only for rejecting “the brethren” but also for accusing John and the other Apostles with wicked words, clearly indicates that even in this early era of the emerging *ekklesia* of “The Way,” there had already begun a division over the person and work of Yeshua.

I would further suggest that some of these “strangers” who had been welcomed by Gaius and the community of believers of which he was a part, may have been Gentiles who had been discipled in other believing communities and then sent out as itinerant teachers to help other communities of “The Way” in implementing the decree of the Jerusalem council to accept Gentile believers as bona fide members of the *ekklesia*.

We should remember that John was writing these epistles nearly 20 years after Paul was martyred for his faith, and that John was most likely the last living Apostle of the Twelve. It would seem very probable, then, that in this amount of time there would have been Gentile believers who were discipled and trained to be itinerant teachers to the communities that were increasingly experiencing the ingathering of Gentiles into the believing community.

Here, once again, we see how the Apostolic teaching regarding the equality of Jew and Gentile within the believing community was of utmost importance for accomplishing the commission given to them by Yeshua. Making disciples of all the nations by teaching them to observe all that He had commanded them surely would have necessitated the voice of spiritually mature Gentile believers as well. Such trained leaders would have played an important role in helping new Gentile believers to integrate into the believing community as fulfilling the promise of the ingathering of the nations (Gen 12:3; Matt 9:38; Lk 10:2;

Matt 28:19–20).

In all of the writings of John, it is only in 3John that he uses the word *ekklesia* (ἐκκλησία), and he does so three times (vv. 6, 9, 10). While this word gained a technical sense in the Apostolic Scriptures to denote the communities of faith formed around the belief in and acceptance of Yeshua as the Son of God and Savior of sinners, in its *koine* setting the word refers simply to a “gathering of people” who have a common interest. Thus, when Paul was in Ephesus, and the artisans had a complaint against him, there arose a mob who intended to harm Paul, but the town clerk quieted the crowd and persuaded them to allow a “lawful assembly” to determine what should be done.

So then, some were shouting one thing and some another, for the assembly (ἐκκλησία) was in confusion and the majority did not know for what reason they had come together. (Acts 19:32)

For indeed we are in danger of being accused of a riot in connection with today’s events, since there is no real cause for it, and in this connection we will be unable to account for this disorderly gathering. After saying this he dismissed the assembly (ἐκκλησία). (Acts 19:40-41)

The notion that the Greek word *ekklesia* derives its meaning from the etymology “called out,” (ἐκ + καλέω), where “called” is viewed theologically as meaning “called to salvation,” is simply not true.

How then did the term *ekklesia* become a word that was so specifically used to denote the followers of Yeshua? It did so because the early communities of The Way were known for their testimony of “the teaching of and about Messiah,” where Yeshua was the central focus of their beliefs, their gatherings, and marked their care for each other. Indeed, the believers in Antioch were called Χριστιανός (*xristianos*), “those associated with the Messiah.” The Greek verb χρίω (*xriō*) with which Χριστός (*christos*), “Christ” is cognate, means “to anoint” and answers directly to the Hebrew מָשִׁיחַ (*mashiach*) “anointed one.”

This is emphasized by the fact that Gaius, in his having welcomed the believers/itinerant teachers into the community, showing them genuine hospitality, was living out his faith in Yeshua. This is the constant emphasis of John in his epistles, that one who truly has the Son of God, Yeshua, likewise has the Father, and therefore will show genuine love to other believers.

We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. (1Jn 3:14)

Now I ask you, lady, not as though I were writing to you a new commandment, but the one which we have had from the beginning, that we love one another. (2Jn 1:5)

You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God.

These believers who, though strangers to Gaius and the community, were given hospitality and welcomed in even though persecution was on the rise, they were not staying but were continuing on their journey, perhaps to visit other communities and to carry the message of John and the Apostles to them as well. Therefore John encourages Gaius to make sure that they have provisions sufficient for their travels.

He writes “You will do well...” (*καλῶς ποιήσεις*), using a future tense verb, but this was a common way of making a polite request and is similar to our use of the English word “please.”¹ John wants to make sure that Gaius has not been influenced by those who were teaching a contrary doctrine, and refusing to accept those who had been sent out with Apostolic approval to aid believing communities by way of bringing letters as well as teaching the Apostolic message.

The phrase “send them on their way” utilizes a form of the verb *προπέμπω* (*propempō*) which was used in the early communities of The Way to describe giving support to those itinerant teachers who traveled at their own expense to carry the message of Yeshua and of His Apostles. Note, as an example, Acts 15:3.

Therefore, being sent on their way by the *ekklesia*, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren. (Acts 15:3)²

The admonition to provide for those who were traveling, especially those who gave all of their time to serving these communities by traveling to them, fulfills the very commandment of Yeshua as repeated by Paul in his first epistle to Timothy.

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- 1 See Marshall, *3John*, p. 85; Culy, *3John*, p. 161. For a similar construction in the Greek, cf. Acts 10:33.
 - 2 For other texts that use this expression “send them on their way” as a technical term for supporting itinerant teachers, cf. Acts 20:38; 21:5; Rom 15:24; 1Cor 16:6, 11; 2Cor 1:16; Tit 3:13.

The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at *the* word and teaching. For the Scripture says, “YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING,” and “The laborer is worthy of his wages.” (1Tim 5:17–18)

The quote regarding muzzling the ox is found in Deut 25:4. But where in the Scriptures of the Tanach do we find the teaching “The laborer is worthy of his wages?” These are the words of Yeshua as recorded in Matt 10:10 and Lk 10:7. Paul must therefore be quoting the words of Yeshua which were passed on to him and thus regards them as having the authority of Scripture. It was established, then, that those who “labored hard in the word and teaching” were to be provided for when needed.

...in a manner worthy of God. – This means that providing for the needs of these traveling believers, who were most likely also itinerant teachers, was to be done in a manner so that God receives praise. Interestingly, there is no example in the Apostolic Scriptures in which an Apostle or one sent out by the Apostles solicits support from those he is serving. The only time that Paul instructs the believing communities to gather financial support is when he does so in order to carry a contribution to the impoverished believers residing in Jerusalem.¹ If the message of the Apostles was that God would supply the needs of the believing community, then they as well as those they disciplined and sent out to other communities were to model that very reality. When those who labor in the word and teaching are supported without soliciting funds, God is the One Who receives the praise. Moreover, when Gaius and the community send these visiting laborers on their way and do so by providing them with what they need for the journey, they are being obedient to the very instructions of Yeshua and His Apostles, and as such, their obedience gives glory to God as well.

7–8 For they have gone out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.

These disciples who were sent out to minister to communities remote from their own homes did so voluntarily, and for “the sake of the Name.” Here, the Greek word *ὄνομα* (*onoma*, “name”) is almost certainly used by John as a metonym to denote Yeshua Messiah. Some understand John’s use of “the Name” in this text to refer both to Yeshua as

1 Cf. Acts 24:17; Rom 15:25–31; 2Cor 8–9; Gal 2:10.

well to the Father.¹ But the weight of the evidence shows that John uses “the Name” specifically of Yeshua as the One Who is the Head of the *ekklesia* and the very One Who promised to build it as His own (Matt 16:18). Note these examples of Yeshua being referenced as “the Name.”

I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your Name, the Name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are. (Jn 17:11)

So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for the Name. (Acts 5:41)

But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My Name.” (Acts 9:15–16)

For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the Name which is above every name, so that at the Name of Yeshua EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Yeshua Messiah is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:9–11)

It is interesting that in later tradition, the Hebrew שׁוֹמֵר , *haShem*, meaning “the Name,” became a common circumlocution for the Tetragrammaton. In the Apostolic Scriptures, “the Name” is a metonym for Yeshua, which is therefore correct, for the Son and the Father are One.

...accepting nothing from the Gentiles. – The interpretation of this phrase depends upon the meaning of the Greek word $\epsilon\theta\nu\nu\iota\kappa\acute{o}\varsigma$ (*ethnikos*), translated by the NASB as “Gentiles.” But this translation is suspect. For though *ethnikos* may be related to the Greek word $\epsilon\theta\nu\omicron\varsigma$ (*ethnos*) which usually carries the sense of “Gentile” or “non-Jew” in the Apostolic Scriptures, *ethnikos* is used most often to denote a “worldly” culture with a focus on issues of “morality,” and specifically “unbelieving,” and “polytheistic” societies rather than specifically denoting a particular people group or ethnicity, i.e., Gentiles.²

Here we seem to have even more substantial evidence that those who were itinerant teachers were in fact those who had previously

1 See Brown, *3John*, pp. 711–12.

2 See BDAG, “ $\epsilon\theta\nu\nu\iota\kappa\acute{o}\varsigma$ ”.

been known as idol worshipers. As they traveled into regions where only few believers in Yeshua lived, they were not to take any help from the non-believers even though they formerly were part of the culture and religion. Rather, they were to rely entirely upon the benevolent support of the believing communities to which they were sent. In doing so, they were to mark themselves out as entirely given over to the service of Yeshua Who had promised to meet their needs as they relied upon Him.

Therefore we ought to support people like these... – Here John is simply repeating the very commandments given by Yeshua to His disciples, and which therefore became the pattern to be followed by the disciples they would make.

Stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not keep moving from house to house. (Lk 10:7)

So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel. (1Cor 9:14)

As noted above, those who were sent out to serve the believing communities as well as to evangelize the lost, were not to solicit support. Rather, they were to rely upon the believing communities to be obedient to the Lord and to supply their needs so long as they labored in their midst.

Therefore we ought to support people like these... – Here, John uses the plural “we” as denoting all believing communities. He is teaching us that one of the primary characteristics of a community of believers is that they take it upon themselves to meet the needs of those who “labor in the word and teaching.” The Greek which lies behind the English “we ought to support” of the NASB has been taken by some to mean “we ought to show hospitality,” which is how the NIV translates the phrase. The Greek word is ὑπολαμβάνω (*hupolambanō*) which can carry the sense of “to take someone under one’s care,” “to receive as a guest,” but it can also carry a broader sense of generally “support” or “meet the needs of someone.”¹ Since John applauds Gaius for receiving those who came, and also asks him to make sure their needs are met for when they leave for their next destination, we should take this verse to indicate that the believing community ought to meet the needs of those who labor among them, including giving hospitality to those who would be with them for only a short period of time. Further, this is not

1 See BDAG, “ὑπολαμβάνω”.

merely a suggestion by John, but is cast in the mode of an obligation. When he writes “we ought to support...,” the Greek *ἡμεῖς οὖν ὀφειλομεν* would indicate something closer to “we are obligated to support...”

...that we may be fellow workers for the truth. – When the believing community supports those who voluntarily labor in their midst, they too are giving glory to God through their obedience to His commandments and thus join the teachers and leaders as workers for the truth.

This is an important truth that has been lost or at least diminished among a large part of the wider “Christian Church” in our times. For the work of making disciples, teaching others, evangelizing the lost, etc. is not to be envisioned as in the hands of a few teachers or leaders, but is that to which every believer in the community is to be connected. “Fellow workers” (*συνεργοί, sunergoi*) means that all combine their abilities and their means in order to accomplish the task. This means engaging in prayer, encouragement, putting hands to particular tasks, sharing that which is needed for the success of the whole, etc.

And what is the ultimate goal of being fellow workers together? It is that the truth of Yeshua as our Lord, Savior, and King, might be made known to a watching world, portraying the riches of salvation He has procured for all who will believe. Rather than being spectators in the community, John exhorts us all to see ourselves as “fellow workers for the truth.”

9 I wrote something to the *ekklesia*; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say.

The opening line, “I wrote something to the *ekklesia*,” has gathered a number of variants in the Greek manuscripts. While the translation as given here has the greater weight of evidence for being authentic, other variant readings would yield “I would have written something to the *ekklesia*,” “I wrote to the *ekklesia* herself,” and “I wrote unto the *ekklesia*.”¹

Given the manuscript evidence for the text being “I wrote something to the *ekklesia*,” it is clear that John is referring to a written com-

1 *ἔγραψά τι*, \aleph^* A (B) 048 1241 1739 (cop^{sa, bo}) arm; *ἔγραψα ἄν* (“I would have written ...”) was introduced into \aleph^c 33 81 181 614 vg al.; those omitting *τι* (C K L P Ψ most minuscules, followed by the Textus Receptus); the readings *ἔγραψάς τι* (B cop^{sa, bo}) and *ἔγραψα αὐτῇ* (326^c) are obviously transcriptional errors. [Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd edition (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), p. 655.]