

Outline of 3 John Emphasizing Love for God in Speech and Behavior

The Third Epistle of John stands as the New Testament's shortest book, containing only 14-15 verses, yet it provides profound insights into Christian character and church leadership. Written by the apostle John around AD 85-95 as a personal letter to his beloved friend Gaius, this epistle demonstrates how **love for God is expressed through walking in truth, showing hospitality to gospel workers, and choosing righteous examples to follow while avoiding selfish ambition and pride**. Through three distinct character studies, John shows that **authentic love for God produces transformed speech and behavior that either builds up or tears down the church community**[1][2][3][4].

I. Gaius: Walking in Truth with Joy (3 John 1-8)

The opening section celebrates Gaius as a model Christian whose truth-walking brings great joy to spiritual leaders and demonstrates genuine love for God through faithful hospitality. John shows how love for God produces delight in others' faithfulness and generous support for gospel ministry[5][2][6][3].

Greeting to the Beloved Friend (v. 1)

John opens with warm personal affection that immediately establishes the relational foundation for everything that follows[6][7][8].

Love in Truth:

"The elder, To my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth" (3 John 1)[2][7][9].

John identifies himself simply as "**the elder**" (ho presbuteros), using the same self-designation as in 2 John[7][10]. This title suggests pastoral authority combined with humble approachability[10].

Gaius was a common Roman name appearing five times in the New Testament[10]. While we cannot definitively identify him with other biblical figures named Gaius, he is clearly a dear friend and fellow church leader whom John knows well[8][10].

The phrase "**whom I love in the truth**" connects this letter with 2 John's emphasis on truth and love working together[2]. John's love for Gaius is **grounded in truth**, not mere sentiment or personal preference[2][7].

- **Love for God Expressed:** Loving fellow believers in truth rather than emotion; addressing others with genuine spiritual affection; establishing relationships based on shared commitment to God's truth
- **Speech Impact:** Speaking with affection that is grounded in truth; using endearing terms that reflect genuine spiritual bonds
- **Behavior Impact:** Demonstrating love that flows from shared commitment to truth; building relationships on theological foundation

Prayer for Comprehensive Well-being (v. 2)

John expresses concern for Gaius's complete welfare, demonstrating the holistic care that should characterize Christian relationships[6][7][8].

Health and Prosperity:

"Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well" (3 John 2)[6][7][9].

This prayer is unique in the New Testament for its explicit concern with **physical health** alongside spiritual welfare[7][8]. John prays for **comprehensive prosperity** - physical, emotional, financial, and relational well-being[8].

Key Elements of the Prayer[7][8]:

- "**Dear friend**" (agapete): Term of endearment used four times in this short letter

- **"Good health"**: Physical wellness and freedom from illness
- **"All may go well"**: General prosperity in life circumstances
- **"Even as your soul"**: Spiritual health as the foundation for other blessings

John's prayer model shows that **spiritual leaders should care about every aspect of believers' lives**, not just their souls[7]. The phrase **"even as your soul is getting along well"** indicates that Gaius's spiritual life is already thriving[8].

- **Love for God Expressed**: Praying for comprehensive well-being of fellow believers; caring about physical as well as spiritual health; desiring God's blessing on all aspects of others' lives
- **Speech Impact**: Expressing genuine concern for others' total welfare; praying specifically for health and prosperity
- **Behavior Impact**: Demonstrating care that extends beyond spiritual matters; showing interest in others' complete well-being

Joy in Truth-Walking (vv. 3-4)

John expresses the pinnacle of pastoral joy - discovering that spiritual children are living according to God's truth[5][6] [3][11].

Great Joy in Faithfulness:

"It gave me great joy when some believers came and testified about your faithfulness to the truth, telling how you continue to walk in it. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth" (3 John 3-4)[5][6][3][11].

The Report of Truth-Walking[5][3]:

- **"Some believers came"**: Fellow Christians brought testimony about Gaius
- **"Testified about your faithfulness"**: Public witness to his consistent commitment
- **"To the truth"**: The gospel message and Christian doctrine
- **"Continue to walk in it"**: Ongoing lifestyle of truth-based living

The Greatest Joy[11]:

John declares that nothing brings him greater happiness than hearing about his spiritual children's faithfulness[5][11]. The phrase **"walking in the truth"** refers to conducting one's entire life according to God's revealed truth[5][3].

In biblical usage, a person's **"walk"** denotes their behavior or lifestyle[5]. **Walking in truth** means **behaving in a way that agrees with Scripture, the gospel message, and Christian doctrine**[5]. It involves applying biblical beliefs to daily life, actions, and behaviors[5].

Modern Application: Instead of "walking in truth," we might say "walking the talk" or "practicing what you preach"[5]. A person who walks in truth demonstrates **no contradiction between creed and conduct**[5].

- **Love for God Expressed**: Finding greatest joy when others live according to God's truth; celebrating faithfulness in fellow believers; testifying to others' spiritual growth
- **Speech Impact**: Expressing joy over others' faithfulness; giving testimony about truth-walking; sharing reports of spiritual progress
- **Behavior Impact**: Living consistently with God's truth; conducting life in ways that bring joy to spiritual leaders

Faithful Hospitality to Gospel Workers (vv. 5-8)

John commends Gaius for his generous support of traveling missionaries, demonstrating how love for God extends to practical care for gospel workers[1][2][3][12].

Faithful Service to Strangers (vv. 5-6):

"Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers and sisters, even though they are strangers to you. They have told the church about your love. Please send them on their way in a manner that honors God" (3 John 5-6)[2][3][9].

Elements of Faithful Hospitality[2][3]:

- **"You are faithful"**: Consistent, reliable service regardless of circumstances
- **"For the brothers and sisters"**: Fellow Christians engaged in gospel ministry
- **"Even though they are strangers"**: Extending care to unknown believers
- **"Told the church about your love"**: Public testimony to his generous character
- **"Send them on their way"**: Provide resources for continuing ministry
- **"In a manner that honors God"**: Support that reflects well on Christ

The phrase "**even though they are strangers**" highlights the remarkable nature of Gaius's hospitality[3][9]. In the ancient world, hospitality to unknown travelers was risky and costly, yet Gaius consistently provided for gospel workers[2][12].

Becoming Co-workers for Truth (vv. 7-8):

"It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. We ought therefore to show hospitality to such people so that we may work together for the truth" (3 John 7-8)[1][2][3].

Why Support is Necessary[2][12]:

- **"For the sake of the Name"**: Motivated by love for Christ
- **"Receiving no help from the pagans"**: Cannot rely on non-Christian support
- **"We ought therefore"**: Christian obligation to support gospel workers
- **"Work together for the truth"**: Hospitality makes supporters co-workers

The phrase "**for the sake of the Name**" refers to **Jesus Christ**[2][3]. These missionaries traveled specifically to proclaim Christ, not for personal gain[2]. Their refusal of support from "**the pagans**" demonstrates integrity - they will not compromise the gospel by accepting help from those who oppose it[12].

By supporting such workers, Gaius becomes a "**fellow worker for the truth**"[1][3]. This shows that **Christians can participate in gospel ministry through practical support even if they don't travel themselves**[2].

- **Love for God Expressed**: Showing faithful hospitality to Christian workers; supporting missionaries for the sake of Christ's name; becoming co-workers for truth through practical service
- **Speech Impact**: Giving testimony about love and faithfulness; speaking well of gospel workers; encouraging support for ministry
- **Behavior Impact**: Providing practical support for unknown believers; sending workers on their way with honor; participating in gospel ministry through hospitality

II. Diotrephes: Pride and Selfish Ambition (3 John 9-10)

The central section presents Diotrephes as a negative example, showing how lack of love for God produces prideful, destructive behavior that harms the church community. John demonstrates how selfish ambition leads to rejection of authority, malicious speech, and exclusion of faithful believers[1][2][13][4].

The Character of Destructive Leadership (vv. 9-10)

John provides a detailed portrait of church leadership motivated by pride rather than love for God, serving as a warning for all believers[1][13][4].

Loves to Put Himself First (v. 9a):

"I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will not welcome us" (3 John 9a)[1][13][4].

The phrase "**loves to be first**" (philoproteuo) is found only here in the New Testament[13]. It describes someone who **seeks preeminence and prominence** in the church[1][4].

The Diotrepheen Spirit[13]:

A "Diotrepheen spirit" arises from the judgment that **one belongs at the top**, whether because of gifts, background, or resources[13]. This spirit manifests itself through:

- Demanding recognition and honor
- Insisting on having the final say in decisions
- Becoming offended when not consulted
- Expecting others to defer to their opinions

This directly contradicts Jesus' teaching that "**whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all**" (Mark 9:35)[13].

Rejects Apostolic Authority (v. 9b):

The phrase "**will not welcome us**" indicates that Diotrephes **refuses to acknowledge John's apostolic authority**[1][4]. This is particularly serious because John was one of the twelve apostles and an eyewitness of Christ[4].

Spreads Malicious Gossip (v. 10a):

"So when I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us" (3 John 10a)[1][4].

The Greek word for "**gossiping maliciously**" (phlureo) means **talking nonsense** or **spreading false accusations**[4]. Diotrephes engages in **character assassination** against John and his associates[1].

Refuses Hospitality and Excommunicates Others (v. 10b-c):

"Not only does he refuse to welcome other believers, but he also stops others from doing so and puts them out of the church" (3 John 10b-c)[1][2][4].

Diotrephes' Destructive Actions[1][4]:

- **Refuses personal hospitality:** Won't welcome gospel workers himself
- **Prevents others from helping:** Stops church members from showing hospitality
- **Excommunicates the faithful:** Removes from fellowship those who support missionaries

This creates a **culture of fear** where church members are afraid to do what is right because they might face punishment[1][4].

The Pattern of Prideful Leadership[1][13]:

1. **Seeks prominence** rather than service
2. **Rejects accountability** from spiritual authority
3. **Engages in character assassination** against opponents
4. **Controls others** through fear and intimidation
5. **Excludes faithful believers** who threaten their position

- **Love for God Expressed:** [Negative example] Avoiding selfish ambition and pride; submitting to godly authority; speaking truth rather than spreading gossip; supporting rather than hindering gospel work
- **Speech Impact:** [Negative example] Refusing to engage in malicious talk; avoiding character assassination; speaking positively about spiritual leaders
- **Behavior Impact:** [Negative example] Serving others rather than seeking prominence; welcoming rather than excluding faithful believers; building up rather than controlling through fear

III. Demetrius and Choosing Good Examples (3 John 11-15)

The final section presents Demetrius as a positive example while calling believers to imitate good rather than evil. John shows how love for God produces character that receives testimony from both people and truth itself[1][2][7][4].

The Command to Imitate Good (v. 11)

John provides a fundamental principle for Christian living while explaining the spiritual significance of moral choices[1][7][9].

Choose Your Examples Carefully:

"Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God; anyone who does what is evil has not seen God" (3 John 11)[1][7][9].

This verse provides **the key verse** and central message of the entire letter[7]. John presents a **clear moral choice** between good and evil examples[1].

The Principle of Imitation[1][7]:

- **"Do not imitate what is evil"**: Avoid following destructive patterns like Diotrephes
- **"But what is good"**: Choose positive examples like Gaius and Demetrius
- **Deliberate Choice**: Imitation is not automatic but requires intentional decision

The Spiritual Significance[7][9]:

- **"Anyone who does what is good is from God"**: Good behavior demonstrates divine origin
- **"Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God"**: Evil behavior reveals lack of relationship with God

The phrase **"has not seen God"** doesn't refer to physical sight but to **spiritual knowledge and relationship**[7]. Those who habitually practice evil demonstrate they have never truly **known God or experienced His transforming presence**[9].

John **reduces moral complexity to a simple choice** between good and evil, similar to his approach in 1 John where he simplifies spiritual life to love versus hate[1].

- **Love for God Expressed**: Choosing righteous examples to follow; avoiding evil patterns of behavior; demonstrating divine relationship through good works
- **Speech Impact**: Encouraging others to follow good examples; warning against evil influences; speaking about spiritual significance of moral choices
- **Behavior Impact**: Deliberately imitating good rather than evil; living in ways that demonstrate relationship with God; making conscious choices about influences

Demetrius: A Good Testimony (v. 12)

John presents Demetrius as a positive example whose character receives universal commendation, demonstrating how love for God produces authentic righteousness[2][7][4].

Triple Testimony:

"Demetrius is well spoken of by everyone—and even by the truth itself. We also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true" (3 John 12)[2][7][4].

Three Sources of Commendation[7][4]:

1. **"By everyone"**: Universal human testimony to his character
2. **"By the truth itself"**: Truth bears witness to his righteousness
3. **"We also speak well"**: Apostolic endorsement of his faithfulness

The Significance of Universal Testimony[2]:

The phrase **"well spoken of by everyone"** indicates that Demetrius has such consistent character that **even potential critics** speak positively about him[4]. This level of respect is rare and significant[2].

Truth Itself Bears Witness[7]:

The remarkable phrase **"by the truth itself"** suggests that Demetrius lives in such **alignment with God's truth** that truth personified testifies to his character[2][7]. This parallels John's Gospel where **truth is personalized in Christ** (John 14:6)[7].

Demetrius likely serves as **John's personal representative or letter carrier** to Gaius[2][12]. John wants to ensure that Gaius will welcome him by providing this strong recommendation[12].

Apostolic Endorsement[4]:

John adds his own testimony with the confidence that "**you know that our testimony is true**"[7]. This phrase echoes John 21:24 and emphasizes the **reliability of apostolic witness**[7].

The Pattern of Good Character[2]:

1. **Consistent righteousness** that others recognize
2. **Alignment with truth** that truth itself confirms
3. **Spiritual leadership** that apostles endorse
4. **Trustworthy character** that inspires confidence
5. **Humble service** that builds rather than divides

- **Love for God Expressed:** Living so that character receives universal testimony; aligning life with truth so completely that truth bears witness; maintaining trustworthy character that spiritual leaders endorse
- **Speech Impact:** Speaking well of those with good character; giving reliable testimony about others' faithfulness; encouraging trust in proven servants
- **Behavior Impact:** Living consistently righteous lives; demonstrating character that even critics must acknowledge; serving faithfully as representatives of truth

Personal Fellowship and Closing (vv. 13-15)

John concludes with expressions of personal affection and hope for face-to-face fellowship, demonstrating the relational heart of Christian ministry[2][7][12].

Preference for Personal Communication:

"I have much to write you, but I do not want to do so with pen and ink. I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face" (3 John 13-14)[7][12].

This closing mirrors 2 John 12, showing John's consistent preference for **personal fellowship** over written communication[7][12]. Some matters are best handled **face-to-face** where tone, expression, and immediate response enable fuller understanding[12].

The Value of Direct Communication[2]:

- **More complete expression:** Some things can't be adequately written
- **Immediate feedback:** Real-time response to questions and concerns
- **Personal connection:** Relationship building requires physical presence
- **Spiritual edification:** Fellowship is enhanced through personal interaction

Final Greeting:

"Peace to you. The friends here send their greetings. Greet the friends there by name" (3 John 15)[7][12].

The word "**friends**" (philoī) creates a warm, intimate atmosphere for the closing[7]. John doesn't use formal titles but emphasizes the **personal relationships** that bind the Christian community together[12].

Elements of Christian Fellowship[7]:

- **"Peace to you":** The blessing of wholeness and harmony
- **"The friends here":** Local Christian community sends greetings
- **"Greet the friends there by name":** Personal, individual recognition of believers

The instruction to "**greet... by name**" shows the **personal nature** of early Christian fellowship[7]. Each believer was known individually, not as part of an anonymous crowd[12].

- **Love for God Expressed:** Valuing personal fellowship for complete communication; maintaining warm relationships across Christian communities; recognizing individual believers by name
- **Speech Impact:** Preferring face-to-face communication for important matters; sending personal greetings; speaking of others as beloved friends
- **Behavior Impact:** Prioritizing personal visits and fellowship; building relationships across church boundaries;

Key Points All Christians Should Know from 3 John

Theme	Key Teaching	Impact on Speech and Behavior
Walking in Truth	I have no greater joy than to hear my children walking in truth (v.4)	Living consistently with God's truth brings joy to spiritual leaders
Faithful Hospitality	You are faithful in whatever you do for brothers, even strangers (v.5)	Extending practical support to gospel workers, even unknown ones
Co-workers for Truth	We ought to support such people so we may be fellow workers for truth (v.8)	Supporting missionaries makes believers partners in gospel ministry
Avoiding Pride	Diotrephes loves to put himself first (v.9)	Rejecting selfish ambition and seeking prominence in the church
Choosing Good Examples	Do not imitate evil but imitate good (v.11)	Deliberately following righteous examples while avoiding destructive patterns
Good Testimony	Demetrius is well spoken of by everyone and by truth itself (v.12)	Living so that character receives universal commendation and truth's witness
Personal Fellowship	I hope to see you soon and talk face to face (v.14)	Valuing direct communication and personal relationship in ministry

Summary

3 John demonstrates that **love for God is expressed through walking in truth, showing hospitality to gospel workers, and choosing righteous examples to follow while avoiding selfish ambition and pride**. Written as a personal letter addressing specific church situations, this brief epistle provides enduring principles for Christian character and leadership through three vivid personality portraits.

The letter teaches that love for God produces:

Speech that builds up the community:

- Expressing genuine affection grounded in truth rather than sentiment
- Giving testimony about others' faithfulness and truth-walking
- Speaking well of those who demonstrate good character
- Avoiding malicious gossip and character assassination
- Encouraging support for gospel workers and their ministry
- Preferring face-to-face communication for important matters
- Greeting fellow believers personally by name

Behavior that demonstrates authentic righteousness:

- Walking in truth through consistent lifestyle alignment with Scripture
- Showing faithful hospitality to gospel workers, even strangers
- Supporting missionaries to become co-workers for the truth
- Avoiding pride, selfish ambition, and seeking prominence
- Building up rather than controlling through fear and intimidation
- Living so that character receives testimony from people and truth itself
- Choosing righteous examples to imitate while rejecting evil patterns

Relationships marked by humble service:

- Loving fellow believers with affection grounded in truth
- Caring about others' comprehensive well-being, not just spiritual health
- Finding greatest joy when spiritual children walk in truth
- Welcoming and supporting those engaged in gospel ministry
- Maintaining warm, personal connections across church communities
- Respecting spiritual authority rather than rejecting accountability
- Including rather than excluding faithful believers from fellowship

The letter's **three character studies** provide clear contrasts between godly and ungodly leadership[1][4]:

Gaius represents faithful discipleship: walking in truth, showing hospitality, supporting gospel work, and maintaining love grounded in truth[2][3]. His character brings **great joy** to spiritual leaders and receives **public testimony** for his love[6].

Diotrephes exemplifies destructive leadership: loving prominence, rejecting authority, spreading gossip, refusing hospitality, and excommunicating faithful believers[1][13][4]. His pride-driven behavior creates **fear and division** in the church community.

Demetrius models righteous character: receiving **universal testimony**, gaining **truth's own witness**, and earning **apostolic endorsement**[7][4]. His character demonstrates what it means to be **from God** through good works.

The letter's central command - **"do not imitate evil but imitate good"** (v.11) - provides a simple yet profound principle for spiritual growth[7]. John shows that **moral choices reveal spiritual condition**: those who do good are from God, while those who do evil have not seen God[1][7].

The emphasis on **hospitality** throughout the letter reflects the crucial role this virtue played in early Christian ministry[2][12]. In a world without modern transportation and communication, **traveling missionaries depended entirely** on local believers for support[2]. By showing hospitality, Christians became **"fellow workers for the truth"** - partners in gospel ministry even without traveling themselves[3].

John's preference for **face-to-face communication** (vv.13-14) demonstrates the importance of **personal relationship** in spiritual leadership[12]. While written communication has value, some matters require **direct, personal interaction** for complete understanding and resolution[7].

The letter's **relational warmth** is evident throughout - John addresses Gaius as **"dear friend"** four times, expresses concern for his health, celebrates his faithfulness, and closes with personal greetings[7]. This shows that **authentic Christian ministry** combines doctrinal fidelity with genuine personal affection[2].

3 John calls every believer to examine their **choice of examples and influences**. The letter challenges Christians to identify whether they are following patterns like **Gaius** (faithful service) or **Diotrephes** (selfish ambition), and to consciously choose **Demetrius-like character** that receives testimony from both people and truth itself.

The letter's warning about **Diotrephen leadership** remains relevant today as churches continue to face leaders motivated by pride rather than service[13]. John's description provides clear markers for recognizing **destructive leadership patterns** while calling believers to **imitate good rather than evil**.

Ultimately, 3 John teaches that **Christian maturity involves deliberate choices** about examples, influences, and behavior patterns. The letter shows that love for God is not abstract but practical - expressed through **truth-walking, gospel support, humble service, and righteous character** that brings **joy to spiritual leaders** and **testimony from truth itself**.

Resources

Tool:

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