

Route 66

3 John: Hospitality & Hostility

Part 64 – September 11, 2011



3rd John and 2nd John are so close in size, that it's debated which is actually *shorter*. 2nd John is shorter by 37 words in English. 3rd John is shorter by 26 words in Greek. So, 2nd John is the shortest book in our NT; but 3rd John is the shortest NT book *written*. And, do you know why they're so close in size? That's what a scribe could fit on a standard sheet of papyrus.

We don't know how big 4th John was, because it's gone. Instead of reading it to his church, an ego-driven leader destroyed it!

I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. – 3 John 9 NIV



That was a public letter to the church. This is a private letter to Gaius, a man John refers to (four times) as a “dear friend”. John was likely in his late 80s when he wrote this; and church leaders in the AD 100s say he lived his final years in Ephesus. This incident may have happened in one of the seven churches (within traveling distance) that John lists in Revelation.

John sends out teachers and messengers who are welcomed with joy in the churches. But Diotrephes sees these *intrusive foreigners* as an insult and a threat to his own authority. He refuses to house them, spreads lies about them, threatens those who want to help them, and excommunicates anyone who does.

But Gaius refuses to be bullied; and he houses and supplies them.

To my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth. Dear friend ... It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth. – 3 John 1-3 NIV



Gaius is a peacemaker. You know what you mostly get if you type *peacemaker* into Google Images? This is appropriate because Gaius was a pistol! Peacemakers resist and confront troublemakers. Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers” (Mat 5:9), not the peace-hoppers, or the peace-keepers, but those who'll face the heat of the *troublemakers* and work for peace, whatever the price.

This is what it means to have “faithfulness to the truth” and to “walk in the truth”: to stand up to non-truth whenever God gives us the opportunity and the means to do it lovingly.

In John’s day, it was illegal to construct a church, because Christianity wasn’t a recognized religion. So, congregations met in the largest houses of their most wealthy members. This road (in Ephesus) should look familiar. That’s the public bath that we discussed in 1st John. It’s next to a Greco Roman temple. And across the street is where the rich folks lived. The six houses being excavated were here in John’s day.



Curetes Street



The “Terrace Houses” of Ephesus; the oldest building dates to the 1st century BC



They had forced air heat (through clay pipes in the floors and walls) and hot and cold running water. If any of the owners were Christian, one of the early churches would’ve likely met here. We don’t know if Gaius was wealthy. We just know that he stepped up when everyone else was cowering to the divisive Diotrephes. And John commends and confirms his gracious generosity.

Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you. They have told the church about your love. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. 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 men so that we may work together for the truth. – 3 John 5-8 NIV

One of those “such men”, Demetrius, is mentioned toward the end of the letter. He’s most likely the delivering this letter to Gaius and using it as his reference from John.

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 NIV

Demetrius might be one of those who’d been opposed and rejected by the little dictator. Interestingly, Diotrephes’ doctrine and theology doesn’t seem to be a problem ... just his *ego*! He’s feeling resentful or threatened or both! And the only clue John offers about what might be motivating this guy is that ...

Diotrephes ... loves to be first. – 3 John 9 NIV condensed

In other words, the way he builds himself up is to tear others down. The way he gets ahead is to pull others back. I think I’ve *met* Diotrephes ... I think I’ve *been* Diotrephes!

He loved recognition more than righteousness. The height of significance in Diotrephes' eyes would be to put down the last living, and therefore most significant, apostle!

So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church. - 3 John 10 NIV

Diotrephes demonstrates a downward spiraling progression that every one of us has followed at one time or another. It begins with "gossiping maliciously". It's so hard not to judge and condemn those who bruise my ego, because it's such a reliably and immediately quenching, satisfying, and pleasurable ... poison!



1. [And so] We speak against them (we slam 'em, criticize 'em, and put 'em down)

And thus we tip the first domino. God takes gossip and slander far more seriously than we do. It's cataloged alongside the *vilest* of sins.

They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are **gossips, slanderers, God-haters** ... - Romans 1:29b-30a NIV

Wait! Why's it lumped with God-haters? Just watch the dominos fall: "Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers"

Speaking against them (without making peace) doesn't solve the problem or scratch that itch we're feeling.

2. [And so] We act against them

When our self-love is offended, we're tempted to take revenge. Nothing serious mind you, just something hurtful to salve my ego and to let them know there's a price to pay for crossing *me*. Granted, taking revenge tells God I don't trust *him*. But if he didn't want us doing it, seems like he'd make it more clear.

Do not take revenge ... - Romans 12:19a NIV

I'm not sure what that means. *Why* is gossip and slander lumped in with God-hating? Let's look at the next domino: "He also stops those who want to do so". This involves recruiting - if not forcing - others to join our sin.

3. We incite others against them

And we reward them with acceptance and approval for speaking and acting against the people that *we* have the problem with. Facebook has made this sin impressively efficient!

When we introduce mean-spirited gossip to another believer, we unconsciously force them to make a grotesque choice: they must either grieve God's Holy Spirit or grieve me! We ask his followers to follow us instead! And to make it even worse, they usually feel our wrath if they choose to grieve us instead of grieving God: "and [he] puts them out of the church". And so the final domino falls.

4. We punish those who won't follow

And now we've not only declared a lack of trust in God's goodness and faithfulness and justice, but we've dethroned him as well! And *that's* why it's lumped with God-hating!

Why is it that believers who'd never think of coaxing someone into murder, strife, deceit, and malice, often give so little consideration to coaxing them into God-hating gossip? Gaius was a kingdom builder; Diotrephes was a demolition expert. Which one are *you* going to be? We have to choose, because God won't allow us to work two jobs.

And John wraps up this short letter with some words of wisdom to Gaius that are profound in their simplicity.

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 NIV

Ever notice how we speak more negative when we're around negative friends, and positive when around positive friends? We're "imitators" by nature. That's what we do. It's kind of impossible for us *not* to imitate those close to us. So, use wisdom when selecting who you surround yourself with.

It's not rocket science: hang with the peacemakers who value righteousness over recognition and you'll grow in that. Hang with the troublemakers who don't mind dethroning God now and then and you'll grow in *that*.

I'll close with the three words John used with Gaius. It's something that flocks to peacemakers and eludes troublemakers.

Peace to you. - 3 John 14b NIV