

An Exegetical Presentation on 3 John 9-15

WELS Northern California Pastors' Study Conference

Monday, April 28, 2008

St. John Lutheran Church; Vacaville, California

Pastor Johnold J. Strey

Establishing the Context

Our study of John's third letter began at our fall '07 conference, when we considered the first portion of this epistle (vv. 1-8). Because our previous conference dealt with the opening verses, we will not include an extensive introduction of 3 John here, but we will note some basic information that places the second half of the letter in context.

The audience gathered here today does not need to be convinced that the writer is the apostle John. As in 2 John, he identifies himself simply as ὁ πρεσβύτερος. The title with the definite article, apart from further explanation, suggests a well-known and well-respected individual. As the sole surviving apostle at the end of the first century, Saint John is the obvious author. This becomes even more obvious when one considers the similar style and tone this short letter shares with John's Gospel and other two Epistles. John's authorship suggests a date in the 80's or 90's A.D. Some (most notably, Lenski) suggest that 2 John and 3 John were even written on the same day and were intended to address the same situation, although verse nine may not support the simultaneous writing. If the "chosen lady and her children" of 2 John are a congregation, then 3 John is written to a specific leader in the congregation and complements what the apostle has written to the whole church.

Third John is written to an unspecified man named Gaius. Three different men named Gaius appear in the New Testament (Acts 19:29, Acts 20:4, 1 Corinthians 1:14 & Romans 16:23). The name was extremely common in the Roman Empire. The recipient of this letter is most likely not the same as the other men name Gaius in the New Testament. From the section studied at our last conference, we learned that he is a faithful member (vv. 3-4) of a church under John's supervision, and that he opened his home as a place for traveling preachers to stay (vv. 5-8). Gaius's positive example, welcoming faithful preachers into his home, stands as a positive example of church fellowship in contrast to John's encouragement in his second letter to refrain from giving support to false teachers (2 John 7-11).

In the section we studied last fall, John commends Gaius because he "continue[s] to walk in the truth" (v. 3). He encourages him to continue his support for the faithful traveling preachers who come into the church's midst, "so that we may work together for the truth." As we study the second half of the letter, we learn about an individual who was not nearly so hospitable to the brothers that came among this congregation.

Verse 9

Ἔγραψα τι τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ· ἀλλ' ὁ φιλοπρωτεύων αὐτῶν Διοτρέφης οὐκ ἐπιδέχεται ἡμᾶς.

NIV

I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us.

ESV

I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority.

NRSV

I have written something to the church; but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority.

Ἔγραψα

aorist, indicative, 1st person, singular

The Aorist emphasizes that John has written to the church previously. This does not necessarily exclude Lenski's suggestion that 2 & 3 John were written to the same group at the same time, but if John is referring to the letter we call 2 John, then 3 John may be a follow-up letter to 2 John. The NIV Study Bible suggests a lost letter. The accusative singular indefinite pronoun τι is not included in all the variants of this verse, which may be why the NIV leaves it untranslated, though its inclusion or omission does not create any major issues.

τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ

dative, feminine, singular – indirect object

The article suggests a particular group or congregation, probably the particular congregation in which Gaius plays an important role.

ὁ φιλοπρωτεύων

present, participle, nominative, masculine, singular

This is the only place in the New Testament that this word is used. The translations place this after the proper name, Diotrephes, to make the verse read smoothly in English, but the fact that John puts this substantival participle first shows us that Diotrephes's constant (present tense) self-absorption and its affect on the church is the reason John abruptly changes his train of thought (ἀλλ'). The roots within the word define it: one who loves to be first. The ESV and NRSV appear to translate the pronoun αὐτῶν as an object (likes to put himself first), but αὐτῶν is genitive, masculine, plural. A partitive genitive would fit much better: "who loves to be first of all."

Διοτρέφης

Nothing beyond this letter is known about Diotrephes, the trouble-making character "who loves to be first of all." Jeske suggests in The People's Bible that his parents must have been pagans, because his name literally means, "cherished by Zeus" or "nourished by Zeus."

ἐπιδέχεται

present, passive (deponent), indicative, 3rd person, sing., from ἐπιδέχομαι

The vocable root means to receive or accept. In context, Diotrephes is not (οὐκ) accepting John's words as authoritative. The plural direct object ἡμᾶς is not the so-called "editorial plural," as the RSV suggests with a singular pronoun (but the NRSV corrects above). Rather, John's apostolic and authoritative message is being given through other messengers sent to the congregation, and Diotrephes does not welcome these faithful brothers; in fact, he even gossips about them! John and the other messengers are grouped together with the pronoun ἡμᾶς.

Verse 10

διὰ τοῦτο, ἐὰν ἔλθω, ὑπομνήσω αὐτοῦ τὰ ἔργα ἃ ποιεῖ λόγοις πονηροῖς φλυαρῶν ἡμᾶς, καὶ μὴ ἀρκούμενος ἐπὶ τούτοις οὔτε αὐτὸς ἐπιδέχεται τοὺς ἀδελφούς καὶ τοὺς βουλομένους κωλύει καὶ ἐκ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἐκβάλλει.

NIV

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.

ESV

So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.

NRSV

So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing in spreading false charges against us. And not content with those charges, he refuses to welcome the friends, and even prevents those who want to do so and expels them from the church.

διὰ τοῦτο

Although left untranslated in the three versions above, these two words show us that John's plans are a response to the report about Diotrephes begun in the previous verse and continued in this verse.

ἔλθω

aorist, subjunctive, 1st person, singular, from ἔρχομαι

With the particle ἐὰν, this becomes the protasis of a future more vivid conditional. Lenski notes that John's style was to use "ἐὰν practically in the sense of 'when'; it is used here: 'when I come'" (p. 586); however, the preceding translations take a more literal approach to that clause.

ὑπομνήσω	<p>future, indicative, 1st person, singular, from ὑπομιμνήσκω</p> <p><i>Here is the main verb in the apodosis. If John arrives at the church, he will recall Diotrephes’s troublesome actions. The verb ὑπομιμνήσκω can take a double accusative, with those who will hear the recollection becoming the other accusative noun. The double accusative construction is not used here, but from context it is clear that John will recall these problems to others, not for himself.</i></p>
τὰ ἔργα	<p>accusative, neuter, plural</p> <p><i>John has several of Diotrephes’s (αὐτοῦ) actions in mind. He has specific examples, indicated by the definite article; these specific examples will be cited shortly by John. The vocable choice emphasizes the actual deeds accomplished, albeit negative in this case. TDNT states, “ἔργον ... denote[s] action or active zeal in contrast to idleness, or useful activity in contrast to useless busy-ness.” This seems to suggest that Diotrephes has done some real damage in the church, rather than attempting to stir up problems with little or no success.</i></p>
ποιεῖ	<p>present, indicative, 3rd person, singular</p> <p><i>This is the main verb in the relative clause that modifies τὰ ἔργα. The present tense shows us that John is not simply addressing some past grievances with Diotrephes, but that “the works which he is doing” continue to go on in the church.</i></p>
φλυαρῶν	<p>present, participle, nominative, masculine, singular, from φλυαρέω</p> <p><i>This participle, φλυαρῶν, is also the only time a form of this verb appears in the New Testament. BAGD lists “talk nonsense” and “bring unjustified charges against” as definitions for φλυαρέω. The masculine singular form modifies the understood subject of ποιεῖ. The verb takes the dative to express <u>what</u> is being spoken, and the accusative to note <u>whom</u> the unjust charges are spoken against. The pronoun ἡμᾶς once again represents John and the other faithful messengers in the church. A literal translation such as the ESV, while accurate, will sound a bit wooden in English. The NIV does an admirable job capturing the thought.</i></p>
λόγοις πονηροῖς	<p>dative, masculine, singular – noun & adjective</p> <p><i>Referring back to the participle φλυαρῶν, this shows us <u>what</u> is being spoken about the faithful servants in the church: “evil words.” The lack of an article emphasizes not the specific things being said but the quality or nature of harmful and wicked words.</i></p>

(μὴ) ἀρκούμενος present, passive, participle, nominative, masc., sing., from ἀρκέω

This form also modifies the understood subject of the last indicative verb, ποιεῖ, which is Diotrephes. The word means to be “sufficient, enough, adequate.” But for Diotrephes, it was still not (μὴ) enough to do these things (ἐπὶ τούτοις), namely, to spread bogus rumors around about John and the other servants of the gospel! Three more present tense indicative verbs follow, showing the additional chaos Diotrephes continued to cause in the church.

(οὔτε) ἐπιδέχεται present, passive (deponent), indicative, 3rd person, sing., from ἐπιδέχομαι

This is the exact same verb form that appeared in the previous verse. There John included himself in the direct object: Diotrephes did not welcome or accept John and the other brothers (ἡμᾶς). Because John himself was not physically present, verse nine was an indication that Diotrephes had rejected their instruction and admonition. But in this verse, the object is τοὺς ἀδελφούς and does not include John. These brothers are physically present, and so the rejection is not only intellectual but also personal. That sense is only heightened with the intensive pronoun αὐτὸς: “He himself continually does not welcome the brothers.” αὐτὸς also stands in contrast to the next clause, where others are unable to welcome the brothers because Diotrephes prevents them from doing so.

τοὺς βουλομένους present, passive (deponent), participle, accusative, masculine, plural

This articularized participle functions as the direct object of the next two indicative verbs. Normally, the direct object, “those wishing” would need an infinitive or some further explanation about what they wish to do. From the preceding clause, it is obvious that John refers to those who want to welcome the brothers in the church.

κωλύει present, indicative, 3rd person, singular

This root simply means to “hinder, prevent, forbid.” Taken with its direct object, the participle τοὺς βουλομένους, we learn that Diotrephes not only gives a cold shoulder to the brothers, but he prevents others in the church from giving them a warm welcome. The three actions John has already cited (spreading false and damaging rumors, failing to welcome the brothers, preventing others from welcoming the brothers) are each offensive enough by themselves, but the most egregious behavior is the third and final item, cited next.

ἐκβάλλει

present, indicative, 3rd person, singular

Diotrephes's behavior has certainly been offensive enough already, but the last item in this list appears almost cult-like. Not only does he prevent members from welcoming faithful preachers associated with John into the congregation, but he throws out of the church (ἐκ τῆς ἐκκλησίας) those members who tried to welcome these brothers in the first place. This, too, is an ongoing problem, indicated by the present tense. Several commentators used the expression, "church boss," to describe Diotrephes's behavior and personality. The NRSV translation, "expels," is a good way to capture the flavor of this verb. Lenski suggests that this expulsion was merely a "vicious attempt" at excommunication, but not a successful attempt (p. 588). This certainly was not a legitimate excommunication. The expulsion of members was not done out of love for a sinner; it was done by a sinner with a lust for ecclesiastical power.

Verse 11

Ἀγαπητέ, μὴ μιμοῦ τὸ κακὸν ἀλλὰ τὸ ἀγαθόν. ὁ ἀγαθοποιῶν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν· ὁ κακοποιῶν οὐχ ἑώρακεν τὸν θεόν.

NIV

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.

ESV

Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God.

NRSV

Beloved, do not imitate what is evil but imitate what is good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God.

Ἀγαπητέ

vocative, masculine, singular – adjective

The first section of the letter (vv. 1-8) commended Gaius for his hospitality to the brothers. John has now spent two verses calling attention to the offensive actions of Diotrephes. He essentially leaves the matters with Diotrephes behind (no conjunction) and addresses his friend Gaius with an encouragement for godly behavior.

(μὴ) μιμοῦ

present, passive (deponent), imperative, 2nd person, sing., from μιμέομαι

In contrast to Diotrephes's continual troublemaking, John calls Gaius to continually emulate a very different kind of behavior: certainly not the

evil (τὸ κακὸν) actions shown by Diotrephes, but something that stands in strong contrast (ἀλλὰ), namely, that which is good (τὸ ἀγαθόν). Interestingly, forms of this verb, μιμέομαι, only appear four times in the New Testament: 2 Thessalonians 3:7,9, Hebrews 13:7, and here.

τὸ κακὸν

accusative, neuter, singular – adjective

As with its contrast, ἀγαθόν, this adjective is articularized and serves as a direct object of the imperative μιμοῦ. According to BAGD, κακός can either refer to moral evil, or dangerous and injurious actions (or sometimes both together). Diotrephes’s actions fell into the category of moral evil; no physical harm was done, but there was no moral or ethical justification for refusing to welcome the brothers or excommunicating members of the church who attempted to do so. John no longer cites Diotrephes or his evil actions directly, but he no doubt has this in mind when he makes the more generic prohibition against evil, immoral behavior.

τὸ ἀγαθόν

accusative, neuter, singular – adjective

In stark contrast (ἀλλὰ) to the behavior Gaius ought never to imitate, John calls him to imitate that which is good. While the English word “good” tends to be rather generic, ἀγαθός primarily has the ideas of moral good or practical value. In the case of the church, actions that are morally good also have the beneficial value of building up the church rather than tearing it down with moral evils or disconcerting strife. This is the behavior John wants Gaius to constantly pursue, and we see in the previous verses that he was already doing that.

ὁ ἀγαθοποιῶν

present, participle, nominative, masculine, singular, from ἀγαθοποιέω

After his “evil vs. good” exhortation, John moves on to an observation about good-doers and evildoers. The two roots within this substantival participle are obvious and self-explanatory. The present tense emphasizes the person who continually does that which is morally good and beneficial. The moral overtone of ἀγαθός shows us that we are not merely considering civic righteousness. Hebrews 11:6 reminds us, “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” John emphasizes that the one who does good is ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, “from God.” The preposition ἐκ can emphasize source. The one who does good ultimately comes from God and finds the source of his good deeds in God.

ὁ κακοποιῶν

present, participle, nominative, masculine, singular, from κακοποιέω

In contrast to the one from God who does what is good, John now speaks about the one who does evil. While even Christians must confess their evil deeds and sin, the present tense suggests one who continually (willingly) engages in acts that are morally evil. The sentence begins with the same grammatical structure as the previous sentence (an articularized participle), but John catches our attention by changing the verb that follows.

(οὐχ) ἑώρακεν

perfect, indicative, 3rd person, singular, from ὁράω

We would expect John to parallel the previous sentence with οὐχ ἔστιν. Instead, he says that the one who does evil “has not seen God.” The fact that he has not seen God leads to the ongoing consequences of immoral acts and attitudes. Lenski suggests that the verb choice is meant to suggest “that one has not even gotten near enough to have as much as caught a glimpse of God” (p. 589). Among the many possible definitions of this word, Louw-Nida lists “pay attention to,” “understand,” and “learn about.” Nothing in the context necessarily suggests a derived meaning, but the nuances of this word indicate that evildoers are those who do not comprehend who God is or what he has done for humankind in his Son, Jesus Christ. The evildoer does not pay attention to the Word and will of God. Even his civic righteousness is driven by a sinful heart that has no desire to pay attention to the commands of God.

Verse 12

Δημητρίῳ μεμαρτύρηται ὑπὸ πάντων καὶ ὑπὸ αὐτῆς τῆς ἀληθείας· καὶ ἡμεῖς δὲ μαρτυροῦμεν, καὶ οἶδας ὅτι ἡ μαρτυρία ἡμῶν ἀληθὴς ἐστίν.

NIV

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.

ESV

Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself. We also add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true.

NRSV

Everyone has testified favorably about Demetrius, and so has the truth itself. We also testify for him, and you know that our testimony is true.

Δημητρίῳ

dative, masculine, singular – proper name

John now introduces another individual to Gaius. It is not likely that this is the same Demetrius who was the silversmith making silver images for the goddess Artemis (Diana) in Acts 19:24ff. Since an introduction is necessary, it seems reasonable to assume that Gaius does not know Demetrius. Many commentators believe that John commissioned Demetrius to carry this letter to Gaius. John's encouraging statements about Demetrius would encourage Gaius to give him a warm reception, similar to the treatment Gaius gave the other brothers who had come to the congregation. Demetrius's name is in the dative, suggesting that a literal translation of the main verb needs to be impersonal: "It is testified concerning Demetrius by everyone..."

μεμαρτύρηται

perfect, passive, indicative, 3rd person, singular, from μαρτυρέω

This root means to testify about something on the basis of personal experience. Those who are giving a report on Demetrius are doing so on the basis of first-hand knowledge, not second-hand information. The word can be neutral, "to witness," or positive, "to speak well of." The context demands the latter approach. The perfect tense shows us that Demetrius has received positive reviews from many people with the ongoing result that he has a positive reputation. The passive voice calls attention to the agents, ὑπὸ πάντων καὶ ὑπὸ αὐτῆς τῆς ἀληθείας. The impersonal verb does not translate well into English. The NIV takes the most conservative approach, keeping a passive verb in English. In this case, the NRSV deviates most from the Greek grammar, turning the agents into the subject. Although this translation is furthest from the original Greek, it is the smoothest approach in English, and the original meaning is not lost. As an aside, this verb is a favorite of John's, found 33 times in his gospel, 6 times in 1 John, 4 times in this short letter, and another 4 times in Revelation. This accounts for well over half of the 76 times μαρτυρέω is used in the New Testament. (Luke's usages take second place, with one in his Gospel and 11 in Acts).

πάντων

genitive, masculine, plural

John wants Gaius to know that all of the Christians at the church in Ephesus speak well of Demetrius. He doesn't have to fear another "church boss" with such a strong consensus from so many others.

αὐτῆς τῆς ἀληθείας genitive, feminine, singular

Not only is Demetrius spoken of highly by the Christians in Ephesus, but he is also spoken of well “by the truth itself.” Unlike modern usage of the word “truth,” which is so generic that it can mean a subjectively held principle, John has something more specific in mind, as is indicated by the definite article and intensive pronoun. This is another favorite word in John’s writings: Of 109 uses in the New Testament, John uses it 25 times in his Gospel, and nine, five, and six times respectively in his letters. Two Sunday’s ago (Easter 5A), we heard in the Gospel that Jesus is “the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6). In the Gospel for this coming Sunday (Easter 7A), Jesus says that “[God’s] Word is truth” (John 17:17). Elsewhere Jesus tells the disciples that the Spirit would “guide [them] into all truth” (John 16:13). The truth is centered in Jesus and revealed by the Holy Spirit in the Word of God. Demetrius’s life and faith are in harmony with the truth of God’s Word. So the truth of God’s Word speaks well of Demetrius – not directly, but indirectly, for his words and actions are in harmony with the Word and will of God.

ἡμεῖς

nominative, plural, 1st person – pronoun

To the testimony of the all the Christians in Ephesus and the testimony of the truth itself, John adds ἡμεῖς – himself and others. “We” may include all of the church leaders in Ephesus (Ross, NICNT), or if John is sending the letter via a delegation with Demetrius, then the entire group sent to Gaius by John (Lenski). This pronoun is not needed grammatically since it is implied in the verb, but the pronoun and the particle δὲ tells us that the testimony of this group is particularly noteworthy.

μαρτυροῦμεν

present, indicative, 1st person, plural, from μαρτυρέω

John repeats the same verb used earlier, but with a different tense. The change draws our attention. The past testimony about Demetrius from others is certainly noteworthy, but even more so is the current testimony from John and the other brothers. When Gaius meets Demetrius and then receives this letter, he knows that he can have full confidence in the brother who has come to him, for he has the first-hand approval and positive testimony of the apostle John.

οἶδας perfect, indicative, 2nd person, singular

The perfect tense of οἶδα really functions like a present tense. John uses οἶδα instead of γινώσκω because Gaius does not have experiential knowledge about Demetrius, only the information that John is disseminating in this letter. But Gaius knows that he can trust John's recommendation, as noted in the discussion of the verb μαρτυροῦμεν.

ἡ μαρτυρία (ἡμῶν) nominative, feminine, singular

This noun comes from the same root as the verb μαρτυρέω. The noun is as popular with John as the verb: John uses it 14 times in his Gospel, 6 times in 1 John, once here, and 9 times in Revelation, but it only has 7 other occurrences in the New Testament outside John's writings. As a noun, it can refer to a witness, the testimony of a witness, or one's reputation (derived from the positive meaning that μαρτυρέω can take). Here it clearly refers to the testimony from John and the others, since it takes the subjective genitive ἡμῶν.

ἀληθής nominative, feminine, singular

This is the adjectival form of the noun we have seen earlier, ἀλήθεια. The case, number, and gender agree with μαρτυρία. John assures Gaius that what he is writing is genuine, truthful, and honest. There is nothing misleading about the testimony from John and the other brothers. Gaius is welcoming a trustworthy and faithful servant of the gospel. If his dealings with Diotrephes led him to be more cautious about his interactions with others in the church, he now has every reason to believe that Demetrius is worthy of his kindness and assistance, for he comes with a "stamp of approval" from John and others.

The verses that we have considered up to this point are part of the body of the letter. We've treated them in a more thorough exegetical fashion, looking at nearly every word and its nuances. The final three verses contain concluding greetings and remarks. Since these verses do not contain any discussion of the doctrinal or practical issues at hand, we will treat them in a more cursory, isogical manner.

Verse 13

Πολλὰ εἶχον γράψαι σοι ἀλλ οὐ θέλω διὰ μέλανος καὶ καλάμου σοι γράφειν·

NIV

I have much to write you,
but I do not want to do so
with pen and ink.

ESV

I had much to write to you,
but I would rather not write
with pen and ink.

NRSV

I have much to write to you,
but I would rather not write
with pen and ink;

John has much more that he would like to write to Gaius. The direct object πολλὰ is placed first for emphasis; there are many things he would like to write – hardly a surprise, given that the last remaining apostle of Jesus Christ would have much Christian instruction to offer. The ESV captures the imperfect tense of εἶχον by translating, “I had much to write to you.” However, his present wish (θέλω) stands in contrast (ἀλλ) to his past intent. Writing a longer letter is no longer his desire; his plan for communicating with Gaius is revealed in the next verse.

Verse 14

ἐλπίζω δὲ εὐθέως σε ἰδεῖν, καὶ στόμα πρὸς στόμα λαλήσομεν.

NIV (14a)

I hope to see you soon, and
we will talk face to face.

ESV

I hope to see you soon, and
we will talk face to face.

NRSV

instead I hope to see you
soon, and we will talk
together face to face.

The reason John no longer wants to write is that he now hopes to visit Gaius personally (σε, singular, not plural). εὐθέως, normally translated “immediately,” is rendered “soon” in these three translations. Louw-Nida explains, “It is impossible to determine from the context whether εὐθέως in 3 John 14 should be understood as referring to a very short lapse of time and therefore be rendered as ‘very soon,’ or whether it refers to the very next event which is relevant to the total context” (67.53). Regardless of the immediacy of John’s visit, he says that he and Gaius (λαλήσομεν is first person plural) will speak “face to face.” The Greek idiom is literally “mouth to mouth.” I don’t think any of us will fault the dynamic equivalent translation!

Verse 15

εἰρήνη σοι. ἀσπάζονται σε οἱ φίλοι. ἀσπάζου τοὺς φίλους κατ' ὄνομα.

NIV (14b)

Peace to you. The friends here send their greetings. Greet the friends there by name.

ESV

Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends, every one of them.

NRSV

Peace to you. The friends send you their greetings. Greet the friends there, each by name.

A few common translations, including the NIV, KJV, and NKJV, do not indicate a verse 15, although the Greek text does. There is no missing content; the latter half of verse 14 in these versions is what other versions call verse 15. Here are the final greetings. Amidst all of the turmoil Gaius has dealt with, John now wishes him peace – a standard Hebrew greeting (shalom), and the same greeting our risen Lord gave to his disciples when he first appeared to them on Easter evening. This is not an empty greeting of peace, but an assurance of peace with God that flows out of the message of the Gospel John preached and Gaius believed. This is not a generic greeting of peace, but it is personalized for Gaius with the dative pronoun σοι.

Finally, there is an exchange of greetings. ἀσπάζονται is a present deponent indicative from ἀσπάζομαι, meaning “welcome, greet.” All of Gaius’s friends in Ephesus who know him are sending their greetings. Likewise, John sends his own greetings with the present imperative ἀσπάζου, from the same root, ἀσπάζομαι. The preposition κατά (κατ' ὄνομα) is used distributively; John wants Gaius to pass on personal greetings to all he knows. These are not artificial, formal greetings, but a sincere greeting that applies to any of his Christian friends at any moment (present tense of ἀσπάζου).

John’s last two New Testament letters, 2 John and 3 John, are little corresponding gems on the doctrine of fellowship. Even in the seven verses we looked at today, a number of fellowship-related issues are brought to our attention for study and discussion: dealing with difficult members who hinder the church’s ministry and fellowship (vv. 9-10); the connection between fellowship with God and the daily, Christian life (v. 11); the blessings of a good reputation and how it encourages fellowship among fellow Christians (v. 12); the fellowship we enjoy with like-minded Christians even when we are physically present (vv. 13-15).

The next page contains a number of questions for discussion, intended to apply the verses we have studied to the contemporary life in the church today.

Discussion Questions

1. John says that he will call attention to what Diotrephes is doing, but nothing is spoken about excommunication or stern discipline. What accounts for this omission? [vv. 9-10]
2. Many congregations have their “alligators.” What criteria should a pastor use to decide whether he should deal gently, firmly, or harshly with the members in question? [v. 10]
3. Is Diotrephes guilty of the same thing Paul has in mind when he refers to “a divisive person” (Titus 3:10)? What constitutes the biblical concept of divisiveness – doctrinal problems, immorality, difficult personality, all of the above, something else? [vv. 9-10]
4. What is the connection between the Eighth Commandment and the doctrine of fellowship? [v. 12]
5. Outlying districts of our synod often have a reputation for pastors traveling long distances to study together and encourage each other (e.g. monthly circuit meetings or smaller conferences like this one). Although our fellowship is not established merely by gathering together, what benefits do we enjoy from such regular face-to-face contact? Should we encourage this more in our two circuits? [vv. 13-15]