

# EPISTLE: 3 JOHN



## MP3

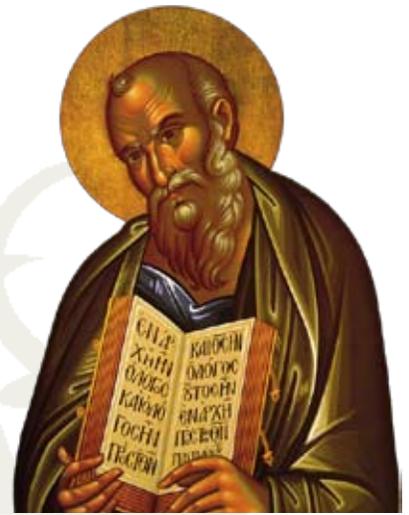
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## PRACTICE QUIZ

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The third epistle of the Holy Apostle John is a bit of a mystery: we know the names of several people from the epistle, but we know neither who they were, nor the specific church or events that prompted the letter. We nonetheless can learn several important things about Christian leadership from the writing.

The epistle is written to the apostle's friend Gaius whom we learn, Venerable Bede says, "Was a man who had believed in Christ and as a result of that was living a life of good works" (v. 1). Gaius apparently suffered from illness (v. 2), but was highly regarded for his dedication to the truth of Christ (as well as to St. John himself) (vv. 3-4).

St. John commends Gaius for his work on behalf of the missionaries and other leaders sent by the apostle to the area (v. 5). Notice how all the work in these verses is directly related to the Christians' relationship with God: the missionaries went forth on their work for the sake of God's name (v. 7), and Gaius and other local Christians provided for these missionaries' needs in a manner worthy of God (v. 6). In this all the Christians were "fellow workers for the truth" (v. 8).

Here is what St. Gregory the Dialogist says about such work:

*Whoever gives practical assistance to those who have spiritual gifts becomes a coworker with those people in their spiritual work. There are relatively few people who are spiritually gifted but many who are rich in the things in the world, and when the latter comfort poor saints with their wealth they gain a share in their spiritual riches.*

Unfortunately, not all Christians were so humble and giving. For example, an individual named Diotrephes apparently used the church as a source of power and glory; he even rejected a previous letter from St. John and refused to allow in those people who had been sent by the apostle, and "prat(ed) against us with malicious words" (vv. 9-10). We do not know why Diotrephes opposed St. John: Fr. Lawrence Farley speculates—in line with some Church Fathers—that Diotrephes was a heretic, while other scholars believe Diotrephes resented the apostle's preeminent position in the church. Whatever his reason might have been, the result was that Diotrephes set himself up, as the *Orthodox Study Bible* says, as "a petty tyrant."

The central problem with such self-aggrandizing, manipulative behavior isn't simply that it is antisocial, or even that it is insubordinate (although such behavior is both those things)—the problem is that it is anti-Christian. St. John puts it bluntly: doing good comes from a Christian life, while

doing evil proves that a person is not a Christian (v. 11).

St. Antony the Great explains how this relates not only to Christian leadership, but to the life of every Christian:

*It was humility (Christ) showed us by example of what He then did. And indeed those who want to be accepted into the foremost rank cannot achieve this otherwise than through humility; for in the beginning the thing that caused downfall from heaven was a movement of pride. So, if a man lacks extreme humility—if he is not humble with all his heart, all his mind, all his spirit, all his soul and body—he will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

St. John concludes the epistle by telling Gaius that he was sending a good man, Demetrius, to the area, and expresses his desire to come himself in the near future (vv. 12-13).

## LIFE TIP

St. Isaac the Syrian explains the difference between humility and conceit: "Hold faith and humility fast within you; for through them you will find mercy, help, and words spoken by God in the heart, along with a protector who stands beside you both secretly and manifestly. Do you wish to obtain these things, which are a fountain of life? From the very onset take hold of simplicity. Walk before God in simplicity and not with knowledge. Simplicity is attended by faith; but subtle and intricate deliberations, by conceit; and conceit is attended by separation from God."

