A Patristic Commentary



The Book of John 3

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THE THIRD EPISTLE
OF
ST. JOHN

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Introduction
to
THE THIRD EPISTLE OF
ST. JOHN

THE SUBJECT OF THE EPISTLE

St. John sent this epistle to Gaius, a Greek word. He praised Gaius for his generosity and hospitality for servants.

WHO IS GAIUS?

It is hard to know his personality. This name was often mentioned in the New Testament.

- Gaius who is from Corinth (Rom. 16: 23). Some think that this epistle is directed to him, but this is not certain.
- Another Gaius from Corinth. (1 Cor. 1:14)
- Gaius from Macedonia. (Acts 19:23- 29)
- Gaius of Derbe. (Acts 20: 4)

DIVISIONS OF THE EPISTLE

1. Gaius abiding in the truth	**v. 1 – 8**
2. Deotriphus, the haughty servant	**v. 9 – 11**
3. Demetrius the faithful	**v. 12**
4. Concluding Farewell	**v. 13, 14**

1. GAUIS ABIDING IN THE TRUTH

"The elder[1] to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth." **(v. 1)**

St. John directs his epistle to Gaius and calls him the beloved, for he truly loves him and not mere hypocrisy. Here, we notice St. John has immersed in the subject of "truth," that is "the Lord Jesus"; for he loves the truth, he talks with the truth and refutes everyone who deviates from the truth. St. John hid in the truth, to the extent that he does not see except the Lord Jesus and does not want to see anyone beside Him.

"Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers." **(v. 2)**

Some think that Gaius was sick, and here St. John is asking good health for him. It is good for the sick person to ask for his spiritual life and not to occupy himself with the temporal matters, for it is written, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you." However, it is good for the church, the shepherds, the friends to ask for his physical needs. That is why the church prays for the sick, the travelers, the troubled, and those who are in captivity. In the mean time, the church asks for the forgiveness of their sins.

- Things are going well for gaius because he himself is concerned things are valid as directed by the will of his mind (good)[2]

Hilary, bishop of Arles

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[1] راجع تفسير كلمة "الشيخ" في الرسالة السابقة.

[2] *Introductory Commentary on 3 John.*

***"For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth."* (v. 3)**

The subject of the joy of the shepherd is to see and hear that all whom he serves are abiding in the truth and are testified of the truth. This is an exhilarating joy, which makes the servant forget all the labor of the service when he sees joyful fruits; that is why he added,

***"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."* (v. 4)**

He rejoices when they walk in the truth because they are his children, "my children." He stems this fatherhood from God and in God and through Him[1]. If the relation is outside the Lord Jesus, then this verse will apply on him, "Do not call anyone on earth your father…" (Matt. 23: 9) No wander that St. John calls the flock his children, and also St. Paul. (1 Thess. 2:8,11), Gal. 4:19) Moreover, St. Paul takes pride in this fatherhood by saying, "For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ , yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel." (1 Cor. 4: 15)

- The right to see the private life of gaius in the perfection of his work. He was a man without any blame or say in thought or work, followed the commandments of god as he could[2]

Hilary, bishop of Arles

***"Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well."* (v. 5, 6)**

Abiding in the truth, he treated the brothers and the strangers faithfully, that is, appropriate as a loving and obedient believer to the Lord Jesus. He means by "the brethren," the believers whom Gaius has known and hosted them in his house. The strangers are the missionaries who went back to St. John witnessing about Gaius' love and his concern for them, for he sent them in a manner worthy of God, that is, he prayed for them and helped them financially too. Those went merely for the service and not for personal interest.

- praised Gaius visitors to the rest of the churh because of the generous vine with workers in the service of god[3]

Hilary, bishop of Arles

***"Because they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles."* (v. 7)**

Gaius provided for them so they did not ask anyone for help. This gives encouragement to the minister in his mission, for St. Paul supplied his needs and the needs of those who work with him by the work of his hands, although it is his right to ask for temporal matters as long as he is sowing the spiritual matters..

"We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth." (v. 8)

Thus, St. John is encouraging us to care for the workers in the vineyard of the Lord, by hosting them and helping them, so we may become partakers in their ministry.

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[1] راجع كتاب الحب الرعوي، 1966، ص33-42.

[2] *Introductory Commentary on 3 John.*

[3] *Introductory Commentary on 3 John.*

2. DIOTREPHES THE HAUGHTY MINISTER

"I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, If I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church." **(9, 10)**

❖ This verse teaches us that for us to tolerate the abuse of those humiliating us with equanimity, but sometimes we need to oppose it, because if we do not spoil the minds of these people who were fit for us to hear what is good.[1]

Hilary, bishop of Arles

St. John wrote to the church, in which Gaius is a member, to remind him to take care of the needs of the ministers. Unfortunately, Diotrephes full of haughtiness and vainglory drove him to the following:

A. To have the preeminence among them: This deviate the minister from his mission, and instead of serving others, he asks for their service and their honoring him.

B. He does not receive us: which means he does not like the truth. He wants to teach and not to be taught. **Bishop Ambrose** says[3] :(When I teach others, I myself learn, for only God is the One who is not taught by what He is teaching.).[2]

St. Augustine [4] says (We are teachers, but in the same time we are colleagues with you in God's school.

St. John Chrysostom [5] said: {When a lay person makes a mistake, he easily comes back, but when one of the clergy sins, he becomes very hard to accept advice.}

C. He himself does not receive the brethren: His love for himself made him lose the love for the service and for the salvation of others. He became a stumbling block for the believers and the servants. He rebukes and expels and excommunicates without being just and he does not care! Thus, the church confirms that any unjust excommunication goes back to the person himself.

St. John's Stand:

"**Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words**…" As an apostle, he rebukes, not for revenge, but for chastening for the salvation of his soul and so that others man not be offended.

The ecumenical councils has put special laws for chastening the shepherds when they deviate, on condition the chastening is according to a special order, so that neither the shepherds nor the flock deviate. [6]

The purpose of this talk: The purpose of this talk with Gaius is not to condemn Deotrephes, but for Gaius not to follow his example. He said:

"Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God." **(v. 11)**

Whoever does good declares his worthiness to become a child of God "the greatest goodness." However, he who does evil and walks in haughtiness and the love of

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[1] *Introductory Commentary on 3 John.*

[3] Pastoral Care, p. 136

[2] الحب الرعوي، 1966، ص136.

[4] Pastoral Care, p. 137

[5] Pastoral Care, p. 164

[6] Pastoral Care, p. 102 – 128.

ego, declares the deviation of his heart and his rejection to the light, for he cannot see God, "For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial?" (2 Cor. 6:14, 15) Hence, the evil person cannot hear God's voice, nor accept his thought nor can see Him.

3. THE FAITHFUL DEMETRIUS

"Demetrius has a good testimony from all, and from the truth itself. And we also bear witness, and you know that our testimony is true." **(v. 12)**

St. John directs Gaius' attention to a good example with a good testimony from all, from God, and from the church. Thus, he encourages Gaius so he may not despair because of the bad example of Deotrephes**. St. Augustine** [1] said: {the world is like a tree with leaves. From far, it looks like a tree with leaves but no fruits, but closely, you find sweet fruits. Likewise, the world is full of wicked people, but many saints are hiding in it}.

We notice that St. John ascertains the testimony of all (that is from the pagans and unbelievers) before the testimony of the truth and the church. This is the beauty of God's children, that even the wicked people cannot deny their dignity.

St. Paul puts this condition for the bishop that "He must have a good testimony among those who are outside" (1 Tim. 3: 7)

St. John Chrysostom [2] said: {Even the pagans revere the blameless man; therefore, let us live a blameless life so that neither an unbeliever nor an enemy can speak evil against us. Even the enemies revere those who live a godly life, for the truth shuts their mouths.}

St. Jerome[3] said: {The Christian bishop has to be like that: those who argue with him about the dogma cannot argue about his life.}

4. CONCLUDING FAREWELL

"I had many things to write, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and ink; but I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak face to face." **(v. 13, 14)**

In the previous epistle, we have seen that the apostles have delivered matters, which are not recorded with pen and ink. **St. John Chrysostom** said in the beginning of his sermons that God's word is not written, but God has recorded it to us with our own language, due to our weaknesses so we may benefit; but in fact it is spirit and life. We have to taste the word of God and people see it in our lives and written in our hearts.

"Peace to you. Our friends greet you. Greet the friends by name." **(v. 14)**

This is the greeting of the Lord Jesus to His disciples after the resurrection. (Luke 24: 36) In the same manner, the church, in the name of Christ, gives the Lord's greeting to others.

St. John is repeating the word "friends," instead of saying "brethren," to ascertain the bond of love, which unites the whole church in "the truth," the Lord Jesus.

[1] Sermons about selective chapters from the New Testament
[2] Pastoral Care, p. 655
[3] Pastoral Care, p 655