

D. Commendation of Demetrius and Closing (vv. 12-14)

John immediately followed his exhortation with his commendation of a man named Demetrius. He exhorted Gaius to shun evil and “do good,” not in the abstract or moral sense (i.e., be a “good person”), but with respect to the matter of hospitality. Diotrophes was guilty of the evil-doing John had in mind, and he was directing Gaius to oppose this evil by holding a different attitude and orientation toward outside brethren (ref. again vv. 5-6). In that way he would set a “good” example for the saints.

John recognized that the fundamental issue in Christians “walking in truth” is the way they perceive and interact with Christ’s body. For *truth* is bound up in the person and work of Jesus the Messiah (John 1:14-18, 14:1-7), and Jesus’ life and fullness – His truth – is now present and manifest in the community of people animated, informed and led by His Spirit. This is the reason for – and significance of – Jesus’ insistence that those who receive His disciples receive *Him* (cf. Matthew 10:1-40, 18:1-5; Luke 9:46-48, 10:1-16). So John’s insistence that one cannot know and love God and not love God’s children who share His life and nature (cf. 1 John 2:7-11, 3:10-14, 18-24, 4:7-21, 5:1). *However we regard and treat the Father’s children who share the likeness of His image-Son, that is the way we regard and treat the Father and the Son.*

And so John’s exhortation concerning good and evil pertained specifically to the matter of *hospitality* – not in the contemporary sense of cordiality and generosity toward guests, but in the sense of Christians “rightly judging the Body” (ref. 1 Corinthians 11:17-29). John was adamant that the Father’s children *walk in truth* – that they order their lives in conformity to the truth as it is in Jesus, and most critical in this conformity is the way they live into and manifest the truth of Jesus’ Body. There is no holiness without unity, for the truth of the *individual Christian life* – the “holiness” that is the consecration of a life hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:1-4) – is the truth of the *corporate body of Christ*: to be joined to Christ is to be joined to the spiritual organism in which He has His fullness (1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 1:15-23). Unity in the Spirit is the manifest truth of holiness, even as holiness (consecration to God in Christ by the Spirit) is the basis and substance of true unity. As “walking in truth” involves faith working through love, this work *in the Church* is the work of Christians living out true holiness in unity.

This is the backdrop of understanding and conviction behind John’s letter and his exhortation concerning good and evil. Walking in truth – “doing good” – means embracing the Father’s children in truth, and John wrote to encourage and exhort Gaius in view of two immediate concerns: *Diotrophes* (vv. 9-10) and *Demetrius* (v. 12). John wasn’t simply giving general instruction, but preparing Gaius to receive Demetrius. This was especially important given Diotrophes’ posture toward outsiders and the influence he was having on other brethren. This is clear from the seamless transition between John’s exhortation and his commendation of Demetrius. In terms of the present circumstance, doing good meant embracing Demetrius when he arrived and then sending him on his way in a manner that honors God (cf. again vv. 5-8).

1. This man Demetrius is a mystery, for the only other person with that name in the New Testament was a pagan silversmith who incited a riot against Paul in Ephesus (Acts 19:21-29). Some believe the two are the same individual, and that this man who so vehemently opposed Paul and His gospel eventually came to faith through that gospel.

A case can be made that both men lived in Asia Minor in the vicinity of Ephesus, but this hardly connects the two. For, just like the name Gaius, Demetrius was a very common name in the first-century Roman world. Almost certainly this Demetrius wasn't the individual who provoked the riot in Ephesus decades earlier, but John wasn't any help in identifying him. He said nothing of this man's background, but focused on the sort of person he was. Interestingly, John didn't identify Demetrius as a *brother* in Christ or as one of his *children* in the faith; indeed, he didn't directly connect him with Jesus at all. Rather, he described Demetrius in terms of the assessment of various *witnesses*. Those witnesses included all of the brethren who knew him, including John himself. The uniform testimony of so many brethren certainly commended Demetrius, but there was yet another witness whose testimony was even more compelling; Demetrius enjoyed the commendation of the *truth* itself.

This way of describing Demetrius is striking, and John clearly was intentional in it. He could have simply identified Demetrius as a Christian brother, but this wouldn't have had the same impact. For many had come to the community of believers associated with Gaius claiming to be followers of Jesus, only to meet with suspicion and rejection. These brothers had testified of themselves, and Diotrephes and those aligned with him were having none of it. And so John presented Demetrius, not as self-attested, but as attested by all the brethren who knew him, and, most importantly, by the truth itself. *Diotrephes needed to understand that, if he refused Demetrius, he was opposing the very truth he claimed to be defending.*

And so, it seems that Demetrius was known to Gaius, but not well or personally. For, while John didn't need to explain who Demetrius was, he did need to commend him to Gaius (and, by extension, to the other brethren in Gaius' community); he needed to attest what sort of a man Demetrius was as a follower of Jesus. It's also notable that John didn't explain *why* he was attesting Demetrius. The overall context gives the impression that Demetrius was coming to visit Gaius and the believers in his area (perhaps carrying John's letter), and John was concerned that he be properly received and provisioned. Many scholars hold this view, and it is probably correct, but it is still an inference. What is clear, though, is that Gaius understood John's reason for mentioning Demetrius; this explains why John didn't have to say anything more.

2. John closed this letter as he did his second one (vv. 13-14a). He had many more things to say to Gaius, but wasn't willing to put them down on paper. He wanted to discuss them in person, and would do so when he visited, which he hoped to do shortly. John didn't say what those matters were, but knowing his heart and his burden for these brethren, it's safe to assume that he intended to speak further regarding the issues at the center of his letter. John knew that it's always best to deal with things in person (especially matters of this sort), and the fact that he felt he needed to send a letter ahead of his visit shows that something was pressing – most likely, the impending arrival of Demetrius. A personal visit was necessary to deal with Diotrephes and the situation he'd created (v. 10), but what mattered at the moment was that Demetrius be properly received, not just for his own sake, but as a testimony to the rest of the believers. Gaius' hospitality would confront Diotrephes and his error, and John would complete that task when he came.

John had specific matters he wished to address in person, but he also longed to fellowship with these brethren “mouth-to-mouth.” There were things he *needed* to say by way of instruction, rebuke and correction, but also things he was eager to say – words of love, joy, faith and hope that reflect and bear witness to their shared communion in Jesus. John was a man who understood the profound mystery and glory of Christ’s body, and he jealously cherished it. Whether it involved confrontation or consolation, difficulty or ease, John longed to be with those with whom he was one in the Messiah.

Once again, John’s expression (*mouth-to-mouth*) underscores this. It is unique to John, and he employed it only here and in the parallel statement in his second epistle. It occurs in the Old Testament scriptures, but only as describing the intimate relationship between Yahweh and Moses. The commentary on Second John examined this connection in detail, but it’s worth mentioning here that John, a devout Jew, almost certainly understood the special significance of this expression and employed it with that in mind.

“Mouth-to-mouth” described the unique intimacy Moses enjoyed with Yahweh as His chosen prophet, overseer and mediator. John was aware of this, but also recognized that Moses and his role prefigured the coming Messiah. Moses had stood between God and His covenant people, representing Yahweh’s presence and word to Israel, on the one hand, and Israel and its covenant sonship on the other (ref. Exodus 19-20, 32-34).

But now that role was being fulfilled perfectly and everlastingly by Jesus, the Son of God and Son of Abraham. He enjoys in perfection a “mouth-to-mouth” intimacy with God, but also with God’s people; *He who is one with the Father is also one with the Father’s children* (John 14:1-20, 17:20-23). Now, through the Messiah, “mouth-to-mouth” signifies the communion that is in and through the Spirit – the “I in you and you in me” common-union of the true children with their Father *and with one another*. Taken up in the life of God, they inhabit the heavenly realm together (Ephesians 2:4-6; Colossians 3:3); they commune with Him in the Spirit, and this spiritual union defines their communion with one another (2 Corinthians 3-4).

3. Having expressed his longing, John bestowed on Gaius the common Jewish benediction: “*Peace be with you.*” For centuries Jews had greeted one another with the blessing of *shalom*: the universal, harmonious flourishing that God held out as the destiny of His creation. What Israelites had affirmed to one another in hope, the God of peace had now fulfilled and enacted in Jesus, the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:1-7; cf. Romans 1:7, 15:33; 2 Corinthians 1:2, 13:11; Philippians 1:2, 4:9; 1 Thessalonians 1:1, 5:3). Thus John’s benediction reminded Gaius of the peace that is true in Jesus, whatever may appear.

Finally, putting a fine point on his message in the letter, John greeted Gaius on behalf of the *friends* with him, and he asked Gaius to greet all of the friends there. John is the only New Testament writer to refer to fellow believers as friends, and he may have been influenced in this by Jesus’ own words (John 15:1-17). The term connotes intimate affection, and John underscored this connotation by asking Gaius to greet the “friends” *by name*. Though he may not have known them all personally, John loved each one as a unique brother in Christ, and he wanted them to regard one another the same way.