

Series: John's Letters

Title: Counsel for Christian Living

Text: 3 John 13-15

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Verse 13

In verse 13, John transitioned to conclude his letter by saying, "I have many things to write you, but I don't want to write to you with pen and ink." The language of the text conveyed a deep desire on the part of John to spend personal time teaching Gaius, the man who was the intended recipient of his letter (3 John 1). One has said the verse could be rendered, "I do not wish to go on writing."¹ The apostle wanted to see Gaius and spend time with him in person. He wanted to speak with him in a face-to-face fashion and communicate more gospel truth to the man (3 John 14).

John's words are reminiscent of His words in both John 21:25 and 2 John 12. There were indeed "many things" that John could say about Jesus and the gospel. The typical papyrus, carbon-based ink, and reed pen would never prove adequate for John to amply say all that could be said about God's truth. Instead of continuing to write from a distant location, John planned to visit Gaius and his readers personally.

Upon visiting his readers, John planned to do two things. First, he wanted to confront Diotrophes for his headstrong, ungodly behavior (3 John 10). The man was undoubtedly unregenerate and he needed to be confronted (3 John 11). Second, John planned to teach and train Gaius and others. He wanted to share additional doctrinal truth with them that was not mentioned by "pen and ink" in his letters (3 John 14).

John's mention of the fact that he would share more than he had written exhibited the high value he placed on the teaching of God's Word. As a pastor (2 John 1 and 3 John 1), he was not averse to spending a lot of time teaching God's people about "many things" related to God's truth. He knew that error needed to be corrected, and he knew that truth was the means of spiritual transformation (John 17:17 and Romans 12:2).

John knew that Gaius would be a willing listener to "many things" he had to say. Earlier in his letter, John remarked on Gaius' devotion to the truth (3 John 3), so he knew the man would willingly submit to the pastor's discipleship and training. John's words, along with the example of Gaius, stand as lesson concerning believers' need to develop an unflinching devotion to God's truth. Though error may surround them, and though opponents of gospel truth may seem to increase, strong Christians take delight in growing in the "many things" found within God's Word.

Mature believers are like Gaius. They love to learn from the doctrine handed down by the apostles. They have a welcoming Spirit toward Biblical revelation. They live by the mantra of Job: "I have not departed from the commands from his lips; I have treasured the words from his mouth more than my daily food" (Job 23:12). They have an attitude similar to the one the Psalmist had: "I hate those who are double-minded, but I love your instruction" (Psalm 119:113).

Some professing Christians are like Diotrophes. They live for prestige, prominence, pride, and power. Others are like Gaius. They live first for the principles and precepts of God's Word. They show a continual, unflinching devotion to God's Word, a devotion similar to the one prescribed by Paul in Colossians 3:16 — "Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts." May modern believers learn to live like Gaius, fostering an ongoing desire to hear Bible preaching and teaching. By God's grace, may many faithfully submit themselves to the truth of the prophets and the apostles.

¹ Robertson, [CD-Rom].

Verse 14

In verse 14, John shared more about his plans to personally visit Gaius and the churches to which he wrote. He said, “I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face” (3 John 14). The word rendered “hope” was the common biblical word used for one of the most popular of all biblical virtues (1 Corinthians 13:13). It referred to a confident expectation that was based on the Lord’s promises. John had a strong conviction that he would see his readers personally. Maybe he had received a personal, apostolic revelation from the Lord that promised such a visit would take place.

As a result of his expectation, John planned to see Gaius and his other readers “soon.” A sense of urgency was conveyed in the apostle’s words.² He wanted to conduct his visit shortly so that he could impart important biblical truth. The need to collect an offering for missions and ministry (3 John 5-8), along with problems associated with self-promoting people like Diotrophes (3 John 9-12), necessitated a visit.

John also wanted to conduct an immediate visit because of his desire for Christian fellowship with his readership. Such a concern was communicated in verse 14 through John’s use of the words “face to face.” The apostle used a figure of speech that literally meant “mouth to mouth.” He used the same figure in 2 John 12. The figurative language depicted close, personal interaction. John wanted to spend meaningful, one-on-one time with his readers. A letter written by ink could never provide an adequate substitute for real Christian fellowship. John yearned for himself and his readers to experience the edification (Jude 20), encouragement (Hebrews 10:24-25), and equipping (Ephesians 4:11-12) that came through Christian community.

Verse 15

John’s final words of his third letter said, “Peace to you. The friends send you greetings. Greet the friends by name” (3 John 15). The “peace” of which John spoke was an inner-disposition produced by the Holy Spirit. It was a tranquil state of the heart and mind that produced a freedom from worry. The idea was similar to the Hebrew concept of “shalom.” John’s readers certainly needed such tranquility, considering some of the difficult people and problems in their midst (3 John 5-9). Fortunately, they could have the experience of peace in a positional (Romans 5:1), practical (Colossians 3:15), and permanent (Romans 16:20) sense through the work of Christ.

John’s letter concluded with the following words – “The friends send you greetings. Greet the friends by name.” The apostle’s words may seem like a simple, generic conclusion. A more careful consideration of his language reveals otherwise. The apostle intentionally used a word rendered “friends” twice. The word was used in the ancient world of “close companions.”³ John’s use of the term in our verse constituted the only occasion in the New Testament in which believers were referred to as “friends.”⁴

The apostle meant to highlight the family-like experience amongst believers. Genuine Christians are blessed with the support and strength of Christian fellowship. Through the Holy Spirit, they have a bond that is thicker than blood. The assembling of God’s people provides them with encouragement and edification. Though the rest of the world seems to trudge through life alone, Christians have a circle of friends to support them in the various seasons and struggles of life. Like John, believers of all generations should cultivate a high regard and deep gratitude for the body of Christ.

² Akin, [CD-Rom].

³ Friberg, Friberg, and Miller, [CD-Rom].

⁴ Akin, [CD-Rom].