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COMMENTARY

COMMENTARY ON
3 JOHN

by Adam Clarke.

*“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without
which no man shall see the Lord” Heb 12:14*

Spreading Scriptural Holiness to the World

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A COMMENTARY AND CRITICAL NOTES

ON THE

HOLY BIBLE

OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

DESIGNED AS A HELP TO A BETTER UNDERSTANDING
OF THE SACRED WRITINGS

BY ADAM CLARKE, LL.D., F.S.A., &c.

A NEW EDITION, WITH THE
AUTHOR'S FINAL CORRECTIONS

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.—Rom. 15:4.

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THE THIRD EPISTLE OF JOHN.

Chronological Notes relative to this Epistle.

- Year of the Constantinopolitan era of the world, or that used by the Byzantine historians, and other eastern writers, 5593.
- Year of the Alexandrian era of the world, 5587.
- Year of the Antiochian era of the world, 5577.
- Year of the world, according to Archbishop Usher, 4089.
- Year of the world, according to Eusebius, in his Chronicon, 4311.
- Year of the minor Jewish era of the world, or that in common use, 3845.
- Year of the Greater Rabbinical era of the world, 4444.
- Year from the Flood, according to Archbishop Usher, and the English Bible, 2433.
- Year of the Cali yuga, or Indian era of the Deluge, 3187.
- Year of the era of Iphitus, or since the first commencement of the Olympic games, 1025.
- Year of the era of Nabonassar, king of Babylon, 834.
- Year of the CCXVIth Olympiad, 1.
- Year from the building of Rome, according to Fabius Pictor, 832.
- Year from the building of Rome, according to Frontinus, 836.
- Year from the building of Rome, according to the Fasti Capitolini, 837.
- Year from the building of Rome, according to Varro, which was that most generally used, 838.
- Year of the era of the Seleucidæ, 397.
- Year of the Cæsarean era of Antioch, 133.
- Year of the Julian era, 130.
- Year of the Spanish era, 123.
- Year from the birth of Jesus Christ, according to Archbishop Usher, 89.
- Year of the vulgar era of Christ's nativity, 85.
- Year of Artabanus IV., king of the Parthians, 4.
- Year of the Dionysian period, or Easter Cycle, 86.

- Year of the Grecian Cycle of nineteen years, or Common Golden Number, 10; or the year before the fourth embolismic.
 - Year of the Jewish Cycle of nineteen years, 7; or the year before the third embolismic.
 - Year of the Solar Cycle, 10.
 - Dominical Letter, it being the first year after the Bissextile, or Leap Year, B.
 - Day of the Jewish Passover, the twenty-seventh of March, which happened in this year on the Jewish Sabbath.
 - Easter Sunday, the third of April.
 - Epact, or age of the moon on the 22d of March, (the day of the earliest Easter Sunday possible,) 9.
 - Epact, according to the present mode of computation, or the moon's age on New Year's day, or the Calends of January, 17.
 - Monthly Epacts, or age of the moon on the Calends of each month respectively, (beginning with January,) 17, 19, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 24, 25, 27, 27.
 - Number of Direction, or the number of days from the twenty-first of March to the Jewish Passover, 6.
 - Year of the Emperor Flavius Domitianus Cæsar, the last of those usually styled the Twelve Cæsars, 5.
 - Roman Consuls, Domitianus Augustus Cæsar, the eleventh time, and T. Aurelius Fulvus or Fulvius.
 - The years in which Domitian had been consul before were, A. D. 71, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 80, 82, 83, and 84.
- It should be observed that the date of this epistle is very uncertain. The above is only upon the supposition that it was written about A. D. 85.

CHAPTER 1

The apostle's address to Caius, and his good wishes for his prosperity in body and soul, 1, 2. He commends him for his steadiness in the truth, and his general hospitality, especially to the itinerant evangelists, 3-8. Speaks of the bad conduct of

Diotrephes; his abuse of his power in the Church; and his slander of the apostles, 9, 10. Exhorts Caius to avoid his example, and to follow what is good, 11. Commends Demetrius, 12. Excuses himself from writing more fully, and proposes to pay him a visit shortly, 13, 14.

This epistle being of nearly the same complexion with the former, and evidently written about the same time, and incontestably by the same person, it is not necessary to give it any particular preface; as the subject of the authenticity of all the three epistles has been treated already so much at large, not only in the introduction to them, but in the notes in general.

This and the preceding epistle are, by Dr. Lardner, supposed to have been written between A. D. 80 and 90. There are no *notes of time* in the epistles themselves to help us to fix any date, therefore all is conjecture concerning the time in which they were written: but to me it appears as likely that they were written *before* the destruction of Jerusalem as *after*; for it is scarcely to be supposed that so signal a display of the justice of God, and such a powerful argument in favour of Christianity and of the truth of Christ's predictions, could be passed unnoticed and unappealed to by any of the inspired persons who wrote after that event. However, where there is no positive evidence, conjecture is useless.

NOTES ON 3. JOHN.

Verse 1. The elder] See on the first verse of the preceding epistle, and also the *preface*.

The well-beloved Gaius] γαίος *Gaius*, is the Greek mode of writing the Roman name *Caius*; and thus it should be rendered in European languages.

Several persons of the name of *Caius* occur in the New Testament.

1. In the Epistle to the Romans, ^{<451623>}**Romans 16:23**, St. Paul mentions a *Caius* who lived at Corinth, whom he calls his *host*, and *the host of the whole Church*.

2. In ^{<46014>}**1 Corinthians 1:14**, St. Paul mentions a *Caius* who lived at Corinth, whom he had baptized; but this is probably the same with the above.

3. In ^{<441929>}**Acts 19:29**, mention is made of a *Caius* who was a native of Macedonia, who accompanied St. Paul, and spent some time with him at

Ephesus. This is probably a different person from the preceding; for the description given of the *Caius* who lived at Corinth, and was the *host of the whole Church* there, does not accord with the description of the *Macedonian Caius*, who, in the very same year, travelled with St. Paul, and was with him at Ephesus.

4. In ~~400~~ **Acts 20:4**, we meet a *Caius of Derbe*, who was likewise a fellow traveller of St. Paul. This person cannot be the *Corinthian Caius*, for the host of the Church at Corinth would hardly leave that city to travel into Asia: and he is clearly distinguishable from the *Macedonian Caius* by the epithet **δερβαιοῦς**, of *Derbe*.

5. And lastly, there is the *Caius* who is mentioned here, and who is thought by some critics to be different from all the above; for, in writing to him, St. John ranks him among *his children*, which seems, according to them, to intimate that he was converted by this apostle.

Now, whether this Caius was one of the persons just mentioned, or whether he was different from them all, is difficult to determine; because *Caius* was a very common name. Yet if we may judge from the similarity of character, it is not improbable that he was the Caius who lived at Corinth, and who is styled by St. Paul *the host of the whole Church*; for hospitality to his Christian brethren was the leading feature in the character of this Caius to whom St. John wrote, and it is on this very account that he is commended by the apostle. Besides, St. John's friend lived in a place where this apostle had in Diotrophes a very ambitious and tyrannical adversary; and that there were men of this description at Corinth is evident enough from the two epistles to the Corinthians, though St. Paul has not mentioned *their* names. See *Michaelis*.

The probability of this Caius being the same with the Corinthian Caius has suggested the thought that this epistle was sent to *Corinth*; and consequently that the second epistle was sent to some place in the neighbourhood of that city. But I think the distance between Ephesus, where St. John resided, and Corinth, was too considerable for such an aged man as St. John is represented to be to travel, whether by *land* or *water*. If he went by *land*, he must traverse a great part of Asia, go through Thrace, Macedonia, Thessaly, and down through Greece, to the Morea, a most tedious and difficult journey. If he went by *water*, he must cross the Ægean Sea, and navigate among the Cyclades Islands, which was always a dangerous voyage. Now as the apostle promises, both in the second and in

this epistle, to see the persons shortly to whom he wrote, I take it for granted that they could not have lived at Corinth, or anywhere in the vicinity of that city. That St. John took such a voyage *Michaelis* thinks probable; “for since Corinth lay almost opposite to Ephesus, and St. John, from his former occupation, before he became an apostle, was accustomed to the sea, it is not improbable that the journey or voyage which he proposed to make was from Ephesus to Corinth.”

In answer to this I would just observe, 1. That the voyage was too long and dangerous for a man at John’s advanced age to think of taking. 2. That John had never been accustomed to any such sea as the *Ægean*, for the *sea of Galilee*, or *sea of Tiberias*, on which, as a fisherman, he got his bread, was only an inconsiderable fresh water lake; and his acquaintance with it could give him very few advantages for the navigation of the *Ægean Sea*, and the danger of coasting the numerous islands dispersed through it.

Verse 2. I wish above all things] *περι παντων ευχομαι.* Above all things I pray that thou mayest prosper, and be in health, *και υγιαινειν.* to which one MS. adds *εν αληθεια*, which gives it a different meaning, viz., *that thou mayest be sound in the truth.* The prayer of St. John for Caius includes *three* particulars: 1. Health of body; 2. Health of soul; and 3. Prosperity in secular affairs. *That thou mayest PROSPER and be in HEALTH, as thy SOUL PROSPERETH.* These *three* things, so necessary to the comfort of life, every Christian may in a certain measure expect, and for them every Christian is authorized to pray; and we should have more of all three if we devoutly prayed for them.

It appears from the last *clause* that the soul of Caius was in a very prosperous state.

Verse 3. When the brethren came] Probably the same of whom he speaks in the fifth {~~6016~~ **3 John 1:5**} and following verses, and who appear to have been itinerant evangelists.

The truth that is in thee] The soundness of thy faith and the depth of thy religion.

Verse 4. To hear that my children] From this it has been inferred that Caius was one of St. John’s converts, and consequently not the Corinthian Caius, who was converted, most probably, by St. Paul. But the apostle might use the term *children* here as implying those who were immediately

under his pastoral care, and, being an *old* man, he had a right to use such terms in addressing his juniors both in age and grace; and there is much both of propriety and dignity in the appellation coming from such a person.

Verse 5. Thou doest faithfully] **πιστον ποιεις.** *Kypke* thinks that **πιστον** is put here for **πιστιν**, and that the phrase signifies *to keep or preserve the faith, or to be bound by the faith, or to keep one's engagements. Thou hast acted as the faith-the Christian religion, required thee to act, in all that thou hast done, both to the brethren at home, and to the strangers-the itinerant evangelists, who, in the course of their travels, have called at thy house. There is not a word here about the pilgrims and penitential journeys which the papists contrive to bring out of this text.*

Verse 6. Which have borne witness of thy charity] Of thy love and benevolence.

Before the Church] The believers at Ephesus; for to this Church the apostle seems to refer.

Whom if thou bring forward] If thou continue to assist such, as thou hast done, *thou shalt do well.*

The *brethren* of whom St. John speaks might have been *apostles*; the *strangers*, assistants to these apostles, as John Mark was to Barnabas. Both were *itinerant evangelists*.

After a godly sort] **αξιως του θεου.** *Worthy of God*; and in such a way as he can approve. Let all Churches, all congregations of Christians, from whom their ministers and preachers can claim nothing by law, and for whom the state makes no provision, lay this to heart; let them ask themselves, Do we deal with these in a manner *worthy of God*, and worthy of the profession we make? Do we suffer them to lack the bread that perisheth, while they minister to us with no sparing hand the bread of life? Let a certain class of religious people, who will find themselves out when they read this note, consider whether, when their preachers have ministered to them their certain or stated time, and are called to go and serve other Churches, *they send them forth* in a manner *worthy of God*, making a reasonable provision for the journey which they are obliged to take. In the itinerant ministry of the apostles it appears that each Church bore the expenses of the apostle to the next Church or district to which he was

going to preach the word of life. So it should be still in the mission and itinerant ministry.

Verse 7. For his name's sake they went forth] For the sake of preaching the Gospel of the grace of God, and making known JESUS to the heathen.

Taking nothing of the Gentiles.] Receiving no emolument for their labour, but in every respect showing themselves to be truly disinterested. Sometimes, and on some special occasions, this may be necessary; but *the labourer is worthy of his hire* is the maxim of the author of Christianity. And those congregations of Christians are ever found to prize the Gospel most, and profit most by it, who *bear all expenses incident to it, and vice versa.*

But some construe **εξηλθον**, *they went out*, with **απο των εθνων**, *from the Gentiles*, or rather *by the Gentiles*, and give the passage this sense: *They went out*, i.e., *were driven out by the Gentiles, taking nothing with them*, i.e., leaving all their property behind, so that they were in a state of great destitution. A curious reading here, **εθνικων**, *heathenish men*, for **εθνων**, *Gentiles*, which latter might imply those who were converted from among the Gentiles, while the sense of the other term seems to be restrained to those who were still *unconverted*, may seem to strengthen the above interpretation; and although the construction seems rather harsh, yet it is not, on the whole, unlikely. The reading above referred to is that of the most ancient and reputable MSS. That *to be driven out* or *expelled* is one scriptural meaning of the verb **εξερχομαι**, see **Matthew 8:32**: *And when they were come out*, **οι δε εξελθοντες**, *and when they were* DRIVEN OUT. **Matthew 12:43**: *When the unclean spirit is gone out*, **εξεληθη**, *is* DRIVEN OUT. See **Mark 5:13; 7:29**: *The devil is gone out of thy daughter*, **εξεληλυθε**, *is* EXPELLED. **Mark 9:29**: *This kind can come forth by nothing* **εν ουδενι δυναται εξελθειν**, *can be* DRIVEN OUT *by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.* **Luke 8:2**: *Mary Magdalene; out of whom went*, **αφης δαιμονια επτα εξεληλυθει**, *out of whom were* CAST, *seven demons.* See also **1 John 2:19**; **Revelation 3:12**; and Schleusner, in voc. **εξερχομαι**.

Verse 8. We therefore ought to receive such] Those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, and have professed the truth at the hazard of their lives, and the loss of all their worldly substance. Instead of

απολαμβανειν, *to receive*, the most ancient and reputable MSS. have **υπολαμβανειν**, *to take up, undertake for, or kindly receive*.

Fellow helpers to the truth] And thus encourage the persecuted, and contribute to the spread and maintenance of the Gospel.

Verse 9. I wrote unto the Church.] The Church where Caius was; *but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the pre-eminence, φιλοπρωτευων, who loves the presidency, or chief place in the Church.* He was doubtless an officer in the Church, at least a deacon, probably a bishop; and, being one, he magnified himself in his office; he loved such eminence, and behaved himself haughtily in it.

Receiveth us not.] Does not acknowledge the apostolical authority. As some MSS. supply **αν** after **εγραψα**, and several judicious critics believe it is implied, the translation will run thus: *I would have written to the Church to receive these men kindly, but Diotrephes, who affects the presidency; and into whose hands, if I wrote to the Church, my letter must come, receiveth us not*-would not acknowledge my authority to interfere with any of the matters of his Church; and therefore I have written unto thee, whose love to the brethren and general hospitality are well known, that thou wouldst receive those strangers and persecuted followers of our common Lord.

Verse 10. If I come, I will remember] I will show him the authority which, as an apostle of Jesus Christ, I possess.

Prating against us] Diotrephes might have been a *converted Jew*, who was unwilling that the Gentiles should be received into the Church; or a *Judaizing Christian*, who wished to incorporate the *law* with the *Gospel*, and calumniated the apostles who taught otherwise. This haughty and unfeeling man would give no countenance to the converted Gentiles; so far from it, that he would not receive any of them himself, forbade others to do it, and excommunicated those who had been received into the Church by the apostles. This appears to be the meaning of *neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the Church.* He had the complete *dog in the manger* principle: he would neither do, nor let do; and when good was done that he did not approve, he endeavoured to undo it.

Verse 11. Follow not that which is evil] *μι μίμον το κακον.* Do not imitate that wicked man, i.e., the conduct of Diotrophes; be merciful, loving, and kind. For whatever profession any man may make, it will ever appear that *he who doeth good is of God*-he alone is the person who uses rightly the grace received from God, and he alone shall enjoy the Divine approbation;

While **he that doeth evil]** He who is unfeeling, unmerciful, unkind, *hath not seen God*-has no proper knowledge of that God whose NAME is *mercy*, and whose NATURE is *love*.

Verse 12. Demetrius hath good report] Perhaps another member of the Church where Caius was; or he might have been one of those whom the apostle recommends to Caius; or, possibly, the *bearer of this letter* from John to Caius. He seems to have been an excellent person: *all testified* of his righteousness; the *truth*-Christianity, *itself bore testimony* to him; and the *apostles* themselves added theirs also.

Verse 13. I had many things to write] That is, I have many things that I might write; but having the hope of seeing thee shortly, I will not commit them to paper. *Ink* and *pen* are here mentioned; *paper* and *ink* in the preceding epistle.

Verse 14. Peace be to thee.] Mayest thou possess every requisite good, both of a spiritual and temporal kind.

Our **friends salute thee.]** Desire to be affectionately remembered to thee. *Greet the friends by name*-remember me to all those with whom I am acquainted, as if I had specified them by *name*. This is a proof to me that this epistle was not sent to Corinth, where it is not likely John ever was; and where it is not likely he had any particular acquaintances, unless we could suppose he had seen some of them when he was an exile in Patmos, an island in the Ægean Sea.

For other particulars concerning John, the reader is requested to refer to the preface to his gospel.

Instead of *φιλοι* and *φιλους*, *friends*, the Codex Alexandrinus and several others read *αδελφοι* and *αδελφους*, *brethren*. The former (*friends*) is a very singular appellation, and nowhere else found in Scripture; the latter is of frequent occurrence.

Subscriptions in the VERSIONS:—

In the ancient SYRIAC.-Nothing.

The Third Epistle of John the apostle is ended.-SYRIAC *Philoxenian*.

ÆTHIOPIC.-Nothing.

VULGATE.-Nothing.

The end of the epistles of the pure Apostle and Evangelist John.-ARABIC.

The Third Epistle of St. John the apostle is ended.-*Latin text* of the COMPLUTENSIAN.

The end of the Third catholic Epistle of St John.-DITTO, *Greek text*.

Subscriptions in the Manuscripts:-

The third of John.-CODD. ALEX. and VATICAN.

The Third catholic Epistle of John the evangelist and divine.

The third of John to Caius concerning Demetrius, of whom he witnesses the most excellent things.

I have already shown in the *preface* to those epistles termed *catholic*, that the word *καθολικος* is not to be taken here, and elsewhere in these epistles, as signifying universal, but *canonical*; for it would be absurd to call an epistle *universal* that was written to a private individual.

We seldom hear this epistle quoted but in the reproof of lordly tyrants, or prating troublesome fellows in the Church. And yet the epistle contains many excellent sentiments, which, if judiciously handled, might be very useful to the Church of God. But it has been the lot both of the *minor prophets* and the *minor epistles* to be generally neglected; for with many readers *bulk* is every thing; and, no *magnitude* no goodness.

This and the preceding epistle both read over in reference to a new edition, Jan. 3rd, 1832.-A. C.