

# **Contending for the Truth**

## **3 John & Jude 17-23**

**Minnesota District Pastors' Conference  
Gregg Bitter, Hancock MN  
April 21, 2009**



“Why can't my uncle sing at my wedding?” “Why can't other Lutherans come to communion.” “Why can't we join in the outdoor community service?” So often fellowship seems to be a list of *can'ts*. Such questions come at us with a negative spin. We know well the Biblical injunctions to “mark . . . and avoid” (Romans 16:17 KJV), to “not be yoked together” (2 Corinthians 6:14 NIV), to “come out . . . and be separate” (2 Corinthians 6:17 NIV), to “withdraw yourselves” (2 Thessalonians 3:6 KJV), to warn, warn again, and then “have nothing to do with him” (Titus 3:10 NIV). We strive, and rightly so, to properly apply these in our fellowship practices, for this is our Lord's revealed will. But we can end up battle-wearied. To the devil's delight, we might even at times cringe at the word *fellowship*.

How refreshing these verses of 3 John and Jude 17-23 are! Fellowship winds throughout these verses, but not in the negative mindset we often create for ourselves by primarily focusing on the “separation” passages in isolation. We witness the beauty of fellowship growing out of the truth and blossoming into joy. We see fellowship acting in love that both helps and rebukes. We draw strength from the battle cry to stand firm against false teachers, to stand firm in the fellowship of faith, eager to snatch others from the fire. These verses inspire us to contend for the truth. For then the blessed fellowship we share with one another and with our God and Savior will continue.

### 3 John 1

Ὁ πρεσβύτερος Γαίῳ τῷ ἀγαπητῷ, ὃν ἐγὼ ἀγαπῶ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ.

*The Elder. To dearly loved Gaius, whom I myself love in the truth.*

Ὁ πρεσβύτερος is the Apostle John. He is not just an elder, one of the leaders in early congregational life, but the well-known (definite article) elder. What a fitting title for the Apostle John! It shows the respect due to the last of the Apostles, and it reflects his tender care for those who have believed through his message, whom he addresses elsewhere as “my dear children” (1 John 2:1 NIV), “dear children” (1 John 2:12, 13, 18, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21 NIV), and “my children” (3 John 4 NIV).<sup>1</sup>

As was the customary style for letters, after the author names himself in the nominative, he names the recipient in the dative: Γαίῳ τῷ ἀγαπητῷ. Who is this Gaius? *Gaius* was one of the most popular Roman *praenomen*. Several other passages mention a Gaius (Acts 19:29; Acts 20:4; 1 Corinthians 1:14; Romans 16:23), but this one appears to be someone else (Lenski 577). We cannot determine for sure whether he is one of the teaching elders of the congregation or a faithful layman. But he is very dear to John, as emphasized by the verbal adjective (ἀγαπητῷ), then repeated in the verb (ἀγαπῶ) in the relative clause, and echoed again in the vocative, ἀγαπητέ, in verse two. This is John's own personal (ἐγὼ) deep affection of love, much more than simply our generic “Dear so-and-so.”

The basis for this love is not family or friendship, but this love occurs ἐν ἀληθείᾳ, “in the truth.” Although linguistically this phrase could simply be a substitute for the adverb *truly*, John's emphases on ἀλήθεια in the following verses, as well as in his other

<sup>1</sup> Some have suggested that “Elder John” is not the same person as “Apostle John.” This stems from a misreading of Papias (c. 150). For a more thorough discussion on this issue see, Becker, Siegbert, *Revelation The Distant Triumph Song*, NPH, Milwaukee, 1985, p. 8, 9 or Lenski, R. C. H., *Commentary on the New Testament: The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel*, Hendrickson, 1998, p. 16, 17

writings, warrants translating “in the truth.” The lack of the article emphasizes the vocable meaning (qualitative use). His love for Gaius has everything to do with the truth. All false teaching is excluded. His love exists and acts only in the sphere of the truth. We'll talk more about the truth in the upcoming verses.

Fellowship is so much more than an intellectual agreement in stated doctrines. The truth produces that bond of love, that deep affection that knows our new relationship with God and therefore our new brotherhood with one another. We are family in Christ. That's why we feel the heartache when a member asks for a release, for the difference between a transfer and a release is much more than just technical terminology. Contending for the truth is a fervent, heartfelt struggle.

Although we cannot identify this Gaius, we can construct a possible scenario that fits the facts of the first century. This scenario should not be used to modify the clear content of the letter, but it can help some of the events here come alive in our thoughts. Here is a suggested scenario<sup>2</sup>:

The early church has spread across the Mediterranean world. The same Roman roads and pirate-free shipping lanes that had brought Paul and Barnabas and the other first missionaries now serve the Christian congregations as corridors of communication to maintain their bond of faith. The church had also weathered the earlier persecutions that had taken many of the Apostles. But John continues working from Ephesus. From there he sends out traveling missionaries both to encourage the established congregations and to bring the Good News into new territory. The existing congregations along the way lodged these missionary brothers and sent them off well-supplied for the next stage of their journey.

False teachers would also come expecting congregational support. Since there were no seminaries or synodical labels to identify a preacher's doctrinal stance, they might carry letters of recommendation, of which 3 John may be an example. Yet the faithful Christian would also distinguish the true brother from the false by what they taught. “By their fruit you will know them” (Matthew 7:16).

Now the congregation to which Gaius belongs, wherever in Asia Minor it might have been, also had a leading member or elder by the name of Diotrephes. He welcomed the false teachers and wanted nothing to do with John or his messengers. This letter, with John's assurances of love, bolstered Gaius against this opponent. Vigorously practicing our fellowship and expressing our brotherly love encourages us to contend for the truth even in the face of entrenched opposition.

### 3 John 2

Ἀγαπητέ, περὶ πάντων εὐχομαί σε εὐδοῦσθαι καὶ ὑγιαίνειν, καθὼς εὐδοῦταί σου ἡ ψυχή.

*Dearly loved, concerning all things I pray that it goes well with you and you are healthy, just as it goes well with your soul.*

Christian fellowship shows the proper love for our fellow Christian concerning all things (περὶ πάντων), balancing both his material and spiritual wellbeing. Assuring

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<sup>2</sup> Much of what follows is drawn from various comments from R. C. H. Lenski, *Commentary on the New Testament: The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John, and St. Jude*, Hendrickson, 1998.

Gaius again of his love with the vocative, ἀγαπητέ, John now expresses one of love's actions. He prays. This isn't a one-time, completed act. It's a present, ongoing reality (εὐχομαί - present, indicative). He prays for Gaius' continuing health (ὕγιαίνειν - present infinitive), that all keeps going well with him (σε εὐοδοῦσθαι - present, passive, infinitive, literally "for you to be led along a good road"). Yet he "makes the well-being of the soul the governing concern; the material is to be 'even as' (καθώς) the spiritual" (Lenski 579). And as the following verses make clear, John had had good reports from the brothers concerning Gaius' spiritual health.

What an inspiration for us to practice our Christian fellowship by praying for one another in all various needs! Yes, we do pray for all people, especially that Christ's kingdom come to their hearts. Yet as we love one another in the truth, that love cannot help but pray for one another, to pray for each other as brothers and sisters united as one body in Christ. So we pray for our members concerning their material and spiritual needs. We pray for our brothers in the ministry not only for their gospel work but also for their families' health and wellbeing. We pray that as the Lord might bless our fellow Christians physically, they use those physical blessings for spiritual gain. For Gaius was able to help support the traveling brothers because of the Lord's physical blessings to him. As we pray for each other, we are helping one another contend for the truth.

What moved John to so pray? He explains (γράφ).

### 3 John 3, 4

ἐχάρην γὰρ λίαν ἐρχομένων ἀδελφῶν καὶ μαρτυρούντων σου τῇ ἀληθείᾳ, καθὼς σὺ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ περιπατεῖς. μείζοτεράν τούτων οὐκ ἔχω χαράν, ἵνα ἀκούω τὰ ἐμὰ τέκνα ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ περιπατοῦντα.

*For I greatly rejoiced as brothers came and testified to your truth, how you yourself walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than this: That I hear of my own children walking in the truth.*

Joy had filled John. It certainly had happened (ἐχάρην - aorist, indicative). What had prompted him to rejoice so much (λίαν - adverb)? He had heard good news about Gaius. Brothers had come and given their eye-witness report (ἐρχομένων ἀδελφῶν καὶ μαρτυρούντων - genitive absolute, present active circumstantial participles). In those days before phone calls, emails, and tweets, how important reliable messengers were! But these were more than simple messengers. They were trustworthy brothers (ἀδελφῶν), united in one family under God the Father through faith in Jesus Christ. And they were not simply reporting some rumor they had heard. They were giving reliable testimony (μαρτυρούντων) as faithful witnesses (μάρτυρες), who had seen the evidence.

What did they testify about? That Gaius held on to the truth (τῇ ἀληθείᾳ) as his very own (σου). John repeats this testimony more fully by adding a clause of indirect discourse introduced by καθὼς (Bauer καθὼς 5.) They testified how Gaius himself - emphatic σὺ since this could not be said about others, like Diotrophes, who had wandered from the truth (Lenski 580) - Gaius kept on walking around (περιπατεῖς - present indicative), living, within the boundaries of the truth (ἐν ἀληθείᾳ - no article = qualitative to emphasize vocable meaning, Lenski 580, see verse 1), not following false teachings.

Now John states a general truth about himself (ἔχω - gnomic present) that

explains his joy. He draws in our attention by pulling the double comparative *μειζοτέρων* to the front, separating it from its accusative noun *χαράν*. He uses *τούτων* as the genitive of comparison so that we listen in anticipation for the *ἵνα* clause (*ἵνα* = explanatory infinitive, Bauer *ἵνα* II. 1. e.) that will explain it. Using the negative (*οὐκ*) emphasizes the positive as in a litotes. "I have no greater joy than this." = "This is my greatest joy."

What is his ultimate joy? *ἵνα ἀκούω τὰ ἐμὰ τέκνα ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ περιπατοῦντα* "That I hear of my own children walking in the truth." What a way to describe true, Christian fellowship!

Christian fellowship flows from the truth, the truth John has been talking about (*τῇ ἀληθείᾳ* - article of previous reference). In our age of subjectivism hearing John say σου τῇ ἀληθείᾳ in verse 3 "your truth" raises red flags. Is truth what I perceive or want to be true, so that my truth can differ or even contradict your truth and yet both be true? Such thoughts wouldn't enter John's mind except as absolute absurdities. Even the secular, intellectual milieu of John's day thought in terms of objective reality (Plato's Forms, Aristotle's universals). Secondly, the rest of Scripture, including John's other books, clearly teach one objective, divine truth. And finally in the immediate context John clearly states that his joy comes when others walk in *the* truth. How could he rejoice over Gaius unless *his* truth matched *the* truth?

But in our contending for the truth against subjectivism and relativism, we must guard against reducing God's truth to a theoretical, abstract body of knowledge. Yes, God's truth is objective reality whether you or I believe it or not, but we dare not simply set it on the bookshelf only to be drawn out like a reference work.

God's truth is living and active. Remember that well-known verse from Jesus' prayer recorded by John. "Sanctify them be the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17 NIV). The truth is objective, revealed in God's word. But that objective word of truth causes a life-shattering subjective rebirth in us. It sanctifies. It daily washes away our filth to present us holy and blameless before God. It sets us apart as those belonging to God, his family, who live to honor our Father in heaven by keeping his name holy. His word of truth is Spirit and life (John 6:63). His word of truth sets us free (John 8:32). His word of truth brings us fellowship with him and with one another (1 John 1:3).

Gaius walked in this truth. It brought him life. It freed him from the slavery of sin and the tyranny of guilt. He walked in it, like we walk in the air around us. He breathed it in. It filled his thoughts, flowed through his veins, powered his heart and soul. It was his truth, not because he had thought it up, but because he possessed it and it possessed him. He held on to it by faith.

How important for us to remember! We are blessed to be heirs of the Lutheran church that has contended for the truth and has carefully formulated those truths to exclude error. But we walk in the truth only as we make those Bible teachings our own, not only in our heads but in our flesh and blood and bone as well, so that they are a part of us. "We remain alive in the doctrine of Christ, not by having it accessible in correctly formulated theses, but by meditating on it and pondering it in our hearts. As soon as we cease to search the Scriptures, to read and re-read it for the nourishment of our faith, the doctrine, no matter how correctly formulated, will begin to die to us, and we to it" (Meyer 77).

Contending for the truth begins in our own hearts, as we with Gaius keep on walking in the truth (ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ περιπατοῦντα), so that each of us as well can call it *my* truth. Keep it upon your hearts. Impress it on your children. Talk about it when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie it as a symbol on your hands and bind it on your foreheads. Write it on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates (see Deuteronomy 6:6-8 NIV). Walk in the truth.

We could coast on the momentum of right teaching handed down to us and be “conservative through sheer inertia rather than through conviction” (Reim 31). Outwardly we would be in right agreement on the truth but inwardly our fellowship would be as much of a sham as the unionism that agrees to disagree. We would find little joy in that fellowship and would fall into the pharisaic rule-keeping that lives in fear of breaking one of the rules or prides itself when others stumble. Rather contend for the truth in your own heart, so that you keep on walking in the truth.

Before we leave these verses, note again that fellowship in the truth makes us family. John calls those who walk in the truth τὰ ἐμὰ τέκνα, “my own children.” Through the word of truth handed down through the apostles those children include you and me. And like John, as you and I hear (ἀκούω) that others walk in the truth, that should not make us defensive or suspicious but rather be our greatest joy. For all who walk in the truth have been reborn of God.

At times contending for the truth, as we correctly practice Scriptural fellowship, may bring pain and conflict. Gaius certainly had experienced opposition from Diotrephes. That's why John reminds him of the joy. And we dare not forget that joy either. We have a taste of that joy here, as we gather together as brothers walking in the truth united around God's Word. “How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! It is like the precious oil poured on the head . . . It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore” (Psalm 133 NIV). Like John our greatest joy is to hear of each other walking in the truth.

Having celebrated that fellowship he and Gaius share, John now moves to his compliment and request by again addressing Gaius, Ἀγαπητέ (vocative), “Dearly loved.”

### 3 John 5-7

Ἀγαπητέ, πιστὸν ποιεῖς ὃ ἐὰν ἐργάσῃ εἰς τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς καὶ τοῦτο ξένους, οἱ ἐμαρτύρησάν σου τῇ ἀγάπῃ ἐνώπιον ἐκκλησίας, οὓς καλῶς ποιήσεις προπέμψας ἀξίως τοῦ θεοῦ· ὑπὲρ γὰρ τοῦ ὀνόματος ἐξῆλθον μηδὲν λαμβάνοντες ἀπὸ τῶν ἐθνικῶν.

*Dearly loved, you're acting faithfully in whatever you have done for the brothers, even though they were strangers. They testified in front of the church about your love. You will do well having helped them on in their journey in a manner worthy of God. For they have gone out in the Name, accepting nothing from the heathen.*

Faith in the heart acts faithfully (πιστόν - neut. acc. used adverbially). Gaius has acted so in the past and continues to do so in the present (ποιεῖς 2<sup>nd</sup> sing. pres. ind.) even as he reads this letter. He has done (ἐργάσῃ 2<sup>nd</sup> sing. aor. mid. deponent subj. in an indefinite relative clause) whatever (ὃ acc. neut. rel. pron. direct object of ἐργάσῃ; ἐάν = ἄν particle marking indefinite relative clause) was helpful for (εἰς with acc. used as a

dative of advantage, Bauer εἰς 4.g.) the brothers (τοὺς ἀδελφούς) in the faith whom John had sent to him. What had Gaius done for them? He not only lodged them while they were there providing them what they needed, but he also supplied them with what they needed for the next stage in their journey, so that they would have no need to try and get handouts from those to whom they were bringing the Gospel for the first time.

He did so even though he did not know the brothers personally. Note the one article (τούς) indicating that the brothers and strangers where the same group of persons. καὶ τοῦτο (neut. acc. used adverbially) means *and in that, and especially* (Bauer οὗτος 1.b.γ.). John wants to draw out the point that Gaius showed such love and kindness to help even strangers who shared his faith. His actions did not flow from natural human attachment (στοργή) or from friendship (φιλία) but from love (ἀγάπη) that imitates God's love, which gave his Son for sinner.

After completing their earlier work, these brothers returned to Ephesus. Before the congregation ( ἐνώπιον ἐκκλησίας - gen. sg.) they testified (ἐμαρτύρησάν - aor., it did happen) regarding Gaius' love (σου τῆ ἀγάπη) in action. The relative pronoun (οἱ) shows that those who testified are these brothers, who were strangers to Gaius.

Now these brothers have returned to Gaius with this letter in hand. As he reads it, he is already acting faithfully (πιστὸν ποιεῖς v. 5) by welcoming them. Now John adds another relative clause (οὓς - acc. pl. dir. obj. of ποιήσεις) referring again to these same brothers, asking Gaius to send them forward on their journey, well supplied with what they would need. He asks in a way that does not impose his will on Gaius and yet also is confident that Gaius' love will not fall short but will indeed follow through. "You will do well" (καλῶς ποιήσεις - fut. ind.), John writes. And what is it that he will do well? Προπέμψας a complimentary (supplementary) participle (Lenski 583) filling in the meaning of the generic verb ποιέω. It's an aorist for John views it as one act (Lenski 583), which he is confident that Gaius will complete in all its parts. Προπέμπω means more than to send (πέμπω) forward (πρό) with a simple goodbye. It was used to mean sending someone on with all that they need for the journey including money or food or traveling companions or the means to get there (Bauer προπέμπω 2., Lenski 583). That is brought out in this context by the adverbial phrase ἀξίως τοῦ θεοῦ, "in a manner worthy of God." Just as our God opens his hand and provides all that we need. So in Christian love, Gaius would generously supply these missionaries brothers for the journey ahead.

Why? Because of the reason (γάρ) they have gone out (ἐξῆλθον - aor. ind.). They have gone out for the sake of the Name (ὕπὲρ τοῦ ὀνόματος), to spread that Name. "For there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12 NIV), as Peter so clearly stated when he and John stood before the Sanhedrin. For the name of Jesus includes all he has done as the God-man to save us from sin and bring us eternal life. As these missionary brothers spread that Name, how could they receive anything from the heathen? How could they proclaim God's free gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ and then demand payment like the money-grubbing charlatans that preyed off gullible listeners? So they go out receiving nothing (μηδὲν λαμβάνοντες - pres. act. part. stating the circumstances in which they went out) from the heathen (ἀπὸ τῶν ἐθνικῶν), those who were not God's people, like the Gentiles of old.

In these verses, we see that Christian fellowship demonstrates itself in action,



actions of love that show kindness and care for our brothers and sisters in the faith. Yes, Christian love acts in kindness even toward our enemies, but we cannot love our enemies by supporting them in their evil deeds. But we can and ought to support those who walk in the truth, support them with our prayers, encouragements, gifts, and blessings. What a blessing that we can show such generous love even to those in our fellowship we do not know personally! Christian love practices such fellowship even when its difficult or dangerous, even as Gaius did so despite the opposition from Diotrephes.

This love supports those in our fellowship in the way the Lord enables us. We see John and Gaius and the traveling brothers contending for the truth as they each do what the Lord has enabled them to. John sends out the brothers. The brothers bring the name of Jesus to those who have not yet heard. Gaius cares for their physical needs, supplying them out of what the Lord has given to him. They are different members serving one body. Our God uses each link here to accomplish his purpose. Contending for the truth is not a one-man show. Look at how John, the Apostle, depends on Gaius. Note John's confidence that the same Lord who has enabled him will enable Gaius to continue in this good work.

As well-rounded as you might be, we need one another. We need our members. Because we walk together in the truth, we can share the burden of the work with others confident that we are walking in the same direction. We can delegate to others what they are capable of accomplishing. This takes some wisdom and Christian judgment as to who and what and when and how much. But don't cut short what the Lord can enable others to do and don't downplay the contribution of others, as if we needed to cling to our own self-importance to have meaning in life. Rather celebrate the fellowship we have, even as the brothers returned to John testifying of the good things Gaius had done for them. For we are on the same team, as John makes clear as he states his conclusion (οὖν) of this section in the next verse.

### 3 John 8

ἡμεῖς οὖν ὀφείλομεν ὑπολαμβάνειν τοὺς τοιούτους, ἵνα συνεργοὶ γινώμεθα τῇ ἀληθείᾳ.  
*Therefore, we on our part ought to keep on supporting such as these in order that we may become coworkers for the truth.*

John uses the nominative personal pronoun (ἡμεῖς) to draw a contrast. “We, you and I, Gaius, do our part, and they, the missionary brothers, do their part. We are different body members doing what the Lord enables us to do. Since the Lord has enabled us so, we have an ongoing obligation (ὀφείλομεν – pres. for continuing action, ind.), a continuing debt to love one another (Romans 13:8). What is this love to do? It is to keep on supporting (ὑπολαμβάνειν – pres. for continuing action, inf.) these kinds of (τοὺς τοιούτους<sup>3</sup>) traveling missionaries who walk in the truth.” Ὑπολαμβάνω can mean to receive (λαμβάνω) someone under (ὑπό) one's roof as a guest, providing for them. By extension it means to support someone even if they are no longer literally under your roof. Such support is not for anyone and everyone, but for the kind of people like these brothers, who walk together with us in the truth.

<sup>3</sup> The τοῖος family of words, such as τοιούτους used here, emphasizes the quality, this kind of person or thing. The τόσος family emphasizes quantity.

What is the purpose, goal, and aim (ἵνα) of supporting this kind of people who walk in the truth? It's nothing short of that we become (γινώμεθα - pres. subjunctive in a purpose clause) fellow workers, coworkers (συνεργοί), for the truth (τῇ ἀληθείᾳ - dative of advantage), working hard, contending to further the truth, to support the truth, to uphold the truth, to hand down the truth - God's objective truth, revealed in his Word and grasped by the heart of faith. There is a flip-side as well. If we support false teachers, we become coworkers in their error. 2 John 11 brings that out. But here John focuses on the positive side.

The preceding verses emphasize working together in mission work. But the principle applies to all the work Christ has given his Church to do. As we support home and world missions, as we support our parish schools and area Lutheran high schools, as we support our worker training system, as we support our local congregations and their various ministries, as we support the production of Scriptural resources for the Christian faith and life, we are working together. And since we walk together in the truth, we are working together for the truth. We contend for the truth as we support the Gospel-work in its various forms.

What motivation for Christian giving! I can't go to Africa and preach in Chichewa. I can't train the next generation of pastors and teachers. I can't start a new home mission on the other side of the U. S. But I can share in all that work and much more. And not only can I share in that work, but so can my member in the pew: the grandma who aches with arthritis, the teenager who's trying to grow a goatee, the mom who struggles to keep her two-year old twins quiet, the retired postman whose head keeps nodding. They are your coworkers and mine, as well as coworkers with our missionaries and professors and teachers. For as each of us does our part as the Lord enables us to support others who walk in the truth, we become coworkers for the truth, contending together for the truth. Teamwork.

Although we may at times lament the lack of monetary support for all the work to be done and there is much room to grow in Christian giving, yet don't miss the miracle the Lord continues to work in the hearts of our fellow Christians. With the support of less than 310,000 adult communicants, the Lord has enabled us to work together to support over 1200 congregations, 23 area Lutheran high schools, 4 worker training schools, over 1800 Lutheran elementary school teachers (*Statistics 2, 3, 117*), 50 missionaries in 24 foreign fields, ([www.wels.net](http://www.wels.net)) numerous special ministries, publications, parasynodical organizations, and more as we walk together in the truth. Much of the offering goes to support the local church work that our people know and see, but a significant part goes to support strangers, people they will never see this side of heaven, but whom they know are of such a kind that walk together with them in the truth. What a miracle! As you and I contend for the truth, we are not alone. Look at the support the Lord has brought to us through our coworkers for the truth.

Now John addresses an issue that must have troubled Gaius greatly, Diotrephes.

### 3 John 9

Ἔργασά [τι]<sup>4</sup> τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ· ἀλλ' ὁ φιλοπρωτεύων αὐτῶν Διοτρέφης οὐκ ἐπιδέχεται ἡμᾶς.  
*I wrote [something] to the church. But Diotrephes, who loves being first among them,*

4 Some manuscripts do not have τι. Others have ἄν instead "I would have written to the church"

*does not welcome us.*

John had written (ἔργαψα - aor. ind.) or, depending on the variant reading (ἄν), would have written a letter (τι) to the church (τῆ ἐκκλησίᾳ) Gaius belonged to. This letter could be what we call 2 John (Lenski 585).

However (ἀλλ'), standing in the way of that letter being accepted, or maybe deterring John from writing in the first place, was Diotrephes. He loved being first, being the leader, which was quite opposite from Jesus' words: "The greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves" (Luke 22:26 NIV). Or consider Jesus' example of washing his disciples' feet as John's Gospel records (John 13).

John uses an attributive, present participle (φιλοπρωτεύων - nom. mas. sg.) to describe Diotrephes in this way. This is an ongoing (pres. = continuing action) characteristic, not a momentary lapse. The participle is a compound of φίλος "love" and πρωτεύω "to be first among" with the genitive object αὐτῶν (Liddell πρωτεύω). Since Diotrephes wanted to be the top dog, he was not accepting or welcoming (ἐπιδέχεται - pres. habitual action) John or anyone or any letter that came from him (ἡμᾶς). He rejected John's authority as his action in the following verses make clear.

Now before we think about who in our own congregation comes closest to matching Diotrephes as the ache in our side, let's contend with the Diotrephes that tries to raise his head in our own hearts. In 1940 Edmund Reim wrote:

If I may point to one of our cardinal faults, so characteristic of our Wisconsin Synod, it is the fact that we do not accept leadership very well. Time and again we have seen plans for action presented to our body, often very good plans, for the accomplishing of a given task. But how often have they not been scuttled through lack of cooperation! Some of us have followed the lead, others have stood on their constitutional right to criticize and (here is the serious fault) declined to follow through with any corresponding effort of their own. (Reim 20)

More recently this same cardinal fault has been described as a lack of trust. In the 2007 BORAM, the Independent Panel for synod restructuring reported:

In WELS, trust can be briefly described as the obligation or responsibility imposed on one in whom confidence or authority is placed . . . The lack of trust is not about the integrity of individuals. We have been universally impressed with the spirit and dedication of the WELS leaders and pastors we met with. *Trust is about working in a team environment* that allows for individuals to take responsibility and deliver results. *When the ability of individuals is questioned or others feel they have a better solution than that of the team, trust breaks down.* (BORAM 46, emphasis added)

Diotrephes wanted to run his own team. But contending for the truth is not a one-man show. Because of the fellowship we share, because we walk together in the truth, we are on the same team. As was mentioned earlier, we have different roles, different positions, different gifts, but the place you're at is where God has called you. The gifts you have are what God has apportioned to you. Work together as a team, contending for the truth.

Now not everything that comes to us from the Synod may fit our present time and circumstances. But decline to do it because sound, Christian judgment that knows the

situation determines that it would not be beneficial for the people of God whom you serve at this time. Fight against personal ego or petty quibbles that refuse to welcome it, even as Diotrephes did not welcome those from John.

And even though you and I are the pastor, we don't need to be the first in our congregation. Maybe that member who is a side-ache is God's way of keeping us from thinking too much of ourselves and his reminder to work together as a team as we contend for the truth, sharing each others burdens and considering others better than ourselves, thereby imitating the attitude of our Lord who humbled himself for us (Philippians 1:27-2:11).

Although little Diotrephes raise their heads in our hearts, our gracious Lord calls us to daily repentance and keeps on raising up a new man in you and me to put down our little Diotrephes. However the original Diotrephes was vigorously following his own sinful pride that loved to be first.

### 3 John 10

διὰ τοῦτο, ἐὰν ἔλθω, ὑπομνήσω αὐτοῦ τὰ ἔργα ἃ ποιεῖ λόγοις πονηροῖς φλυαρῶν ἡμᾶς, καὶ μὴ ἀρκούμενος ἐπὶ τούτοις οὔτε αὐτὸς ἐπιδέχεται τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς καὶ τοὺς βουλομένους κωλύει καὶ ἐκ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἐκβάλλει.

*Because of this, if I come, I will bring up his works that he is doing prating against us with wicked words, and, not being satisfied with that, he himself does not welcome the brothers and prevents those who want to and throws them out of the church.*

Because Diotrephes refuses to welcome those associated with John (διὰ τοῦτο), John will take a definite course of action if and when he comes (ἐὰν ἔλθω - aor. subj.). John's letters often use ἐάν in the sense of "when," yet the indefinite condition leaves the future in God's hands (Lenski 586). What is that course of action? He will remind (ὑπομνήσω - fut. act. 1. sg., in the middle it means "remember") the congregation by bring up Diotrephes' (αὐτοῦ) works (τὰ ἔργα) pointing out what he was doing (ἃ ποιεῖ - pres. act. ind. 3<sup>rd</sup> sg) in both words and actions. With his wicked words (λόγοις πονηροῖς - dat. means or manner) he was constantly spouting nonsense, babbling negativity, prating against (φλυαρῶν - pres. act. part. ) John and those who walked in the truth with him (ἡμᾶς).

But words (ἐπὶ τούτοις) were not enough (μὴ ἀρκούμενος - pres. mid./pass. part., circumstantial, maybe with a causal flavor) for Diotrephes. In addition (καί) he took actions. John lists three progressively greater offenses Diotrephes was in the processes of doing (οὔτε . . . καὶ . . . καί). He himself does not (οὔτε) welcome (ἐπιδέχεται) the brothers (τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς). But it's not enough that just he himself (αὐτός) refuses. He also prevents (κωλύει) those who want to do so (τοὺς βουλομένους - pres. part, attributive). And he goes even further He does what he can to throw them (ἐκβάλλει) out of the church (ἐκ τῆς ἐκκλησίας). How successful he was in preventing and excluding these others is hard to say. The present tenses simply indicates this is what he was working at. And obviously he hadn't been able to prevent Gaius from welcoming the brothers.

Contending for the truth means confronting those who oppose the truth. John would soon come and do just that. "Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, having nothing to do with him" (Titus 3:10). Would Diotrephes

turn from his evil words and actions and humble himself? Or would he continue in his opposition against the truth and be excluded from the fellowship? We don't know what the outcome was.

So also as we contend for the truth by confronting those among us who are opposing the truth, we don't know what the outcome will be. Human fear and reasoning may say that such confrontation will only drive more people away and make us even smaller. But the outcome is in God's hands. Commit the outcome to the Lord and instead focus on what he has given us to do, namely, to warn, rebuke, correct. Yet we are not to do so in hasty judgment or selfish pride, but with great patience (2 Timothy 4:2), watching ourselves so that we are not tempted (Galatians 6:1) to lord it over them as if we were superior. That alone is more than we can handle, so leave the outcome to the Lord, fervently praying that they will turn and be saved (Ezekiel 33:11; Matthew 18:15).

Some may label our fellowship practices as unwelcoming saying we're like Diotrephes. But his error wasn't simply that he was unwelcoming but that he was unwelcoming to those who were walking in the truth. That's the key difference. Are they in the truth or outside of it? If they come walking in the truth, not opposing any of the truth, welcome them. Otherwise we cannot practice fellowship with them (2 John 10, 11).

The next verse reminds us again of the importance of being in the truth.

### 3 John 11

Ἀγαπητέ, μὴ μιμοῦ τὸ κακὸν ἀλλὰ τὸ ἀγαθόν. ὁ ἀγαθοποιῶν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν· ὁ κακοποιῶν οὐχ ἑώρακεν τὸν θεόν.

*Dearly loved, don't imitate the bad but the good. The one who does good is from God. The one who does bad has not seen God.*

After reviewing the opposition from Diotrephes, John bolsters Gaius, again reminding him of his love calling him ἀγαπητέ and then pointing him to the benefit of doing what is right and good.

The truth produces the good in us, both right belief and right action. To walk in the truth does what is good in faith and life. So John encourages Gaius. Despite the opposition in contending for the truth, don't even begin (pres. impv.) to imitate or mimic (μὴ μιμοῦ - mid./pas.-deponent 2<sup>nd</sup> sg.) the bad (τὸ κακόν), "anything that is spiritually or morally inferior" (Lenski 588), but rather (ἀλλά) imitate the good (τὸ ἀγαθόν), "anything that is spiritually or morally beneficial" (Lenski 588). The substantivized, neuter, singular adjectives ( τὸ κακόν; τὸ ἀγαθόν) "are used like abstract nouns but are more concrete in force" (Lenski 588). This is not some theoretical badness or goodness, but it takes reality in our hearts and lives.

Why imitate the good? Because the one who is characterized by doing good (ὁ ἀγαθοποιῶν - pres. act. part. attributive) is from God (ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν). "It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Philippians 2:13 NIV). A branch connected to the vine produces much fruit, good fruit. Apart from our God, Jesus Christ, we can do no good (John 15:5). The one who does what is truly good in God's sight has his origin from God. He is born from God (John 1:13).

On the other hand, the one who is characterized by doing evil (ὁ κακοποιῶν) has

not seen God (οὐχ ἑώρακεν – perf. act. ind. – τὸν θεόν). He has not even caught a glimpse of God and remains in that ignorant state (perfect tense). For God reveals himself through his word of truth. The one who does bad does not walk in the truth.

What encouragement for us as well. “Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil.” (1 Thessalonians 5:21, 22 NIV). Keep on walking in the truth as you imitate the good.

Now as Gaius welcomes the brothers despite Diotrephes, he is not going out on limb. John assures him of the good standing of the lead missionary brother, Demetrius.

### 3 John 12

Δηματρίῳ μεμαρτύρηται ὑπὸ πάντων καὶ ὑπὸ αὐτῆς τῆς ἀληθείας· καὶ ἡμεῖς δὲ μαρτυροῦμεν, καὶ οἶδας ὅτι ἡ μαρτυρία ἡμῶν ἀληθῆς ἐστίν.

*Demetrius has received a good testimony from all and from the truth itself. And we ourselves also are testifying, and you know that our testimony is true.*

We can not say for sure who this Demetrius is. But it fits well into the overall context to consider that he may be the leader of the missionary brothers whom Gaius would lodge and then send on their way (Lenski 590).

Δηματρίῳ μεμαρτύρηται ὑπὸ πάντων is an impersonal passive construction. In the passive μαρτυρέω can mean “be well spoken of, be approved of.” A literal rendering could be “it has been well spoken of Demetrius by all” or “good testimony has been given to Demetrius by all.” More fluid English expresses the same thought as translated above (Bauer μαρτυρέω 2.b.).

Gaius is facing a very volatile situation. Was the leader of these brothers the right man for the job? John assures Gaius that yes he was (Lenski 591, 592). He establishes this by the testimony of two or three witnesses. Demetrius' fellow Christians all (ὑπὸ πάντων) spoke well of him. And Demetrius' conduct and character matched up with God's Word, so that the truth itself (ὑπὸ αὐτῆς τῆς ἀληθείας) testified well of him. So both the subjective testimony of his fellow Christians and the objective testimony of the Word of truth recommended Demetrius (Lenski 591). This good testimony has been true in the past and continues into the present (μεμαρτύρηται – perfect).

Then John caps it off with a third witness, he himself and the other brothers traveling with Demetrius (ἡμεῖς – emphatic) (Lenski 591). “And we also are testifying, right now through this letter and through the words we are speaking to you” (καὶ ἡμεῖς δὲ μαρτυροῦμεν – present). This third and final witness is the weightiest so John adds (καί) “you know (οἶδας – perfect stem but always used as a present - Bauer οἶδα) that our testimony is true” (ὅτι ἡ μαρτυρία ἡμῶν ἀληθῆς ἐστίν), it is beyond all question (Lenski 591). Gaius is to have all assurance and confidence in these brothers despite the trouble, risk, and opposition from Diotrephes and his followers.

What a reminder for us to speak well of our brothers in the gospel ministry! Sometimes to build up our own self-esteem we focus on the weakness in someone else. Even if this doesn't overflow into gossip or slander, it still infects our attitude and shows itself in our words and actions toward them. Or maybe to build ourselves up we demean the scope of a brother's or sister's work, “They're just a teacher.” But note how highly John speaks of Demetrius, recommending him so thoroughly – even though he's not an

apostle. Now of course, our own speaking-well and endorsement of others needs to be based on the truth. Yet if we think we cannot truly say anything good about a fellow worker in our fellowship, we're looking with blinders on absorbed in our own self-created notion of what the gospel ministry should be.

And what blessing to be in a church body that does walk together in the truth! We can with confidence recommend our sister congregations and fellow pastors to our members with a clear conscience and solid testimony that our fellow shepherds will feed them God's word of truth. As we contend for the truth, we work as a team that builds one another up with true words of encouragement and recommendation.

### 3 John 13, 14

Πολλὰ εἶχον γράψαι σοι ἀλλ' οὐ θέλω διὰ μέλανος καὶ καλάμου σοι γράφειν· ἐλπίζω δὲ εὐθέως σε ἰδεῖν, καὶ στόμα πρὸς στόμα λαλήσομεν. εἰρήνη σοι. ἀσπάζονταί σε οἱ φίλοι. ἀσπάζου τοὺς φίλους κατ' ὄνομα.

*I still had many things to write to you, but I do not want to keep writing to you with ink and pen. Rather I hope to see you at once, and we will speak face to face. Peace to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.*

John was still in the processing of having (εἶχον - imperf.) many things (πολλά) to write (γράψαι - inf. aor. viewing the writing as a single unit that he has finished) to Gaius (σοι), but (ἀλλ') John does not want (οὐ θέλω - pres. ind.) to keep on writing (γράφειν - inf. pres. continuing action) in this way with a reed dipped in black ink (διὰ μέλανος καὶ καλάμου). Rather (δέ) he hopes (ἐλπίζω) to see him (σε ἰδεῖν) at once (εὐθέως). This is his earnest desire, his hope, but he leaves it in God's hands, much like the ἐὰν ἔλθω in verse 10 (Lenski 586, 593). He plans to come at once (εὐθέως) right on the heels of these missionary brothers. Diotrophes will soon be dealt with (Lenski 593). At that time Gaius and John will speak (λαλήσομεν - fut. ind.) "mouth to mouth" (στόμα πρὸς στόμα), or as we would say it face to face - although if we see "eye to eye" shouldn't we then speak "mouth to mouth?"

John quickly closes. Peace to you (εἰρήνη σοι), that peace which comes through the truth, the peace that we have as we walk in the truth. Despite the hostility from Demetrius, Gaius had peace. John includes the greetings from the friends who were with him (ἀσπάζονταί σε οἱ φίλοι). And he asks Gaius to be greeting (ἀσπάζου - pres. imperative) the friends (τοὺς φίλους) there individually by name (κατ' ὄνομα).

We are social beings. We encourage and help each other contend for the truth not only through written communication but also face to face, such as we are doing at this conference. In our digital age let's not lose the benefit of physically coming together. Both can be vital tools in walking together. Note also the greetings at the end. Greetings can be superficial, but don't neglect them for that reason. For when the deeper bond of unity unites us in the truth, it also bubbles to the surface expressing itself in sincere greetings for those who walk together with us in the truth. For as we walk in the truth, we walk in the peace that surpasses all understanding, no matter how troubling the circumstances around us.

## Jude

Now those to whom Jude wrote also faced troubling circumstances. They faced false teachers who were infiltrating among them. Jude describes them as “godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord” (Jude 4 NIV). So he urges those called and loved by God “to contend for the faith” (Jude 3 NIV). For unending, fiery punishment awaits those who do not follow the Lord, just as it did for the unbelievers among the Israelites rescued from Egypt, for the fallen angels, and for Sodom and Gomorrah (Jude 5-7). These false teachers are dreamers who reject authority and “speak abusively against whatever they do not understand” (Jude 10 NIV), not heading the example of Michael in his dispute with Satan over the body of Moses (Jude 8-10). Woe to them, for they are heading down the path of Cain, Balaam, and Korah (Jude 11). They are shepherds who feed on their flock, empty clouds, fruitless and uprooted trees, wild waves, and wandering stars (Jude 12, 13). The judgment against these ungodly men will certainly come, just as it came against the ungodly whom Enoch prophesied against (Jude 14-15). For “these men are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage” (Jude 16 NIV).

In contrast to them, Jude now address his fellow Christians.

## Jude 17

Ὑμεῖς δέ, ἀγαπητοί, μνήθητε τῶν ῥημάτων τῶν προειρημένων ὑπὸ τῶν ἀποστόλων τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ

*But as for you, dearly loved, remember the words foretold by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ,*

With the ὑμεῖς δέ (nom. pers. pron.) Jude now turns from describing the false teachers to urging his fellow Christians, whom he calls ἀγαπητοί, the same vocative we met in 3 John but now in the plural. They are dearly loved by Jude for Jude knows the love of God that so ἠγάπησεν the world that he gave his only-begotten Son.

He urges them to remember (μνήθητε - aor. imperative, pass. deponent). They are to call to mind and not forget the words (τῶν ῥημάτων - gen. with the verb), the message, which had been foretold (τῶν προειρημένων perf. pass. part. attribute). Although the message had been spoken in the past the words are still valid and true (perfect tense), for they were spoken by the apostles (ὑπὸ τῶν ἀποστόλων - agent), those sent out by our Lord Jesus Christ (τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ - subjective or possessive). Note the full title of our Lord. These are his official spokesmen. Certainly we are to remember their words. For they come from our Lord, who ransomed us with his blood to be his own. They come from Jesus, our Savior. They come from the Christ, the Lord's Anointed, who carried out the full mission the Father sent him on as our Prophet, Priest, and King.

What apostles did Jude have in mind? We cannot say for sure. His readers may well have been some of those whom the Apostle Paul brought the gospel to. Also the similarities between Jude and 2 Peter 2 & 3 may indicate that the Apostle Peter wrote to warn these believers of the false prophets who were soon coming and now Jude urges them to keep on contending now that the false prophets are among them, reminding them here of what Peter had foretold (Lenski 643).



Still today, we can do no better than to remember the words of the apostles, given to them by our Lord himself, recorded in the Scriptures for us. For it is the Spirit, himself, working through these words who brings us the unity in mind and thought so that we have fellowship with one another.

Likewise, although not verbally inspired as the apostles, let us not forget our forefathers who have contended for the truth in the generations before us. We can learn from what they have written for they drew their battle strength from the Holy Scriptures. Their victories are only truly ours if we make the Biblical truths they contended for our own in heart and soul and mind. Then we are not living off their legacy but contending with the same strength that empowered them.

Jude now summarizes what specifically the apostles had foretold that his readers are to remember.

### **Jude 18, 19**

ὅτι ἔλεγον ὑμῖν ὅτι Ἐπ' ἐσχάτου τοῦ χρόνου ἔσονται ἐμπαῖκται κατὰ τὰς ἑαυτῶν ἐπιθυμίας πορευόμενοι τῶν ἀσεβειῶν. Οὗτοί εἰσιν οἱ ἀποδιορίζοντες, ψυχικοί, πνεῦμα μὴ ἔχοντες.

*that they kept on saying to you, "In the last time there will be mockers conducting themselves according to their own desires for all kinds of ungodliness." These are the ones who divide, consumed with this life, not having the Spirit.*

Here is the content (ὅτι) of the words the apostles foretold. They kept on saying (ἔλεγον - imperf.) this to these readers (ὑμῖν). The second ὅτι (recitative) marks the quote. These things will happen in the last time (ἐπ' ἐσχάτου τοῦ χρόνου), which means the same as the phrase "in the last days." This is the time between Pentecost and our Lord's return in glory on Judgment Day (Lenski 339, see 2 Peter 3:3). This warning is not only for the readers in Jude's day, but for you and me today as well.

What will happen in these last days? There will be (ἔσονται - future) mockers. Take in the full meaning of that word for it is used without the article (qualitative - Lenski 339, see 2 Peter 3:3). ἐμπαῖκται is related to παῖς, "child." The ἐμπαῖκται are like smart-aleck children who make fun of what they do not understand. They think they know so much more than they do. Rather than humbly accepting what our heavenly Father says, they stand judging it according to their own desires, whether base appetites or the so-called higher desires of reason.

For rather than staying on the path lit by God's Word (Psalm 119:105) and following him who alone is the Way (John 14:6), they journey off, carrying themselves along, conducting themselves (πορευόμενοι - pres. part. attributive) according to their own desires (κατὰ τὰς ἑαυτῶν ἐπιθυμίας) for all kinds of ungodliness (τῶν ἀσεβειῶν gen. pl). This is not a momentary lapse or a misspoken word that could happen to any of us. They persist on this course (πορευόμενοι - present tense), despite brotherly correction based on the Scriptures. The plural τῶν ἀσεβειῶν brings to mind all the different masks ungodliness can wear. This genitive could be qualitative, "ungodly desires," subjective, "desires produced by ungodliness," or objective "desires for ungodliness" (Lenski 644) Whichever you choose the meaning is the same. Their desires have nothing to do with what God wants. Instead they rush off in their own self-chosen directions.

And look at what that causes. Divisions. As we contend for the truth others will accuse us of causing the division. "If you would just compromise . . ." But Jude clearly states that it's the mockers (οὐτοί) who are doing it (οἱ ἀποδιορίζοντες - pres. act. part. attributive, this is their ongoing character). The truth unites; error divides. For if all fully submitted to God's Word, there would be no divisions (John 17:17-23). And despite all the outward unity compromising the truth might showcase, this would not be true, spiritual unity (1 Corinthians 1:10).

Jude continues to describe them as ψυχικοί, πνεῦμα μὴ ἔχοντες. ψυχικός, related to the noun ψυχή, "soul," "in our literature always denot[es] the life of the natural world and whatever belongs to it, in contrast to the supernatural world . . . one who lives on the purely material plane, without being touched by the Spirit of God" (Bauer ψυχικός). Contrast that with πνεῦμα, "spirit." This too denotes the inner, non-material part of man, his soul, but often indicating the soul that the Spirit, πνεῦμα, has raised to spiritual life. Rather than consumed with this life, this soul is set "on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God . . . not on earthly things" (Colossians 3:1, 2). Such spiritual life only comes from the Holy Spirit. So whether we translate "spirit" or "Spirit" the meaning ends up the same.

Who are the mockers? Note the plurals (ἐμπαῖκται, ἐπιθυμίας, ἄσεβειῶν). We dare not limit the mockers to one particular kind of ungodliness. Contending for the truth means fighting against any and every kind of mockery against our God. In fact, we may at first think that the mockers are those outside the church, the anti-religion crowd who ridicule and make fun of God. They certainly are mocking God, but that's not the focus here. Jude has already said that he's warning against those who have slipped into the congregation (Jude 4). In addition, divisions are more often than not caused from the inside. When the church is attacked from without, there is a desire to rally together against a common foe. But when the attack comes from within the visible church, sides are drawn up.

Now consider what every kind of false teaching does. It twists God's Word. It presents a false caricature of who God is and what he has revealed about himself. Isn't that the essence of mocking someone? It's like a bratty child who's told to clean his room and then repeats his father's words in a disrespectful way: "Go clean your room, yah-dah-dah-dah-dah." That's the mocking of false teaching. So these mockers are teachers within the visible church who are teaching false doctrine.

And what is it that leads a teacher into false doctrine? Is it not being ψυχικοί? Rather than being led by the Spirit who alone can reveal the thoughts of God through his Word (1 Corinthians 2:9-16), they are led by their ungodly, earthly-minded desires. Maybe it's a desire for earthly comforts so they use the church as a way to gain wealth. Maybe it's a desire to ease their guilt by redefining what lifestyles are sinful or not. Maybe it's a desire to follow the pride of the *opinio legis*, so works are invented that we're told will make us right with God. Maybe it's a desire that wants our human reason to be able to understand what we are to believe, so the real presence in the Lord's Supper or the efficacy of Baptism is denied. Do you begin to see all the different forms the ἄσεβειῶν can take?

But can we say that someone who has departed from God's Word in only a small area is πνεῦμα μὴ ἔχοντες, without the Spirit? In the area they depart in, they certainly do not have the Spirit. And even though where the difference comes to a head may seem

to be only a peripheral doctrine of Scripture, how much does that other spirit, the ψυχικοί, infect their hearts on the points that may seem to be in line with the Scriptures? Consider Luther and Zwingli at the *Colloquy of Marburg*. Although they agreed on all points except the Lord's Supper, Luther declared "Yours is a different spirit." John P. Meyer comments:

The difference that separated the two reform movements was not merely a different conception of the Lord's Supper, important though this would have been in itself; much less was it one of phraseology and mode of presentation; it was one of approach and of basic attitude . . . [A] difference in basic attitude, a different spirit, left the colloquists without a common ground on which to meet . . . (Meyer 59)

So even though we may pinpoint only one specific disagreement, how can we see into their hearts to know for sure how limited or how prevalent this false spirit is?

Yes, if the error does not deny the essentials of salvation, God in his grace and mercy can preserve them in the saving faith, so that they continue to trust in his Son, Jesus Christ, as their only Savior from sin. The Holy Spirit can still be active in their hearts, only resisted in the areas in which they err. They may well be saved "as ones escaping through the flames" (1 Corinthians 3:15 NIV). Or even better, our prayer is that the Spirit open their minds to see their error that has mocked God's Word and turn from it.

But our place is not to try to peer into their heart. God knows which false teachers have turned their hearts away from him and so are headed for destruction like those in Enoch's day. He knows those who are his, who are escaping through the flames despite their error. We, who cannot see the heart, must act only on their outward confession expressed in their words and actions, not on what we hope their inner faith is. By teaching any of God's Word falsely and persisting in the error despite Scriptural correction, their words and actions place them in the same category as these mockers as far as we can see.

So how are we to act toward such persistent false teachers, no matter what we might hope is in their heart? Jude does not have an imperative here saying: "Watch out. Stay away." as Romans 16:17 has. But consider how he has already described the mockers and their followers as on the path to destruction following in the way of the unbelieving Israelites, the fallen angels, and Sodom and Gomorrah. It doesn't take much to figure out what to do.

George O. Lillegard expresses these thoughts this way:

True Christians, who would confess the whole truth of God, must, therefore, separate themselves from those who teach and advocate error. For they cannot contend against their error while at the same time recognizing them as Christian brethren and fraternizing with them on equal terms. This is the essential meaning of Romans 16:17 and similar passages. No matter what the error is, whether it be what men regard as small or what they consider important, the directions of Scripture are clear. We are to set the erring teachers right, and if they "consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Ti 6:3), we are to exclude them from our spiritual fellowship, even though we may admit that they could still be Christian at heart, if the faith of their hearts is better than the confession of their lips. But we cannot look into the hearts of men and judge whether they are sincere believers or not. Seeing the sinful acts and false teachings, which the Word of God itself condemns so definitely, we must be guided in our

attitude to them by that. (Lillegard 179)

Deviating from the Scriptures is a very, serious matter. Notice of all the statements of the apostles on all the various doctrines of Scripture that Jude could have highlighted, the Holy Spirit led him to quote this warning against false teachers: "In the last time there will be mockers conducting themselves according to their own desires for all kinds of ungodliness." Of course, much had to do with the circumstances his readers were facing. Jude's focusing on this warning does not mean that the Gospel of justification through faith in Jesus is not the central teaching of Scripture that is to predominate our life and ministry.

But consider how frequently warnings against false teachers are given throughout Scripture. "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves" (Matthew 7:15 NIV). "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (Matthew 16:6 NIV). Jesus listed false christs and false prophets as signs of the last times (Matthew 24:4, 24). The Apostle Paul, in his farewell words to the elders at the church of Ephesus, says, "I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears" (Acts 20:29-31 NIV). And in the final letter of Scripture he wrote, he calls false doctrine gangrene (2 Timothy 2:17). John urges believers to "test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1 NIV). And so much of Revelation, properly understood, vividly warns against false teachers. How many more references couldn't you add?

As mentioned back under 3 John 3, 4, we live in an age of subjectivism. What good are warnings against false doctrine if no one can know what is true or false for anyone else? In this age when for so many tolerance is the state religion and Christianity has been distorted into a god of indulgent love, we dare not neglect to emphasize the Scriptural warning against false teachers, even as Jude does. No doubt this will draw the ire of those influenced by the current age, even those in our congregation at times, but contending for the truth is a hard-fought, life-and-death struggle.

In my opinion, one chief reason our fellowship practices cause the consternation among us that they sometimes do is that so many of our people, and even sometimes we ourselves, fail to fully comprehend and appreciate the horror of any and every false teaching and so the warning in this verse doesn't sound so dire. Yes, some false teachings aren't immediately faith-destroying, but all false teachings harm faith. They're poison. They twist God's Word. They make him to be a liar. False teachers, whether they realize it or not, are lying by God's name (2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment). Shouldn't this not only drive us to heed the warning against false teachers but also drive us into God's Word, so that we do not become liars ourselves? When we fully realize with our heart and mind that false teaching is like a house on fire, then disturbing someone's peaceful sleep, even if they are angry at first, doesn't seem too drastic. It's all part of contending for the truth.

Yet in the face of such opposition and indifference to the truth, how can we ever stand firm?

**Jude 20, 21**

ὁμοῖς δέ, ἀγαπητοί, ἐποικοδομοῦντες ἑαυτοὺς τῇ ἀγιωτάτῃ ὑμῶν πίστει, ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ προσευχόμενοι, ἑαυτοὺς ἐν ἀγάπῃ θεοῦ τηρήσατε προσδεχόμενοι τὸ ἔλεος τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον.

*But as for you, dearly loved, by building yourselves up in respect to your most holy faith [doing so] in the Holy Spirit as you pray, guard yourselves in God's love, anticipating the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life.*

Jude moves from the description of the mockers to addressing his dearly loved readers once again (ὁμοῖς δέ, ἀγαπητοί). Guard yourselves (ἑαυτοὺς . . . τηρήσατε), keep watch over yourselves encircled in the safety of God's love (ἐν ἀγάπῃ θεοῦ - subjective gen.). Although God's love extends over all (John 3:16a), yet only believers in Jesus enjoy the eternal blessings of that love (John 3:16b). Don't leave off from keeping yourselves within the mighty fortress of his love. Within it's walls you are safe even as you contend for the truth. Let the mockers do what they will, they cannot harm your relationship with God as you keep yourself in his love. So bring this act to full completion (τηρήσατε - imperative, effective aorist, Lenski 646).

How? By continuing to build yourselves up (ἐποικοδομοῦντες ἑαυτοὺς - pres. act. part. circumstantial means) in respect to your most holy faith (τῇ ἀγιωτάτῃ ὑμῶν πίστει - dat. of reference). God's people, and so also your faith, are "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:20 NIV).

Is the faith mentioned here *fides quae creditur*, the objective body of doctrine that is to be believed, or is it *fides qua creditur*, the subjective act of believing by which we grasp God's promises as our own? You have those who say *quae creditur* (Lenski 645). And you have those who say that the New Testament, including this passage, never uses πίστις for objective faith (Schaller 248). In my opinion, especially with the use of ὑμῶν, the primary focus is subjective faith. They are to continue building themselves up in their faith that believes God's promises.

However, in our day that so often disconnects faith from any objective promise, we need to remember and to remind our people that faith, properly speaking, holds on to a promise. Faith is being fully persuaded that the one who has made the promise is trustworthy and will keep his word. Having faith that if you wish upon a star your dreams will come true is superstition, not faith, or as the German would put it *Aberglaube*, anything "but faith." Believing in yourself is like trying to hold on to air. Faith needs a promise to grasp. And the effectiveness of faith is only as good as the promise its holding on to. If the promise breaks, then faith is again left clutching at air.

How is faith built up? We do not build ourselves up in respect to our faith by focusing on our own act of believing but rather by focusing on the promise. It's just as when we want to be happy we don't try to generate happiness by focusing on the emotion of happiness, we focus on the people, events, or things that make us happy. Faith focuses on a trustworthy promise, and no promises are more trustworthy than those of our God and Savior. So if you and I are to keep ourselves in God's love by building ourselves up in respect to our faith, focus on God's promises. Focus on God's truth. To contend for the truth, we must keep our faith focused on God's promises.

But can the faith by which we believe, as weak and small as it often is, be described as most holy (ἀγιωτάτη)? Through faith we apprehend Jesus' righteousness. Through faith we're washed clean in Jesus' blood. Through faith we are presented to God, holy and blameless, as a bride beautifully dressed. Our faith is most holy only to the extent that we are holding on to Jesus and his blood and righteousness. Jude's inclusion of this adjective reminds us of where our faith must be focused if we are to keep ourselves in God's love by building up ourselves in respect to our most holy faith.

Many connect the phrase ἐν πνεύματι ἀγίῳ with προσευχόμενοι. Lenski takes it with ἐποικοδομοῦντες because of the word order (Lenski 646). I took it as Lenski did. As we build ourselves up in respect to our most holy faith we do this in the Holy Spirit (ἐν πνεύματι ἀγίῳ). Outside the Spirit's work there can be no faith (1 Corinthians 12:3), much less a building up. But as the Holy Spirit works through his word and sacraments, faith grows stronger and we stay secure within God's love.

Next προσευχόμενοι (pres. part. circumstantial) is the third modifier of ἐποικοδομοῦντες (first = τῇ ἀγιωτάτῃ ὑμῶν πίστει; second = ἐν πνεύματι). This building up of ourselves in our most holy faith in the sphere of the Holy Spirit takes place as the humble attitude of prayer permeates our hearts. This is the opposite of those mockers who stand over God's Word. Prayer calls out like the child Samuel, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." For without this humility that kneels before God, our reason hardens our hearts against the Holy Spirit and our faith refuses to hold on to God's promises.

However, as we guard ourselves in God's love by building ourselves up in our faith that holds on to Jesus' holiness, doing so in the Holy Spirit and with that attitude of prayer, our expectation and desire is lifted from the mundane life of this world. Rather than being ψυχικοί, we are προσδεχόμενοι τὸ ἔλεος τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον, anticipating the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life.

This is the continue circumstance (προσδεχόμενοι - act. part. circumstantial) for all who guard themselves in God's love. We keep on looking forward, eagerly awaiting the mercy (τὸ ἔλεος) Jesus will show us when he returns in glory. Our life in this world is a vale of tears. We are poor travelers, just passing through as strangers. We came into this world with nothing and will leave with nothing, for we are only beggars. "*Hoc est verum. Wir sind alle Bettler*" (Kittelson 297). But our Lord Jesus Christ - note the full official title again as he brings his saving work to complete fulfillment - our Lord Jesus Christ has pity on our miserable condition. He will bring it to an end with his glorious return on the Last Day. Note how Jude, who has been using the 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural as he encourages his readers, now shifts to the first person plural (ἡμῶν), for he and all believers in Jesus along with his faithful readers call him Lord and will be united in glory. Yes, we anticipate his mercy that will bring us to the ultimate goal (Bauer εἰς 4.), namely eternal life (ζωὴν αἰώνιον). His love purchased it for us on the cross. His grace brought it to our undeserving hearts through word and sacrament. His mercy will bring us into its full enjoyment for all eternity. Keep yourselves in God's love, for heaven is what is ahead.

Does contending for the truth leave you at times weak and exhausted? Do the false teachers seem so successful that we wonder at times why bother contending? Take heart. Find strength as you heed Jude's encouragement in this verse. Guard yourself in God's love. Run into the tower of his gracious promises. Study his love letter to you.

Receive the testimony of his love given for you in his last will and testament, sealed by his body and blood. Stay guarded in God's love as you humbly build up your faith with the Spirit's tools. Stay guarded in God's love eagerly looking forward to your eternal home in heaven.

And what about our weary travelers along the way? Just as we anticipate Jesus' mercy, so also we show them mercy.

## Jude 22, 23

καὶ οὐς μὲν ἐλεᾶτε διακρινομένους, οὐς δὲ σώζετε ἐκ πυρὸς ἀρπάζοντες, οὐς δὲ ἐλεᾶτε ἐν φόβῳ μισοῦντες καὶ τὸν ἀπὸ τῆς σαρκὸς ἐσπιλωμένον χιτῶνα.

*Show mercy to those who are doubting. Save some by snatching them from the fire. Show mercy in fear hating even the inner shirt stained by flesh.*

Having told his readers what to do for themselves (“guard yourselves in God's love”), he now adds (καί) what to do for others who have suffered from the mockers (Lenski 647). As we contend for the truth, we long to rescue others for that truth. We use our Scriptural fellowship practices as a beacon of the truth to draw others into the safety of God's love.

However, before we proceed further, we should consider the textual variants for the underlined portion above. The UBS Third Edition has three intertwined footnotes covering over half a page for variant readings. Here is a summary, grouping together manuscripts that only had variant spellings or small word-order changes:

Manuscripts with two phrases:

ⲡ<sup>72</sup> it<sup>t</sup> syr<sup>ph</sup> cop<sup>sa</sup> Clement<sup>lat</sup> Orsisius, Jerome

οὐς μὲν ἐκ πυρὸς ἀρπάζετε, διακρινομένους δὲ ἐλεᾶτε (ἐν φόβῳ) μισοῦντες  
“snatch some from the fire, on doubters have mercy in fear hating . . .”

K L P 049 0142 056 330 451 630 1877 2127 2492 Byz Lect, Ps-Oecumenius<sup>txt</sup>  
Theophylact<sup>txt</sup>

οὐς μὲν ἐλεᾶτε διακρινομένοι, οὐς δὲ ἐν φόβῳ σώζετε ἐκ πυρὸς ἀρπάζοντες  
μισοῦντες

“And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear pulling them out of the fire; hating . . .” (KJV)

C<sup>2</sup> 88 1505 2127 2495, syr<sup>h</sup>

οὐς μὲν ἐλεᾶτε διακρινομένους, οὐς δὲ (ἐν φόβῳ) σώζετε ἐκ πυρὸς ἀρπάζοντες  
(ἐν φόβῳ) μισοῦντες

“have mercy on doubters, (in fear) save some by snatching from the fire (in fear) hating

Manuscripts with three phrases:

Ⲙ B Ψ

οὐς μὲν ἐλεᾶτε διακρινομένους, οὐς δὲ σώζετε ἐκ πυρὸς ἀρπάζοντες, οὐς δὲ ἐλεᾶτε ἐν φόβῳ μισοῦντες (UBS)

“have mercy on those who doubt, save others by snatching them from fire, have

mercy on others in fear hating . . .”

A 33 81 181 326 436 1241, 1881 it<sup>ar, c, dem, div, p\*</sup> vg cop<sup>bo</sup> arm Ephraem

οὓς μὲν ἐλέγχετε διακρινομένους, οὓς δὲ σώζετε ἐκ πυρὸς ἀρπάζοντες, οὓς δὲ ἐλεᾶτε ἐν φόβῳ μισοῦντες

“convict those who doubt, save others by snatching them from fire, have mercy on others in fear hating . . .”

As far as I could determine no variant as a whole is clearly ancient and widespread. Yet I think we could safely draw the following conclusions about the original.

- ἐλεᾶτε (“have mercy”) is in all the variants, though they differ whether to place it at the beginning or end or both
- διακρινομένους (“doubters”) is in all but one of the groups, which made it nominative instead of accusative, and most likely it's the direct object of ἐλεᾶτε
- σώζετε (“save”) is in most of the variants
- ἐκ πυρὸς ἀρπάζοντες (“snatching from the fire”) is in all the variants and usually associated with the verb σώζετε
- ἐν φόβῳ (“in fear”) is in all the variants but jumps around
- μισοῦντες καὶ τὸν ἀπὸ τῆς σαρκὸς ἐσπιλωμένον χιτῶνα ends this section
- Whether there are two phrases or three seems too evenly split to tell

Now the overall doctrine, no matter what reading we follow, stays the same. We can draw good guidance from these verses on helping others as we contend for the truth. But because of the uncertainty about the exact reading of the autograph, I do not think we should try to define two or three separate categories based on these verses and say this group needs this kind of help and that group needs that kind of help. Rather the rest of Scripture and sound Christian judgment will need to guide us as we apply the law and the gospel.

ἐλεᾶτε (pres. act. imperative, alternate for ἐλέεω) διακρινομένους (pres. part. attributive). Unlike the false teachers who promote their false teaching refusing to change and from whom we are to spiritually separate ourselves, these people are struggling with doubt. They're wavering between (δια-) two opinions (κρινομένους). That's the evil fruit of false teaching. It creates doubt. Like the father of the demon possessed boy, those being sucked down by doubt call out “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24). What a wretched condition to be blown about by the winds of doubt! Have mercy (ἐλεᾶτε) on them. Like Jesus did for that father, reach out and help. Like Jesus did for Thomas, point them to the risen Savior, whose resurrection wipes away all doubt. Follow Jesus' example of whom the Scriptures say: “A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out” (Matthew 12:20 NIV). Contending for the truth shows tender mercy to those who are weak.

As we show mercy to those who doubt and bring them God's word of promise to fan their smoldering faith back into a flame, God uses that to snatch some from the fire of hell. In fact since you are his ambassador caring his saving news as you contend for



the truth, he describes this as if you saved them. “Save some” (οὐδὲ σῶζετε - pres. act. imperative) “by snatching them from the fire” (ἐκ πυρὸς ἀρπάζοντες). As we contend for the truth, we share in God's saving plan for others. Note that ἐλεᾶτε and σῶζετε are both present imperatives. This is what we are to keep on doing.

Yet lest we lose ourselves to false doctrine and fall into the very fire we want to save them from, Jude adds: “in fear hating even the inner shirt stained by flesh” (ἐν φόβῳ μισοῦντες καὶ τὸν ἀπὸ τῆς σαρκὸς ἐσπιλωμένον χιτῶνα). Holy fear places God's word and command above all else. It shares God's hatred (μισοῦντες -pres. act. part.) for all that is sinful (Psalm 5:5), for all that deviates from his word of truth. Just as under the Old Testament ceremonial laws, the unclean contaminated whatever it touched, so also we dare not play around with false teaching or anything sinful. This emphasizes again the deadly seriousness of false teaching that we talked about in Jude 18, 19. Contending for the truth hates all that is contrary to the truth.

Whatever stands still stained (ἐσπιλωμένον - perf. pass. part. attributive) by the sinful flesh (ἀπὸ τῆς σαρκὸς) with its desires to mock God's truth can only be washed clean by the blood of the spotless Lamb of God. Such cleansing comes only through repentance that turns from error and follows Jesus in faith. So as we contend for the truth we show tender mercy eagerly desiring to save others by snatching them from the fire, but we never compromise the truth.



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