

3 JOHN: OVERCOMING MISLEADING ERROR ON THE EXTENT OF GOD'S FELLOWSHIP

Part I: God's Bounds On Who To INCLUDE In The Local Church Fellowship

(3 John 1-8)

I. Introduction

- A. When we as believers in Christ realize our need to heed Scripture in withdrawing from parties who are at odds with God's true fellowship, we inherently face the temptation of following misleading guidelines so as to pull back from those whom God does not want us to avoid.
- B. To defray the confusion involved that we properly include those in fellowship with God, the Apostle John exemplified and promoted the *EXTENT* to which God's true fellowship *includes* in 3 John 1-8 as follows:

II. God's Bounds On Who To INCLUDE In The Local Church Fellowship, 3 John 1-8.

- A. The Apostle John claimed he enjoyed a warm friendship with an elder named Gaius, an association that was based on a mutual commitment of both men to the truth, 3 John 1.
- B. This relationship led John to pray that God would give Gaius the **practical blessings** of *livelihood welfare* and *good health* in keeping with how his **soul** fared, 3 John 2; Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 912.
- C. This prayer request for Gaius' **temporal welfare** was made in connection to the noteworthy *ministry* he performed as described as follows, 3 John 3-7:
 - 1. John expressed his joy in hearing Gaius adhered to the truth of God in belief **and life**, a belief in which Gaius "walked," 2 John 3.
 - 2. This adherence to God's truth in **LIVING** caused John his **greatest joy**, 2 John 4.
 - 3. The cause of John's conviction that Gaius adhered to the truth in his belief **and life** was seen in his ministry of sharing of his sustenance and shelter not only with **HUMANLY familiar** "brethren" in the local church, but also to **HUMANLY unfamiliar** "strangers" who proved their fellowship in the truth by their sacrificial actions (as follows), 3 John 5-8:
 - a. John noted his awareness of Gaius' practice to "brothers" who were part of the local church he attended **and** to "*strangers*," or "Traveling evangelists and teachers" who "were dependent on men like Gaius for shelter and sustenance," cf. Ryrie St. Bib., KJV, fn. to 3 John 5 in light of 3 John 7.
 - b. Now, ministry to fellow believers in the body whom Gaius personally knew and enjoyed natural camaraderie was **HUMANLY** easier than helping traveling but unfamiliar evangelists, so the work of giving shelter and sustenance to them was a greater, more noteworthy ministry, *Ibid*.
 - c. Yet, his ministry to these **HUMANLY UNFAMILIAR** traveling evangelists was **RIGHT** in **GOD'S** view since these men had **demonstrated by personal sacrifice** the **same dedication** to the **truth** that John and Gaius enjoyed: (1) These unfamiliar traveling evangelists and teachers had refused to receive sustenance or shelter from unsaved Gentiles lest their Gospel appear to be in league with those in darkness; they evidently felt it important to reveal by this refusal that their Gospel was not a false one compromised with error, but God's pure truth, 3 John 7. (2) Since turning down food and shelter was a **costly** act for traveling evangelists who had no regular employment, their refusal to accept these humanly needed things **demonstrated a genuine commitment** to God's truth. (3) Thus, Gaius was **RIGHT** to help them, putting his commitment to the **TRUTH above** his **own NATURAL tendency** to be **reserved** with such **unfamiliar** evangelists!
- D. Accordingly, John claimed the **circle** of Gaius' fellowship was **properly EXTENDED** to **include** people with whom Gaius might **NOT** have **human** familiarity **because of the HOLINESS of their WALK** as **proved** in their **sacrificial adherence to the truth** in **faith and life**, 3 John 8.

Lesson: (1) Our **CIRCLE of FELLOWSHIP** is **NOT to EXCLUDE others based on how NATURALLY FAMILIAR we are with them, but on a MUTUAL commitment to the TRUTH of God as EVIDENCED in WORD and DEED.** (2) We are thus to **INCLUDE** in our fellowship **ALL** who are committed to trusting and heeding God's **TRUTH** as **WE** do, and that as **PROVED** in their **WORDS and LIVES!**

Application: May we thus **INCLUDE** in our circle of fellowship **NOT ONLY** those with whom we are **HUMANLY FAMILIAR** and who **BELIEVE** and **WALK** in God's truths, but **ALSO** even **HUMANLY UNFAMILIAR** people who walk in the **TRUTH** as is **PROVED** in their **WORDS and LIVES!**