

Gaius was a common name in my time. People with that name are mentioned five times in the New Testament,¹ and it is possible that some of those mentions are of the same person. I am the Gaius mentioned in the tiny letter of *Third John*.

Before I tell you more about...me, first, let's talk about art.

You've heard the term "Starving Artist Show?" It refers to art shows that feature local artists, most of whom have a very hard time making their livings as artists. It has always been that way.

For about a thousand years after the demise of the Roman Empire, most Western art that has survived to modern times was done by artists or monks paid by the Roman Catholic Church or rulers who wanted to appease the Roman Catholic Church. For the next eight centuries a lot of art was done by artists who used religious themes, too.

Now, take a wild guess. Who do you think are the heroes of much of that Christian-themed art? Correct...the apostles...especially Peter, Paul, James, and John. They are almost always depicted as wise, powerful, authoritative, saintly. In much of the art they are depicted with haloes around their heads as a sign of holiness.

Based on those images and a quick reading of the New Testament, you could easily perceive that those apostles were actually that way. That everybody accepted them as wise and authoritative. Surely nobody would have questioned anything they said or did. After all, they spent time with Jesus and knew more than anyone what Jesus said and meant.

A closer reading of the New Testament reveals that Peter, Paul and John spent a lot of their time and effort contending against false teachers. James did not have to do that; he was beheaded by Herod Agrippa before the false teachers became active.

Imagine the bewilderment of new believers, like myself. Peter, Paul, John and their followers taught certain things. Other teachers taught things that were similar in our view, and often seemed much more logical. Who were we to believe? How were we to choose which teachers to believe. Sometimes it seemed to make more sense to believe nothing at all rather than get involved in their dissension and contention.

¹ Acts 19:29, 20:4; Romans 16:23; 1 Cor. 1:14; 3 John

Bewildered. That's what we new believers were. Paul talked about unity, but then he and other teachers hurled threats at each other. John talked about love, but warned us about being hospitable to people who disagreed with his teachings. Peter...well, you know Peter. He had no patience with anybody who disagreed with him.

The first disagreements appeared in the 40's AD when some wanted non-Jewish converts to follow the Laws of Moses, including being circumcised. Uh, yeah...no. When that was settled, some teachers wanted Christians to follow certain teachings of the Jews on angels, or teachings of the Greeks on philosophies. Then alternate teachings on the resurrection, whether Jesus came in the flesh or not, the relationship of God and Jesus, and all sorts of teachings on behavior. There seemed to be no end to the types of false teachings out there.

In the same way, there seemed to be no end to the types of false teachers, and the ways they could corrupt people or take their money. The simple teachings of Jesus seemed to get more and more complicated and corrupted.

I tell you all of this not to be negative or to criticize our leaders, but to help you understand the mindset of those who loved the old apostle, John. When I say old, I mean old. He wouldn't tell us how old he was, but he seemed way more than seventy when he wrote *Second and Third John*, and that was very old by our standards.

John addresses *Second John* to the lady chosen by God and her children. It is unclear whether the letter is addressed to a real person, or to a church. Although that is not clear, it is clear that John claims to know the truth, as well as does the chosen lady and her children.

John rejoices that some, only some, of the children walk in the truth. He reminds the lady of the commandment given from the beginning: love one another and walk according to the commandments of God. By that, John meant the commandments taught by Jesus as interpreted by him and the other apostles.

He immediately launches an attack on false teachers by calling them deceivers and antichrists. They are the ones teaching that Jesus did not come in the flesh. These are transgressors who do not teach the true doctrine of Christ.

Then, John gets very specific. Christians are not to greet these false teachers or be hospitable to them. If we do so, we share in their evil doings!

John does not give us the easy out of listening to their teachings and being hospitable, then sending them on their way. He requires us to be publicly rude to people who profess to be Christians! That went against everything we had ever been taught, and against the norms of our society.

I think John did that because he knew how destructive their teachings really were. He had heard Jesus teach about a little yeast working through all the dough, and he knew that applied to false teachings. A little false teaching could destroy churches, families, and individuals.

John ends his letter rather briefly by saying that he doesn't want to write everything, but hopes to come and share his thoughts face to face.

John addresses his next letter, *Third John*, to me, Gaius. He says that he loves me and wants me and my soul to prosper. He rejoices that he had heard that I walk in the truth. That makes me smile, because I know he loves it when any of his spiritual children behave well.

He also commends me for treating Christians and strangers in a manner worthy of God. He especially compliments me for helping those who are working to spread the name of Jesus.

He then shifts gears, saying he wrote to the church but Diotrephes would not receive him. He berates Diotrephes by saying he loves preeminence, berates John with malicious words, and won't receive the brothers. Worse, he puts out of the church those who want to receive the brothers well.

John reminds us to imitate what is good, not what is evil. He is clearly telling us not to imitate Diotrephes. On the other hand, he compliments Demetrius, who is representing Jesus well and is of the truth.

John ends this letter briefly, by saying he wants to come see us in person, not just write things to us. He wishes us peace. The Apostle of love, for sure.

So, there you have it. I am to welcome those who represent the truth, and ignore those who teach falsehood. Who teaches the truth? Those who are from Peter, Paul and John. Any who teach differently from them are to be forcibly ignored. Apostle of Love, hmmm? Tough Love.