

# 3 John 1:1

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/3john/3john-1/3-john-11/>

*John begins his letter by referring to himself as an elder, rather than an apostle, to put himself on equal footing with his recipient, Gaius. He seeks to advise, not dictate, concerning a problem within the church which Gaius helps shepherd.*

This brief text, the third of the Apostle John's epistles (or letters), opens with John referring to himself as *The elder*. The Greek word here translated *elder* is "presbýteros." In the gospels this word generally refers to elders among the Jewish people who, along with the religious leaders, resisted and ultimately condemned Jesus. However, it is also used to refer to someone who is eldest in age, as in John 8:9, when the Jews departed from Jesus' presence from eldest to youngest when He challenged those without sin to cast the first stone. In this case, it seems to refer to John's status both as an older man as well as an authority figure within the church. Why did John not refer to himself as an apostle, which would have carried higher authority? Likely because he is addressing an issue within the church of Ephesus. It is possible that he was an elder in this church. It is also possible that He was serving as a protective elder. John does not address the church's elders in the salutation, but rather appeals as an elder speaking to the church as a whole.

Rather than pulling rank over other elders, he spoke as a fellow elder. The Apostle Peter did likewise in his first epistle (1 Peter 5:1). This is consistent with one of the clear teachings of Scripture, that the proper use of authority is to serve and protect rather than to lord over (1 Peter 5:1-4). This is of particular relevance since the primary purpose of this letter is to oppose the counterproductive, self-serving leadership of a man named Diotrephes.

John, the elder, initially addresses *Gaius*, and expresses that he is *beloved*. But *Gaius* is *beloved* in a specific context. John expresses that *Gaius* is someone *whom I love in truth*. Perhaps *Gaius* was a fellow elder. There is a *Gaius* named in Romans 16:23, who was said to be a "host of the whole church." If this is the same *Gaius* as the one addressed here by John, it could mean that *Gaius* was a man of exceptional hospitality. One of John's primary admonitions in this letter is to exhort the believers to extend hospitality to fellow believers who are traveling through their town ministering the gospel.

John's love for *Gaius* is *in truth*. This could mean that John is asserting the truth of his love for *Gaius*. It could also mean that it is *truth* that binds John and *Gaius* together. The latter seems more likely, since the primary purpose of John's letter is to preempt a bad actor in the church, who is spreading untruth.

## **Biblical Text**

**The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.**