

The “Gaius” Argument

by Tim Haile

Some are teaching that Gaius (of John’s third epistle) and John “combined” their “efforts and resources” in the work of supporting gospel preachers. This argument is made by Mike Willis and Dan King in their book, *“We Have a Right,”* beginning on page 63. The argument is made in the ongoing effort to find biblical authority for the practice of operating human evangelistic organizations. I should point out that if John and Gaius really did work *jointly* in the financing of gospel preachers, and not just *concurrently*, their actions still don’t provide authority for an evangelistic organization to solicit and receive funds *from others* for the finance of evangelism. These brethren will need to look elsewhere for authority forthat, and their *Jesus-Group* and *Synagogue* arguments have failed to support their claims. These arguments are answered elsewhere on my Bible Banner website (www.biblebanner.com). The thing that all of these arguments do have in common is that of a common membership, common work, common oversight and a common treasury. These are the basic elements of the *joint* action of an *organism*. The Bible uses the perfect illustration for organic function: the human body (Eph. 4:16). In all such organisms the individual members of the organism function as one.

Verses 3-8 of Third John provide the background for the above argument:

3: For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth.

4: I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.:

5: Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers;

6: Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well:

7: Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles.

8: We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellowhelpers to the truth.

John commended Gaius for acting charitably towards brethren, both the ones that he knew and the ones that he didn’t know. John told Gaius, “you are faithful in whatever you do for the brothers.” John spoke of what Gaius was *personally* doing for the brethren. In discussions with those intent upon *institutionalizing* the work of the church, I have always pointed out that their interpretations and applications of Bible passages destroy the independent actions of the Christian *individual*. They turn every passage into a *collectivity* passage. This same skewed approach to the Scriptures is again being used by those who are attempting to justify individually supported evangelistic organizations: They view *concurrent-action* passages as a *joint-action* passages.

They appear to think that the Christian is incapable of *effectively* functioning as an individual, and that greater success is had by his functioning through human organizations. Incidentally, this approach is precisely what drove the interpretations of past defenders of institutionalism.

The "We" of Third John 8

Much is made out of John's use of the plural pronoun, "we," in verse 8. John obviously included himself in some way. But what way? He told Gaius that "*we* ought to support such people..." Some people cite the "we" to prove that John and Gaius combined their "*resources and effort.*" The very important question is whether or not John meant "we" in the sense of *joint action*, or "we" in the sense of *distributive action*. If John meant to suggest joint (organized) action, then why did he earlier credit Gaius with doing *his own work* by referring to him using the pronoun "*you*?" The answer is simple. The "we" of 3rd John 8 is distributive, as in **Galatians 6:10**. Gaius and John practiced the same thing: They both "received" truth teachers. John nowhere describes a pooling of funds under common oversight. **If the "we" of 3 John 8 implies organized action, then why wouldn't the "we" of Galatians 6:10 do the same?** The strained interpretation that would have John and Gaius forming an evangelistic society would also have Paul and Galatian saints forming a benevolent society. Of course, institutionalists insist that the "we" of Galatians 6:10 means "church" organization and action. Gaius society proponents make the "we" of 3 John mean non-church organization. The interpretive approach is identical. Only the application differs. Will the Guardian of Truth Foundation be consistent and join the institutionalists in insisting that the "we" of Galatians 6:10 implies the joint action of an organism? We shall see.

Forgotten in the discussion of the "we" in 3 John 8 is the context. The very next verse begins a discussion of the problem that resulted in John having to write to Gaius: "*I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority*" (3 Jn. 9). John instructs Gaius to disassociate from Diotrephes, and to join with other **church members** who *will* support the truth! John's "we" includes the members of such a church! Now, if the "we" of 3 John 8 implies the joint action of an organism, then the church where John was a member (vs. 5), and the church where Gaius was a member (vss. 9-12) were to function *jointly* under *common oversight*! Dear reader, the Guardian of Truth argument on 3 John 8 defends the heresy of intercongregational organization! Have they forgotten their own arguments against unscriptural cooperation and the sponsoring church arrangement?

In 3 John 8, John is describing *cooperation*, not through an organism, but through independent action in a work. It is the same type of *cooperation that is*

practiced when multiple churches, each operating autonomously (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2), supply a common need (Romans 15:26; 2 Corinthians 8:1-14). It has become quite obvious to me that either some non-institutional brethren *never understood the real institutional issue, or they never understood the arguments against it!* If the latter, then some men have only parroted the arguments of others, and have not fully appreciated their meaning and significance. **If cooperation among individuals cannot take place unless individuals function jointly, then cooperation cannot take place among churches unless those churches function jointly.** The arguments that brethren are making are paving the way for justification of institutionalism *of all kinds*.

Joint Action versus Concurrent Action

Joint action involves the pooling and sharing of resources. Married couples may choose to *file their taxes* separately or *jointly*. When filing jointly, the couple’s incomes and assets are added together before taxes are calculated. A *joint* session of Congress means that both houses are meeting *together*. In law, those acting *jointly* are regarded as *one legal body*. They are **united in identity and in liability**. Where does third John say that John and Gaius had a joint working relationship? We read that John *hoped to see* Gaius, not that he was together *with* Gaius! We do not read of their actually working together *as one*. Where does the Bible say that they *pooled their resources*? Where does third John state or imply that John and Gaius had *organized* and were operating as a unit? If they had pooled their resources and were operating collectively in preaching and in the support of preachers, where is any mention of that organization?

G.A.I.U.S. or just plain Gaius?

Some have suggested that John and Gaius constituted an evangelistic organization. Incidentally, nothing is said in third John that identifies Gaius as a preacher. We are told that he *supported preachers*, but we are not told that he ever *preached*. Others have flippantly suggested the notion of some sort of “**Gaius Society**.” Some don’t use this term, but make arguments that suggest the concept of a “Gaius Society.” For those who seriously entertain such a concept, I offer the following suggestion. In the language of folly, and only for the purpose of making a point, I join the theorists in their speculations. Let us assume that John is defending a “Gaius Society.” Perhaps then, John intended the letters of Gaius’ name as an **acronym**! If so, John may have intended for the name “Gaius” to represent something like the following:

Gospel **A**ssociation of **I**ndividuals **U**nited in **S**ervice

This must be it! (Bear with me a little in my folly, 2 Cor. 11:1.) The name then suggests an evangelistic organization that is united under a common name, common leadership and a common treasury. Is this what John is teaching in his third epistle? **My speculation may seem whimsical, but no more so than the skewed exegesis provided by those who actually see this concept in John’s text!** The fact is that there is no proof that any such organization ever existed! Brethren who invent and defend such a concept are guilty of *sheer fabrication*. They have added to the word of God! This should not be tolerated (Gal. 1:8, 9; Rev. 22:18). Sadly, these additions are always made when men have no biblical authority to support their religious innovations. They completely ignore the context, which, in this case, describes the God-given role of local churches and individuals in the support of the gospel, and they fabricate in their imaginations the notion of a man-made evangelistic society. Men are trying to turn John and Gaius into board members of some man-made religious organization. The skewed interpretation robs the passage of its true meaning and beauty. In his third epistle, John praises an **individual Christian** for his love, devotion and outstanding commitment to the support of truth teachers. Sadly, the passage has somehow gotten turned around into a support of man-made religious organizations. **A natural reading of third John leads no one to such a conclusion.** One must have an agenda before him in order to arrive at that conclusion.

John and Gaius acted concurrently. *Concurrent action* involves no ceding of responsibility or liability. There is no common oversight or treasury. There is simply the matter of agreement and harmony. People who work concurrently may be working at the same time, but they are not joined to one another. Paul and Barnabas had no *joint* affiliation, which is seen from the fact that they were able to separate from each other and continue their respective works in the gospel, each without loss of identity or money (Acts 15:37-40). New Testament evangelists formed no preacher organizations of peculiar identities. Man-made evangelistic societies are foreign to the Scriptures. The Bible contains no authority for their existence.

Third John Facts

- The only classes of people that are mentioned in third John are **churches** and **individuals**. **No organization is mentioned other than the church!**
- John was a member of the church before whom the traveling preachers “testified” of Gaius’ love (verse 6), for John said to Gaius, “*I rejoiced greatly, when brethren came and testified of thy truth*” (verse 3). John said “we ought to receive such.” If the church, where John was a member, supported truth teachers (vss. 5, 8), and the church where Gaius was a member was to do the same thing (vss. 8-12), and John and Gaius formed

an evangelist organization, then local churches supported a human evangelistic organization! **Churches are not authorized to support preachers through third party organizations.** Support is to be given directly to the preacher in need (2 Cor. 11:8). Just as Gaius and John did not function as a unit, neither did the preachers whom Gaius supported. The GOTF position on this passage opens the door for church support of missionary-styled evangelistic organizations!

- The “we” of verse 8 is distributive, and is not limited to certain *organized* individuals. Verse 12 says, “Demetrius has received a good report from everyone, including the truth itself. We, too, can testify to this, and you know that our testimony is true.” The “we” and “our” in this verse do not include Gaius! John has reference to himself and others. Thus, the very near context of 3 John 8 uses the 1st person plural pronoun, but excludes Gaius. Thus, the only sense in which the “we” of 3 John 8 applies to Gaius is in the sense that all Christians should receive the truth. The “we” has no special reference to some peculiar organization that had been formed by John and Gaius!
- The brothers whom Gaius assisted included some who were “strangers” to Gaius. That is, they were *unknown* to him. They were, however, known by John (verses 3 & 6). If John’s “we,” in verses 8 and 12, represents an evangelistic organization, then Gaius was in an organization with members that *he didn’t even know!*
- John and Gaius were not *physically together*. They did not operate under a common identity and through a common treasury. John closed his letter to Gaius by expressing his desire to soon see him “face to face” (vs. 14).
- There is no mention of John and Gaius ever having worked together *jointly*.
- As I mentioned earlier, Gaius was already doing his own work in supporting the brethren. John did not include himself when making that observation (vs. 5). The “we” of verse 8 is thus intended for broader application than just John, Gaius and John’s companions. The “we” includes all who wish to be supporters of the truth (verse 8). Thus it applies, generally, to all saints. Of course, as with all other Bible teaching, there was an originally intended audience. Verse 9 shows that John had earlier written to *the church*, but Diotrephes had taken over control of the church. Not only did he refuse John and his companions, he even cast out of the church all of those who *supported* John and his companions. Verses 9-12 suggest that John was targeting the other Christians of that church.

Through Gaius, Christians would be instructed to reject Diotrephes and put themselves in the position of being able to once again “receive” gospel preachers. John, therefore, charges the local church with being the organization that is to receive the truth.

- The 3 John 8 word for fellow laborers is *sunergos*. The word does not suggest the notion of *collectivity, joint action, organization, corporation, society, or foundation*. Paul used the word when he said “we are fellow laborers with God” (1 Cor. 3:9). Timothy was described as a “fellow laborer” with Paul (1 Thess. 3:2).

Conclusion

Other passages are being equally abused, and the arguments constructed upon these abuses must be thoroughly exploded so that all can see. This article should not be construed as an attack upon *businesses* that *sell* religious materials, for I have no objection to that practice. In such cases the individual buyer pays for a service and assumes the responsibility for the material that he buys. Selling religious material does not make a bookstore an evangelistic organization, nor is selling religious material a spiritual work. Religious bookstores are still just *bookstores*. They can sell anything from Bibles to bullets and from commentaries to cows. My objection comes when a bookstore leaves the business of selling products and services, and enters the realm of gospel evangelism. And as I have shown in this article, there is an obvious lack of authority for such a practice. **Let the bookstore be the bookstore.**

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