

Basic Training Bible Ministries

“In the Fellowship of the King”

A Study in 2nd and 3rd John



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In The Fellowship of the King

The 2nd and 3rd Epistles of John

Introduction

The story of redemption is the greatest romance ever told. In it we have the greatest conflict, the most noble and valiant hero, and the most glorious victory. This overarching theme is often summarized in biblical “snapshots” such as David and Goliath, Boaz and Ruth, and even David and Mephibosheth. But the larger epic of our Lord’s search for a people, a bride, and a kingdom, far surpasses the romance, intrigue, chivalry, struggle, or victory of any literature ever known to man.

In the epistles of John we see a common theme of a fellowship shared by believers and the Lord. This fellowship is forged in conflict, against dark and sinister forces, as faith is tested and refined. The touchstone of the fellowship is found in the truth, and that truth centers in the glorious person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. To hold to this truth against all odds, all deception, and all temptation is to win a place among the ranks of those who value the fellowship of the King. It is an old story.

The Old Testament is a story of our King in search of a nation and a people. From all the nations of the earth God selected the smallest and weakest, and called them “Israel,” after the man whose history foretold their centuries-long struggle to enter into His blessings. Because of her election, Israel’s history plays out on a stage of perpetual hostility and affliction. Yet out of that centuries-long anguish comes a fellowship of those who, by persistent faith, enter the roster of heroes (Heb 11).

In the New Testament, the story continues, as the King now seeks His choice bride—the Church—from among all the peoples of the earth. He is born into poverty, lives in obscurity, and dies in agony and unjust infamy. Just when the hordes of hell were celebrating His defeat, He rises from the tomb, and ascends into His glory. In the sending of His Spirit at Pentecost, a new era begins—the Church Age. A new fellowship begins to form, built on the truth of Christ’s incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. In the intensified fires of spiritual conflict, against every scheme of a wily and evil Foe, the beleaguered bride is tempted, torn, and purified, for her coming day of glory, when she will be presented to the King—robed in all His glory.

The same general theme runs through the epistles of John. That theme is a priceless treasure called “fellowship,” shared by all who hold fast to “the truth,” and who live in the power of the love of Christ. Those who enter into this fellowship are known by their demonstration toward one another of the grace and the love they each have received through the mercies of Christ Jesus. In the first epistle of John, we see the precepts of that fellowship set forth. Then, in the second epistle, we find the practice set forth in the face of hostile and deceptive opposition. And in the third epistle, these principles and practices are personified in living examples of those who stand approved within this fellowship, and those who, having been led astray, have excluded themselves from it. Will we stand approved in the fellowship of the King?

Defining the Fellowship

In 1 John 1:3, the author states the goal of his writing, “*That you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.*” The conditions of this fellowship are then clearly established, “*If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin*” (1Jo 1:7).

The key then to entering into this fellowship is to “*walk in the light,*” which John further explains as “*walking in truth*” (2Jo 4; 3Jo 3–4). This truth is specifically stated as “*the doctrine of Christ*” (2Jo 7–9). Those who live by this truth are easily identified, because the outward evidence is a manifest love for other believers (2Jo 1, 5; 3Jo 5–8). This conduct of love comes at great cost,—first, by those who are not believers (2Jo 7–11), and often even from believers who have been deceived by the enemy (3Jo 9–11).

In this light, the fellowship of which John speaks is a costly thing—a prize won through diligent spiritual vigilance, in which we “share in the sufferings of Christ,” in order to maintain His claims. For it was in the Upper Room that Jesus proposed the greatest weapon against the prince of darkness and his forces. “*By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*” (Joh 13:35). No sooner were the words spoken than Satan, the “old deceiver,” began his assault on this stronghold of the faith. First, he attacks the unity such love creates (1Co 1:10–13) by causing division, then perverts the true meaning of spiritual love into the shallow and sentimental version known in this depraved world and applauded in our churches.

Most Christians today simply cannot reconcile the call to “[maintain] *the unity of the Spirit*” (Eph 4:3) with the “sword of division” which Christ brought into this world (Mat 10:34). To far too many people, these seem to be contradictory statements that are mutually exclusive. Yet to those of the fellowship, these statements are in perfect harmony. The organized Church of today waters down the truth of the Gospel, to not offend and thus cause division. In so doing, they violate both “the sword of Christ” and the “*unity of the Spirit.*” Meanwhile, believers who refuse to compromise the fundamental truths of Christ, and who call the Body of Christ to “*stand firm in the faith,*” are ostracized as “trouble-makers,” and “unloving” people who “divide the church.” As we will see, the same conditions existed in the Church of John’s day (3Jo 9–12).

The fellowship of which John speaks is like the bonds forged by warriors who have fought bravely together, suffered and died sacrificially for one another. The love they share is a priceless and timeless thing—forged in the fires of combat. It is something those on the outside will never understand. In it is found a unity that cannot be broken, and it co-exists with a sword that forever identifies the common enemy and vows to fight that enemy whenever and wherever he is found.

In this fellowship, the truth is never compromised, and the love is never a pretense.

Second John

The Practice and Premise of True Fellowship

I. **The Elect Lady, 2Jo 1–3**

“For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.” 2Co 11:2

A. **Introduction**

1. The Church is neither a building, nor an organization, much less a denomination. The Church is a spiritual body made up of everyone who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. The true Church is being built by Jesus Christ, as the Spirit of God calls believers out of this world into His kingdom. (Mat 16:18; Rom 15:16)
3. On earth, the Church is the Body of Christ; in Heaven, the Bride of Christ. (Eph 1:22–23, 5:32; Rev 19:7–8)
4. When the Rapture of the Church occurs, the ancient marriage rites of Israel will be fulfilled in spectacular, supernatural fashion. (1Th 4:13–18)

B. **The Author**

“The Elder” is none other than John the Apostle, *“the disciple ... Jesus loved”* (Joh 21:7, 20). While some argue for a “John the elder,” based on nothing more than an obscure statement by Papias, we can be sure that our author is indeed John the Apostle.

1. John never speaks of himself as “Apostle” in any of his writings.
2. His content, even to exact phrases, is the same in all three epistles.
3. The doctrinal emphasis is identical in all three, as we shall see.

C. **The Recipient (“the elect lady”), 2Jo 1–2**

The term *“elect lady”* has been thought by some to be a Christian woman of distinction. There are several reasons to reject this view and identify her as a local church.

1. Peter uses similar language in 1Pe 5:13, *“She who is [elect] in Babylon,”* referring to the church there.
2. Also, John uses the plural in addressing his readers in vv. 6, 8, 10, and 12.
3. It is also possible that the epistle John wrote *“to the church”* mentioned in 3Jo 9 actually refers to this epistle, as we will see.

John addresses this church in affectionate and exalted language. The Church of Jesus Christ is the most exalted company of people ever to walk this earth. Our

position “in Christ,” as revealed by the Apostle Paul, makes us unique among all the believers of history. Five works of the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation make this possible:

1. The baptism of the Holy Spirit (1Co 12:13; Rom 6:1–4; Eph 4:5)
2. The regeneration, new birth, unto eternal life (Tit 3:4–5; Joh 3:3–8)
3. The personal indwelling by the Spirit (Joh 14:16–17; Rom 8:9–11)
4. The spiritual gifting by the Spirit (1Co 12:4–7; Rom 12:3–8)
5. The sealing of the Spirit unto eternal security (Eph 1:13–14, 4:30)

Because of these mighty and transformational works every one who believes in Jesus Christ becomes an essential part of His Body, with a vital and worthy purpose for life and eternity. Every believer is seen by God the Father as “*accepted in the Beloved*” (Eph 1:6), treasured by Him as He values His only Begotten Son. Note five great truths revealed here about the “*elect lady*”:

1. She is “*elect*,” chosen, because she is “*in Christ*.” (Isa 42:1; Eph 1:4; 1Pe 1:2)
2. She is the future bride of Jesus Christ. (2Co 11:2; Eph 5:32; Rev 19:7–8)
3. She is the recipient and only possessor of the love of God in Christ. (Joh 13:14; 1Jo 4:19; 2Co 5:14–15)
4. The Church is the only company capable of sharing this love, due to the indwelling of His Spirit. (Gal 5:22; 1Jo 4:12–13)
5. This love is possible only when we “abide in the truth” (2Jo 2), another term synonymous with “*walking in the truth*” (vv. 4–6), “walking in the Spirit” (Gal 5:16, 25), or being “*filled by the Spirit*.” (Eph 5:18)

When John speaks of “the truth,” he is talking about the revealed truth of God’s Word, specifically that which is revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ (2Jo 7–10). Of this truth, John has four valuable things to say in vv. 1–3.

1. This truth is the only sphere in which such love is possible, v. 1.
2. All who know the truth by faith are capable of such love, v. 1b.
3. This truth is the common possession of all of God’s people, v. 2. The phrase “*abides in us*” is literally “among us.”
4. This truth will be with us forever, our eternal treasure, v. 2b.

D. The Assurance and Security of the Church, 2Jo 3

In contrast to the most common greeting of “grace to you and peace,” John actually goes further in v. 3, assuring us that we will always possess “*grace, mercy, and peace*.” The addition of mercy is similar to 1Ti 1:2; 2Ti 1:2; and Tit 1:4. These priceless spiritual riches come to us as daily gifts from the heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. However, there is an indication that the enjoyment of these blessings is ours “in truth and love,” in other words, only in

the life of fellowship as we abide in Christ by faith. Note the relationship of these three great blessings of God:

1. **Grace** is the unmerited favor of God found only in Jesus Christ (Eph 2:8; Joh 1:14, 16, 17; Rom 1:5, Rom 3:24, Rom 11:6). The grace of God supplies us with everything we don't deserve, such as righteousness and eternal life.
2. **Mercy** is the personal application of God's grace to the individual sinner (Luk 18:13; 1Ti 1:13). Mercy removes from us all that we do deserve such as eternal condemnation.
3. **Peace** is the gift of God resulting from our reconciliation to Him through Jesus Christ (Rom 5:1; Eph 2:14–18). We enjoy this peace as we live in the power of the Spirit (Gal 5:22).

II. The Unity of True Fellowship, 2Jo 4–6

"Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Eph 4:3

A. Introduction

1. Jesus Christ died to bring about reconciliation between men and God. (Rom 5:10–11; 2Co 5:18–19)
2. Beyond that priceless gift, He came to reconcile men to one another. (Mat 5:24; 2Co 5:19–20)
3. In His high-priestly prayer in John 17, our Lord prayed for the unity—the oneness—of all those who believe in Him. (Joh 17:11, Joh 17:21–23)
4. This unity, or oneness, is effected by the love of God's Spirit working through the lives of His people. (Rom 5:5, Rom 12:9–10, Rom 13:8–10; Eph 4:1–2; 1Co 13)
5. This fellowship of unity is not based on perfect agreement in all spiritual issues, but on the fundamental issues of the spiritual life and the standing of every believer before God. (Eph 4:1–6)
6. It is the love of the Spirit that is the bond of this unity and provides the greatest possible witness to the world of the victory of Jesus Christ. (Joh 13:34–35, Joh 15:9–14; 1Jo 4:7–11)

B. The Fellowship of the Truth, 2Jo 4–5

John expresses his great joy resulting from his recent fellowship with some members of this church which he found "*walking in truth.*" These believers were living spiritually dynamic lives because of their obedience to the Word of God. As such, they had an immediate spiritual rapport with the "disciple Jesus loved" (Joh 21:7). The indication in the original language, indicated by the word "*some*" in italics, is that this was not the case of others from the same church. This becomes more evident in v. 5 where John pleads with the church for greater diligence in this area. It remains true today that a loveless church is a church where God's truth is trampled underfoot. The interdependence of truth and love is

nowhere else so clearly and powerfully set forth as in the epistles of John. Consider the highlights of this section, with applications from other passages, in point form:

1. “*Walking in truth*” is the essence of the life of fellowship. (Joh 14:15; Joh 15:4, Joh 15:7, Joh 15: 9–10, Joh 15:14; 1Jo 1:7)
2. To walk in the truth is synonymous with walking in the Spirit. (Gal 5:13–18)
3. The believer who walks in the truth is one who is obedient to the Word of God, as stressed three times in 2Jo 4–6 and Joh 14:15, Joh 14:21, Joh 14:23; 1Jo 2:3–6, 1Jo 3:4–6.
4. The command to love one another is not a “*new commandment*,” but what we heard from the beginning. (Lev 19:18; Mat 22:37–40; Joh 13:34–35, Joh 15:12; 1Jo 2:7–8)
5. Genuine spiritual love is possible only to those believers who are having fellowship with the Lord, are filled by His Spirit, and thus are living an obedient life. (2Jo 6; Eph 5:1–2, Eph 5:15–21; 1Jo 2:3–6).

C. The Walk of Faith, 2Jo 6

The figure of walking is the most common metaphor in the Bible for the life of faith. The walk of the believer is closely related to the warfare of the believer. In fact, we will never win in the spiritual battle apart from a faithful walk. Take a look at just a few of the biblical examples of the walk of the believer:

1. Enoch’s fellowship with God was described as a walk. (Gen 5:22, 24)
2. This walk involves obedience. (Deu 5:33; Jud 2:22; Psa 86:11, Psa 119:1; Isa 2:3, 5)
3. The Spirit of God is our guide in this walk. (Isa 30:21; Joh 16:13)
4. Those who walk by faith have supernatural endurance. (Isa.40:31)
5. The faithful believer walks in resurrection power. (Rom 6:4, Rom 8:4)
6. The walk of faith is a fruitful journey. (Eph 2:10)
7. Those who walk by faith grow in virtue (Eph 4:1), love (Eph 5:1–2), insight into the Word (Eph 5:8–10), wisdom (Eph 5:15–17), and usefulness (Eph 5:18–21).

However, as mentioned earlier, the spiritual walk leads to intense spiritual warfare. Wherever we find faithful believers walking in the power of the Spirit, you can be sure we will find a spiritual warrior in the thick of the battle. The life of fellowship with the King of kings is like a coin with two sides. On the one side, there is the peace of God that surpasses comprehension; on the other is the sword of Christ (Mat 10:34). This becomes evident as we move into the next section.

III. The Sword of True Fellowship, 2Jo 7–11

“*For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness?
And what communion has light with darkness?*” 2Co 6:14b

“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.” Eph 5:11

A. Introduction

1. In any kind of war, there is no substitute for unconditional victory.
2. Victory is impossible when the fundamental issues at the heart of the conflict and enmity are compromised.
3. The very thing that binds one in the fellowship of love and devotion to his kin and country also creates a hostility toward those who would do harm to them.
4. Love that will not fight—when the fight is necessary—is not love worthy of the name.
5. Thus, Paul declares that fellowship with God excludes any fellowship with those who are hostile to Him and His Word.
6. Just as truth—by its very nature—is exclusive, so also is fellowship which is built upon the truth.
7. The very existence of a fellowship of any kind implies that there are those who are not part of it and are not welcome in it, apart from radical change on their part.

B. The Enemy Identified, 2Jo 7

John identifies the enemy or enemies as those who have gone out into the world—basically traveling hucksters—who profess to teach the truth while denying the very cornerstone of truth. All cults can be identified by this mark: that they teach a “Jesus” who is not the biblical Christ. They will deny His deity, or His humanity, or the sufficiency (because of the first two denials) of His saving work on the cross. Historical tradition tells us that during John’s lifetime, one Cerinthus in Ephesus was such a man. So great was John’s antipathy toward Cerinthus, that on one occasion he is said to have left the public bath, as Cerinthus entered, yelling loudly, “Let us hurry away lest the building collapse on us, because Cerinthus, the enemy of truth, is here.” (Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude*, pg. 168). When Polycarp, the disciple of John, was asked by the heretic Marcion, “Do you recognize me?” he replied, “I recognize Satan’s firstborn.” (*Ibid*) These men understood that while we walk in harmony and love with those in the fellowship, we must wage unrelenting war on those who would deny or defame the truth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Here, John declares that the deceiver in question denies the incarnation of our Lord—that He came in a human body. Two groups from early forms of Gnosticism existed at this time:

1. Cerinthian—Cerinthus taught that Jesus was just a man, on whom the “Christ-spirit” descended at His baptism, and which departed from Him at His

crucifixion. Thus He denied both the deity of our Lord, as well as the sufficiency of His work on the cross.

2. Docetic—this form of Gnosticism comes from the Greek word *dokeo*, meaning (in the infinitive) “to think, assume, suppose, imagine, appear.” Their lie was that Jesus was not a man at all—He was a spirit being who only appeared to be human. They denied both His deity and His humanity, thus again making the cross of Christ of no effect.

Today there are many cults that fall into one category or another, proving once again that there is nothing new under the sun. John further identifies the deceiver as “*an antichrist*.” Ultimately, this denial will be the fundamental platform of the Antichrist himself, as he presents himself to the world as the true god-man. What follows are a few of the warnings we have of this antichrist spirit and teaching.

C. The Spirit of Antichrist

1. Jesus warned that those who reject the truth about Himself will be deceived to believe in another who is false. (Joh 5:43; Mat 7:15)
2. Paul warned of false teachers who would come out from among the church membership, “wolves in sheep’s clothing,” Act 20:28–30. It is interesting that Paul appears to speak of two groups of false teachers—those who are unbelievers, who “*will come in*,” and those who are apostate believers, who “*will rise up*” from among yourselves. We will see this same distinction in 3rd John.
3. John speaks of the coming of Antichrist, and of his many forerunners, which are a sign of the end times, 1Jo 2:18–23. Here he goes further to identify their brand:
 - a. They (antichrists and Antichrist) all are motivated by the same spirit.
 - b. They often go out from among the saints, but are not of the saints. This would be true of unbelieving professors and pretenders. We must remember, however, that it is also possible for believers to slip into false doctrine.
 - c. They deny that Jesus “*is the Christ*,” which is the same as to say they deny His Deity, His humanity, and His role as Savior of the world. (See Joh 1:14–18, Joh 4:42, Joh 20:31; Heb 5:7–10, Heb 7:24–25; 1Jo 5:11–13)
 - d. They deny both the Father and the Son, that is, that God can have a Son, or that Christ is His unique, only begotten Son. In essence, this is a denial of the Trinity.

D. The Fellowship Warned, 2Jo 8–9

When John says, “*Look to yourselves*,” he is addressing the members of this local church. As with the plural “*we*” (v. 6) and “*you*” (vv. 10, 12), this again indicates that the “*elect lady*” is a local church. The present imperative commands a constant state of vigilance among the members. It is inevitable that deception in

eternal matters involves spiritual loss. John's concern is that "*we do not lose those things we worked for.*" He and his team have labored to bring these believers to spiritual maturity. His goal matches that of Paul: to bring believers to spiritual maturity, in order to "*present every man perfect [complete] in Christ.*" (Col 1:22, 28, Col 2:10, Col 4:12)

The ultimate effect of failure on their part is loss of eternal reward on John's part. The italicized "we" is picked up from its two antecedent uses in the verse, both referring to John and company. Not only does the failing believer suffer loss at the Bema Seat (1Co 3:15), but so does his teacher. This may seem on the surface to be unfair. However, consider that if the teacher will share in the accomplishments of his faithful student as an outcome of his labors, then if the student fails, the teacher is robbed of a joy and reward that was potential. It is my conviction that, at least to a degree, any rewards gained by any faithful believer go to those who have taught, nurtured, and mentored him or her.

E. Rewards

1. It is a common promise in the Bible that faithful believers will be rewarded for their deeds in eternity. (Gen 15:1; Psa 19:11, Psa 58:11; Pro 11:18; Isa 40:10; Rev 20:12)
2. Jesus' teachings were filled with promises of rewards, or warnings of their loss. (Mat 5:46, Mat 6:1–6, Mat 6:16–21, Mat 25:14–29)
3. Rewards will be given for the smallest service offered to God in faith. (Mar 9:41; Mat 10:41; Luk 6:22–23, Luk 6:35)
4. The Scriptures set forth five crowns available to the believer:
 - a. Crown of Joy (Phi 4:1; 1Th 2:19)—for faithful witness
 - b. Crown of Life (Jam 1:12; Rev 2:10)—for faithfulness in trials
 - c. Crown of Righteousness (2Ti 4:7–8)—for living for eternity
 - d. Imperishable Crown (1Co 9:25)—for spiritual self-discipline
 - e. Crown of Glory (1Pe 5:4)—for faithful ministry, often called the "shepherd's crown."
5. It is possible for every believer to gain eternal rewards, but also they may be lost through unfaithfulness, Col 2:18; Rev 3:11. Note that rewards once gained are not lost, only those we could have received, but failed to gain.
6. The Bema Seat, or "judgment seat of Christ," will be the place of rewards given or lost. (1Co 3:10–15)
7. When Paul calls us to "redeem the time" (Eph 5:16; Col 4:5), it is essentially the same as Jesus saying "*lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven.*" (Mat 6:20) Time well spent in obedience to God's Word brings eternal reward.

F. The Transgressor, 2Jo 9

John presents a hypothetical situation, and shows its outcome. There is no “if” in the original. John speaks here of anyone who “transgresses.” The context of v. 8 continues, so John is speaking to members of this church. The word “transgress” simply means to “go ahead” or “go beyond” sound doctrine. The corollary of this is that they do not “abide in the doctrine of Christ.” Only a believer who has been placed “in Christ” can fail to “abide in Christ” and His doctrine. Keep in mind that John is further developing his warning of v. 8 that there may be loss of “full reward.” A quote from Zane Hodges is helpful here:

“According to some expositors, a true Christian could not succumb to heresies about Jesus Christ and, if someone does, it only proves that he was not a Christian to begin with. To others, of course, to give in to heresy would be to lose one’s salvation. John shared neither viewpoint. If the Apostle had held either of the doctrines stated above, it was almost mandatory that he should warn the church that any acceptance of the false teaching placed before them (or, showed them to be) in danger of eternal damnation. The fact that his concern is expressed in terms of losing a “full reward” is eloquent testimony that this alone is seen by him as the eternal consequence of failure to maintain the truth. The tendency of some modern theologians to frame every issue in the New Testament within the parameters of eternal salvation represents a massive misreading of the Scriptures.” (Hodges, *The Epistles of John*, pg. 262–63)

John does not say the transgressing believer loses salvation, or that his transgression proves that he was never saved in the first place, but that he “does not have God.” This is equivalent to saying “God is not with him.” He is not walking in the light (1Jo 1:7), therefore he does not have fellowship with God. He has gone where God will not go.

What John is saying here goes back to the teaching of Jesus in the Upper Room. In Joh 14:21–23, our Lord gives what I believe is the greatest promise in the New Testament. Simply put, He says that if we have His commandments and keep (obey) them, we prove our love for Him; and He and the Father will reciprocate with a greater love-relationship, in which our Lord will “manifest,” or reveal His presence with us. This He describes as both the Father and Son making their “abode,” or dwelling-place with him. The clear implication is that the believer who does not love Him and does not obey His Word, will miss out on this rich blessing. It is in this light that Jesus later urges us to “abide in Me, and I [will abide] in you,” (Joh 15:4). He also makes it very clear that it is possible, and warns against the danger that some will not abide in Him. The result will be a fruitless life “without Me” (Joh 15:4–6). Clearly, John is teaching us what Jesus taught Him.

Again, when John says in 2Jo 9b “*He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son,*” he is speaking of the very thing Jesus promised in Joh 14:23, “*We [Father and Son] will come to him and make Our home with*

him." How could it be said that they would "*come to him*" if he already had them? If the believer does not abide in Christ, then neither the Father nor the Son is "*abiding*" with him. It can then be said that he "*does not have God*," in the sense of His immediate presence, power, and fellowship. It is due to this grave danger that John gives the following counsel on how to deal with false teachers.

G. The Action Required, 2Jo 10–11

Here is another potential—or hypothetical—situation. The "*if*" here assumes that the potential is a real one. Among the traveling teachers of the time, some were faithful and true (as we will see in 3rd John), while many were heretical. Using the "*doctrine of Christ*" (2Jo 9) as the key paradigm of truth, any who do not accord with its truth are to be rejected outright. The phrase "*do not receive him into your house*" could refer to the meeting place, as the local church met in homes.

The instruction "*nor greet him*" implies the common greetings of the day, such as "peace," or in the Christian sense, "grace and peace to you," or our equivalent "God be with you" or "God bless you." None of these greetings are proper to one who denies the very foundation of our faith. To "wish him well" is to participate in his evil deeds. Interestingly, the word "*shares*" is the word for "fellowship." We need to learn, in our age of watered-down Christianity, that fellowship is not some "rosy feeling." Rather, it is fundamental agreement which produces action. No where in Scripture can we find the phrase "in fellowship." This construction has led to many false teaching and false perceptions. Fellowship is something we "have," by agreement with God in His Word and active participation in His work. If one is not "having fellowship" then he/she "*does not have God*" (2Jo 9) in the sense of an active partner in his or her life. With such a person there are no grounds for fellowship (1Co. 5:1–2, 11; 2Co 6:14–16; 2Th 3:14).

H. Conclusion, 3Jo 12–13

Rather than go into many other matters on his mind, John declares his preference to "*speak face to face*," or literally, "mouth to mouth." This is how God spoke to Moses (Num 12:8). This does not minimize in any way the value of the written Word. Everything John has written in this small book is "God-breathed" (2Ti 3:16) truth. What this does tell us is the value of personal presence in communicating that truth. This is why God ordained that there be local churches under gifted shepherd-teachers (see Joh 21:15–17; Eph 4:11–16; 1Pe 5:1–4). It is certainly possible for believers to learn and grow by intermediate means such as books, recorded messages, videos, etc. However, while this is helpful, it was never God's ideal.

Only in the local church do we have all the components to make for full spiritual benefit; including the necessity of loving and working with people we may not agree with or find appealing. Within the framework of a local church, our life is open and observable, and we are to be held accountable for our actions. It is the

duty of the local church—and every believer in it—to hold one another to the standard of the truth (Mat 18:15–20). This never excuses anyone becoming a busy-body (1Ti 5:13). The most gracious and loving thing we can do for one another is to guard against embracing destructive error, whether in belief or in conduct. It is only in the community of the saints that pure and true fellowship, the developing of “brothers-in-arms,” can develop. And it is out of this fellowship, this joint-participation, with our Lord and King, and with His people, that “*our joy may be full*,” or literally “fulfilled,” speaking of a completed state of affairs among believers.

The “*elect sister*” would be the local church where John was at the time of writing—possibly Ephesus. Thus, one local church greets another in the very love for which John has been pleading. Let us always remember that Jesus Christ did not say, “I will build my denomination,” but, “*I will build My church*” (Mat 16:18). He died for her, and every attempt of those who seek to divide the Body—for whatever reason—is a “denominational” or divisive spirit, which is not worthy of our Lord. Let every local church have her distinctions, and may every one be unique in her own way. But none have a right to assume a position of superiority or elitism. Nothing could be further from the spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Third John

The Personification and Perversion of True Fellowship

I. Gaius: Profile of a Faithful Believer, 3Jo 1–4

"But you, O man of God, flee these things, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life ... " 1Ti 6:11–12

A. Introduction

1. We have seen in our study of 2nd John that the spiritual walk is also a spiritual warfare, for which we need the armor of God (Eph 6:10–18), as well as the power of God (2Co 10:3–6).
2. In this conflict, the fiercest battles are fought within. It is the battle of the Spirit against the flesh. (Rom 8:5–7; Gal 5:16–18)
3. Ultimately, the battle is hottest where the issue is good versus evil, the Satanic counterfeit of good (note the context of the above passage, where in vv. 3–10 Paul is warning against a phony godliness).
4. Two simultaneous actions are required if we are to gain the high ground in the spiritual life: flight from evil matched by relentless pursuit of that which is divine good. Any believer who fails to pursue the good that comes from God will, by default, be deceived and engulfed by the evil. (2Ti 4:10)
5. Four actions go into the makeup of a victorious spiritual warrior:
 - a. flight from evil,
 - b. pursuit of divine good,
 - c. valiant fighting for the faith, and
 - d. laying hold of eternal life.

Thus, the vigilant believer strives to be a fugitive, a follower, a fighter, and a finder of God's hidden treasure.

B. John "the Elder," 3Jo 1

Once again, John uses the title "*the Elder*" as a humble form of introduction. In all likelihood he is not even thinking of the office of elder, as Peter spoke of himself (1Pe 5:1), but is using it in the sense of one who is aged. At the time of writing, he would have been around 80 years old. He writes as a grandfather in the faith to a beloved disciple.

When used in the official sense, elder is one of three titles used for the same office or man. In two passages (Act 20:17, 28; 1Pe 5:1–2), we find the words overseer, shepherd, and elder used of the same office. It has been suggested that elder speaks of his authority, overseer of his care over the flock, and shepherd of the task of feeding the flock.

C. The Beloved Disciple

John writes to a “*beloved*” disciple, and uses the term four times in this little epistle. Gaius appears to be to John what John was to our Lord (Joh 19:26, 20:2, 21:7, 20). In the Old Testament, Daniel is addressed in the same way by the Angel Gabriel (Dan 9:23, 10:11). The very use of this term by one of John’s spiritual caliber speaks volumes about Gaius.

D. A Prosperous Soul, 3Jo 2

Of Gaius, John is able to pray a most interesting prayer: that he might prosper in wealth and health, as much as his soul is prospering. The word for prosper, however, does not imply wealth or riches. It is a word that means “to be led along a good road or path.” Just as Gaius is following hard after the Lord (Luk 9:23; 1Ti 6:11–12), and being blessed in it, so John prays that he will be guided and blessed in all his activities, and in his health. It may suggest that he was suffering some physical malady at this time. This prayer begs the question, if your health was a direct reflection of the condition of your soul, what would you look like? Look at some things that are evidence of a healthy, prosperous soul. The word “sound” used by Paul is a word meaning “healthy, health-giving.”

E. Five Evidences of a Healthy Soul

1. A hunger for sound doctrine (1Ti 1:10; 2Ti 4:3; Tit 1:9, 2:1)
2. Practical soundness in the faith (Tit 1:13, 2:2)
3. A stable, sound, healthy mind (2Ti 1:7) (This implies the ability to think through biblical principles as they apply to daily questions.)
4. A love for—and use of—sound, healthy speech (2Ti 1:13; Tit 2:8; Col 4:6)
Remember that Jesus said, “... *Out of ... the heart the mouth speaks.*” (Mat 12:34)
5. Soundness of character and conduct (Tit 2:1–2)

F. A Walker and a Warrior, 3Jo 3–4

John had received a good report from some brethren, probably from the home church of Gaius. This church, as we shall see, had some major problems in doctrine, leadership, and missionary vision. Gaius was a bright light in a dark setting. Of him, John says three wonderful things:

1. He was a source of exceeding joy to John. In fact, he brought joy to John in the area that meant most to him (v. 3). For the shepherd of men’s souls, this is the greatest payoff for the labors of the ministry (Phi 1:3–7; 1Th 1:2–5).
2. He was a vessel of truth: “testified of the truth that is in you.” Every believer is a vessel and, depending on what fills the soul and the life, will be either a vessel of honor, or of dishonor (2Ti 2:20–22).

3. He was a living example and witness of the truth. As we have seen in 2nd John, to “walk in the truth” is to “*walk in the light*” (1Jo 1:7). It is to “*walk by faith*” (2Co 5:7). This is possible only when we “*walk in the Spirit*” (Gal 5:16), by whom we are enabled to “*walk in love*” (Eph 5:2).

Any believer who merits such approval is, without doubt, on his way to being a great spiritual warrior. Furthermore, such a believer is sure to be the object of attack from the fallen realm. Satan’s hosts have no need to bother with the believer who is drifting aimlessly. It is the heroic soul that causes the hosts of hell to tremble. Gaius was such a man. Will we measure up to the standard in our own generation?

II. Gaius: Profile of Unity (Fellowship) in Action, 3Jo 5–8

“How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?” Rom 10:14–15

A. Introduction

1. Every local church has both a primary and a secondary mission, one is immediate, the other ultimate:
 - a. The primary/immediate goal, Eph 4:11–16; Heb 5:11–14: bringing each believer to maturity for the purpose of fruitful and effective service is the urgent and immediate goal before us.
 - b. The secondary and ultimate goal is our mission to the world, to proclaim the life-giving message of Jesus Christ and make disciples, Mat 28:18–20; 2Co 5:14–21.
2. The local church that does not have concern for these priorities is not having fellowship or actively participating with the Lord Jesus Christ.
3. In the plan of God, every believer—and every local church—is accountable for accomplishing these tasks. If you are not gifted/trained for preaching, then be devoted to sending, 1Pe 4:10–11.
4. Gaius was a member of a local church with real problems in its leadership, vv. 9–11.
5. Rather than use this as an excuse for inactivity, Gaius bucked the opposition and served and sent.

B. Eternal Commendation, 3Jo 5–6

It’s worth noting here that because the commendation of Gaius by John is recorded in Scripture, it will last forever. However, God is keeping His own records of those who are faithful, and their deeds will also be recognized in due

time (Gal 6:7–10; 1Jo 2:17). In this commendation, John identifies three worthy ministries of Gaius:

1. Hospitality, 3Jo 5

In the ancient world, hospitality was considered one of the great virtues (Rom 12:13; 1Ti 3:2; Tit 1:8; 1Pe 4:8–9; Heb 13:1–2). Gaius was a man whose door was open, both to traveling brethren (probably itinerant missionaries), as well as to strangers. He saw his home and possessions as a gift from God, to be used for His glory. Such people God is able to entrust with much more than others. How many times have we been refreshed by those willing to share their home and food with us!

2. Encouragement, 3Jo 6a

The fact that those who had been hosted by Gaius had “*bore witness of your love before the church*,” indicates a means of encouraging and motivating others in their own efforts. One of the most effective and powerful object lessons regarding truth and faith is a good example. These who brought news of the hospitality of Gaius may have been the same who were “*walking in [the] truth*” mentioned by John in 2Jo 4.

3. Financial support, 3Jo 6b

John encourages Gaius to go beyond hospitality, and “*send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God*.” It is a simple fact that we show our love for God by our conduct toward other believers. Gaius was not in a position to go, but he was able to send. To engage in such a ministry is to “do well.” What an understatement! It is pleasing to God, glorifying to Christ, effective for the commission, and a blessing to God’s people far and wide.

C. A Mission-Minded Church

1. The Thessalonians were a mission-minded congregation—one of the greatest examples we have in the New Testament.
2. They grasped and exhibited the great virtues of the faith, 1Th 1:3.
3. They utilized the dual powers of the Spirit and the word, 1Th 1:5.
4. They were avid and diligent followers of Paul’s example, 1Th 1:6.
5. They became a base of operations from which the gospel went forth to all surrounding regions, 1Th 1:7–10.

D. The Divine Blueprint for Missions, 3Jo 7–8

In these two verses, we have a format for faithful and effective missions. In the world of missions and mission organizations, there is often much smoke but little fire. Far too often, the mission endeavor is only a means of gaining recognition among believers or of attempting to build a small empire for one’s glory. Take note of the ingredients of effective mission endeavor:

1. Some must go!

John says, “*they went forth.*” The command in the great commission is not “*go,*” but “*make disciples.*” However, unless some go this cannot be achieved.

2. The glory of Christ must be the goal.

It was “*for His name’s sake*” that they went. Far too often, it is the missionary, or the mission organization, who are attempting to “make a name.” If we are not compelled by the love of Christ (2Co 5:14–21), and are not striving for His glory alone (1Co 1:29), no matter how much dust we raise or noise we make, in the eternal evaluation we will do little.

3. There must be financial integrity.

Specifically, Christian missions should not be funded by unbelievers. Often, we have had offers of support from wealthy individuals or businesses. However, this has always been turned down if the ones giving are not believers who have a desire to reach the lost for Christ. The phrase “*taking nothing from the Gentiles*” means that they did not receive support from unbelievers. Often unbelievers, with the mind-set that those who do good deeds go to Heaven, are keen to give to Christian causes. Wisdom and Scripture dictate that such giving is rejected.

4. Those who serve as missionaries are worthy of our support.

When John says “*we ... ought to receive such,*” he uses a word that indicates obligation or debt. We have a spiritual obligation to do all in our power to support and sustain the missionary. One veteran missionary with whom we have worked has told us how people would send them their used tea-bags as an offering. What a pathetic attitude toward servants of our Lord Jesus Christ.

5. Fellowship requires participation.

To “*become fellow workers for the truth*” is the essence of true biblical fellowship. As I said before, nowhere in Scripture does the phrase “in fellowship” occur, as if it were a locational issue. What we find is “have fellowship” which is an active concept. Fellowship means much more than simple agreement. It requires joint-participation in the work of God. Paul says, “*For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power*” (1Co 4:20). At salvation, we have been transferred into Christ’s kingdom (Col 1:13) for the purpose of becoming “*fellow workers for [that] kingdom*” (Col 4:11). In fact, we will one day receive that kingdom (Heb 12:28). In eternity, our status in the kingdom will be determined by how we have served the King (1Co 6:9–10). Only those who share in the sufferings of Christ—as fellow-servants—will become “*joint heirs with Christ*” (Rom 8:17). These considerations should provide strong motivation toward diligence and dedication in our own sphere of service.

III. Diotrephes and Demetrius: the Sword of Division, 3Jo 9–12

“*Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth, I did not come to bring peace but a sword.*” Mat 10:34

A. Introduction

1. No issue of the Bible seems to be more perplexing to modern Christians than that of peace and war.
2. Many take the angelic annunciation of Luk 2:14, “*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men,*” as a blanket statement that Jesus came to introduce a pacifistic spirit into the world.
3. This gross misconception existed in Jesus’ day, and He clearly addressed it in the text quoted above.
4. The peace God offered to the world is found only by entering into a right relation to Him through faith in His Son, who came as Savior to the world (Rom 5:1; Eph 2:14–17; Col 1:20). This peace came at the cost of the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.
5. Long before Jesus came into the world, the prophets declared that only in Him could peace be found, and apart from Him there could be no peace (Isa 57:19–21; Mic 5:5a).
6. The cry of the false prophets throughout history has always been, “*Peace, peace,*” when in fact, they are at war with God (Jer 6:14, 8:11, 15; Eze 13:16; 1Th 5:3).
7. In the climax of the battle between good and evil, Antichrist will use a “peace message” to deceive and captivate the world (Dan 8:25, 11:21, 24).

B. Diotrephes: Profile of evil, 3Jo 9–11

In this section, we have an amazing look into the early church. What is most astounding is not the problems that Diotrephes represented, for his type of leader is found in many churches today. The thing that is most startling is how John, the last living Apostle, chose to deal with this egotistical man.

Diotrephes—possibly an elder in the church—was an arrogant, domineering leader who imposed his will on the members by force. In a strange twist of irony, his name means “God-bearer,” yet his conduct was totally ungodly. John identifies these attitudes and actions of the man:

1. His motivation was that he “*loves to have the preeminence among them*” (v. 9). The word is a compound of the verb *phileo*, to love, and *proteuo*, to be first, ahead. This is the very word used by Paul in Col.1:18 where he writes of Christ, “*that in all things He may have the preeminence.*” Thus Diotrephes is arrogantly seeking a place in the church which belongs only to Jesus Christ.
2. Due to his arrogance, Diotrephes “*does not receive us*,” John writes. The word used here can mean “does not accept our authority,” or, “does not warmly welcome us.” In either case, it is an insult to John, and to the Lord who called him to apostleship.
3. What resides in the heart will come out of the mouth (Mat 12:34; Luk 6:45). Therefore Diotrephes carried on a campaign of slander and maligning against John and his representatives. The word “*prating*” is *phluareo*, meaning “to

talk nonsense, to bring empty charges.” In Micah, the prophet was accused by those who rejected his message of being a “prattler” (Mic 2:6), when in fact it was their own false prophets who were guilty of it (Mic 2:11).

4. Furthermore, this self-willed tyrant not only refused to receive traveling missionaries, but sought to throw out of the church any who did receive them.

C. John’s Proposed Response, 3Jo 10

When Paul was dealing with problems in Corinth, he asked them, “*What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?*” (1Co 4:21). Here, John simply says he will “*call to mind his deed which he does.*” Very much in the spirit of Christ, John simply says, I will expose his actions for what they are. This leaves the members of the church to decide what they will do with Diotrephes.

In keeping with the nature of the light of truth, John will expose the shameful deeds of darkness (Eph 5:11–13). Once this is done, each believer of that congregation will have to decide whether to join in the fellowship of the King—represented by John—or remain in the enslaving fellowship of darkness. The ultimate battles of the spiritual life always come down to the issue of decisions, choices, the free exercise of human volition. Our Lord will have no one follow Him by force—that is Satan’s way. Once issues are made clear, and good and evil are exposed in clear light, every soul must choose (Deu 11:26, 30:19; Jos 24:15; 1Ki 18:21).

D. Good Versus Evil, 3Jo 11

It is important to take note of the fact that John identifies the attitudes and actions of Diotrephes as evil. Far too often, we see or hear of pastors or churches using the word “evil” to identify anyone who does not agree with their pet doctrines or practices. Yet evil is a clearly defined quality in Scripture.

John exhorts Gaius not to be intimidated or swayed by the blustering of Diotrephes, and not to imitate his evil. The word “*imitate*” is the word we get “mimic” from, and reminds us that there is great power in the act of imitation, whether of good or bad (1Co 4:16, 11:1; 1Th 1:6–7). The conflict here is that of “*good*” (*agathos*) against “*evil*” (*kakos*).

These invisible spiritual opposites are personified in the contrast of Diotrephes and Demetrius. John says, “*He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God*” (v. 11b). Again, a quote from Zane Hodges is helpful:

“*We have already met these types of expressions in First John. To be “of God” is a fluid expression signifying usually that the action of the person in question has its source or inspiration in God (cf. 1John 3:10b and discussion). We are likewise told in 1 John 3:6, “Whoever sins has neither*

seen Him nor known Him;” that is, sin is always an act performed in spiritual ignorance and darkness. The sinner acts sinfully precisely because he has lost sight of God.” (Hodges, *The Epistles of John*, pg. 289–90)

In short, the issue here is not whether one is saved or not, but rather, from what source does one’s actions come. If this were not true, how could John warn Gaius—obviously a mature believer—not to become an imitator of him who is evil? When anyone performs evil works, those works find their source in the Devil, who is called “*the evil one*” (Mat 6:13).

E. The Warfare of Good and Evil

1. The first assault of Satan against mankind was launched in the Garden using the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (Gen 2:17, 3:3–6)
2. The conflict of good versus evil is always an issue that can only be resolved by a volitional decision in the soul of every human being.
3. The essence of evil is revealed in the desire to be like God, without being subject to God. (Gen 3:5; Isa 14:12–14)
4. Evil is distinguished from sin in the sense that it presents itself as godly and good. It is the great counterfeit of godliness. This is why it is antichrist in spirit, since by definition to be “*antichrist*” is to seek to oppose Christ by taking the place of Christ (1Jo 2:18–23; 2Jo 7).
5. The great battle of the spiritual life for every believer is to gain the wisdom necessary to distinguish and discern good from evil (Isa 5:20; Amo 5:14–15; Mic 3:2; Mal 3:18; Heb 5:14).
6. Because it is possible for believers to become involved in evil, we are exhorted to pray for deliverance from the “*evil one*” (Mat 6:13; Luk 11:4; Rom 7:19, 21–25; 2Ti 4:17–18).
7. The believer can only win in this invisible, spiritual struggle through faith in Jesus Christ and His Word, and the surrender to and utilization of the ministries of the Holy Spirit (Rom 7:24–25,; 12:21; Heb 5:14).
8. A perfect example of evil is when believers claim to be having fellowship with God, while at the same time “walking in darkness” (1Jo 1:5–6; Joh 8:12, 12:35–36). John, building on Jesus’ teachings, uses light and darkness to represent the absolute opposition of good and evil.

F. Demetrius: Profile of Good, 3Jo 12

Taking into consideration the context, and the actions of Diotrephes, it would appear that Demetrius is a traveling missionary—one whom Diotrephes would not receive. John puts his weight of evidence behind the ministry of Demetrius as an encouragement to Gaius to receive him.

G. By the Mouth of Two or Three Witnesses

1. It was an ancient biblical maxim that truth in court was to be established by trustworthy witnesses. So serious was this, that if anyone gave false testimony, they were to suffer the penalty they sought to impose on the person they were charging. (Deu 19:15–21)
2. Jesus relied on this principle in establishing His claims to be the promised Messiah. (Joh 5:31–39)
3. Jesus established the principle of witnesses when dealing with sinning members of the church, for the purpose of exercising church discipline, (Mat 18:15–20)
4. The Apostle Paul affirmed the principle of witnesses in his conflict with members of the Corinthian church. (2Co 13:1)
5. John used this principle in presenting the claims of Jesus Christ in 1Jo 5:6–8. Here, “*the Spirit*” speaks of His anointing by the Spirit in the form of a dove, “*water*” speaks of His public and unique baptism, when the Father spoke in His behalf, and “*blood*” speaks of His cross—a fulfillment of Scripture (cf. Mat 3:16–17; Joh 1:29–34).
6. John continues this practice by calling three witnesses to affirm the genuineness of Demetrius as a minister of the Word.

H. John’s Witness and *The Didache*

1. John calls three witnesses to verify the character and conduct of Demetrius: First, “*from all*,” meaning from everyone who knew him. Secondly, “*from the truth itself*,” meaning that his conduct was in keeping with the standards of God’s Word. Finally, from John and his associates. John concludes, “*and you know that our testimony is true.*”
2. In the earliest work we have on church order, called *The Didache*, or literally, “*The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*,” very strict standards were set down for identifying those traveling missionaries who were worthy of support. (Barclay, *The Letters of John*, pg. 157) Just a few examples will be helpful:
 - a. If he teaches any other doctrine, than that which has been given by the Apostles, reject him (cf. 2Jo 7–11).
 - b. If he teaches, and his conduct accords with, “*the increase of righteousness and knowledge of the Lord, receive him as the Lord.*” (*The Didache*) (cf. Gal 4:13–14).
 - c. If he asks for money, he is a false prophet, reject him. If he says, “*give me money, or any other thing, you shall not hearken to him; but, if he bid you give for others who are in need, let no man judge him.*” (*The Didache*)
 - d. “*...If he has the manners of the Lord. By their manners, therefore, shall the prophet and the false prophet be known...Every prophet that teaches truth, if he does not what he teaches, is a false prophet*” (cf. Mat 7:15–20).
 - e. Every traveling teacher or missionary was to be vetted by the church. “*Let everyone that comes in the name of the Lord be received, and then, when*

you have proved him, you shall know, for you shall have understanding to distinguish between the right hand and the left” (*The Didache*) (i.e., good and evil).

- f. In *The Didache*, an interesting term is coined, or it speaks of the false teacher, or of the teacher with wrong motivations, as a “*Christmonger*.” This is someone who seeks to promote self, prosper self, or profit in any way from the ministry of the Word of God. I wonder, what we can say of Christian authors who have become rich by selling their wares. What are we to conclude regarding pastors of huge churches, who become millionaires through their ministry? I will leave the conclusions to the reader.

Thus John commends this itinerant missionary, and gives a contrast in these two men which highlights the conflict of good and evil which often enters into the local church.

Conclusion:

The little epistles (letters) of 2nd and 3rd John—though small and often overlooked—give us valuable teachings on the battle for the truth of the Word of God. In many ways, John amplifies the call of Jude that we “*contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints*” (Jud 3b).

Although the closing of this epistle is similar to that of 2nd John, there is an interesting addition. Since it is a personal letter to Gaius, John adds, “*Our friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.*” The obvious implication is that not all believers fall into this category. Once again John has in mind the teachings of Jesus in the Upper Room. In Joh 15:13–15, our Lord identifies those who are “*friends*” as those who are obedient to His Word, and are willing to “lay down their lives” for one another. Such a man was Epaphroditus (Phi 2:25–30). We see Paul greeting such believers by name in Rom 16:3–16. These are those who—like Abraham, and Rahab—stand in the status of “*friend[s] of God*” Jam 2:23–25).

May we all enter into their ranks in the fellowship of the King!