

The Epistle of 3 John—1:1-14

(1/29/20)

Tonight, we want to look at John's third and final epistle.

3John is the shortest New Testament epistle (in the original Greek—more of a postcard rather than a letter) and focuses on the battle for truth in the local church.

In his second epistle, John's heart was to admonish a local house church (and by extension—all churches) to keep loving one another by keeping God's commandments.

He warned that many deceivers had gone out (from the church) into the world (1John 2:19) spreading heresy concerning the doctrine (teaching) of Christ—his strict warning was:

2 John 1:10-11 (NKJV)

¹⁰ If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; ¹¹ for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.

So, in his second epistle, John's emphasis was on keeping evil people and false doctrine *out* of the church.

In his third epistle, John continues in this line of thought (keeping false brethren out of the church) but then expands his comments to include false brethren who had *infiltrated* the local churches.

He mentions one man by name (Diotrephes) whom he implies was a false shepherd, that had risen up, drawn disciples to himself and started a church.

He then began to lead the church like a dictator, refusing to accept the Apostle John or anyone from his group into his church, railing against John’s authority (John was the overseer of that area of Asia Minor) and throwing out of his church anyone who dared oppose his dictatorial reign.

This was something John had to deal with (and no doubt the other apostles as well)—and was the fulfillment of something Paul the apostle said to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:

Acts 20:29-31 (NKJV)

²⁹ For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. ³⁰ Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. ³¹ Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

And so we could say that in 2John he deals with these false teachers generically—in 3John he deals with them specifically—by name!

One pastor said it well—

“There are times when we must speak the truth generally and let the Holy Spirit make application specifically. But there are also times when, like John, we must speak the truth to people individually and personally.”

John addressed this epistle to a man named Gaius (he brings up two other men by name—Diotrephes and Demetrius).

After the opening greeting—3John breaks down this way—

- I. Commendation of Gaius’s Hospitality (vv. 5–8)
- II. Condemnation of Diotrephes’ Behavior (vv. 9–10)
- III. Consistency of Demetrius’s Testimony (vv. 11–12)
- IV. Conclusion and Closing Benediction (vv. 13–14)

3 John 1:1 (NKJV)

¹ The Elder, To the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth:

The Elder

As I said when we studied 2John, when John refers to himself as “**The Elder**”, he could be using it as a title for his *office* in the church (the Greek is ‘presbuteros’ or presbyter)—or simply as a term designating his advanced age (by this time, John was around 90 years old!).

To the beloved Gaius

We’re not sure who this Gaius was since there are several men named Gaius in the New Testament.

- There was a Gaius who accompanied Paul and was with Paul in Ephesus (he was the one that when the silver smith created the riot and the people gathered in the great amphitheater there, Gaius was one of those who was brought into the theater. And so he is called Gaius of Macedonia—Acts 19:29).

- There was a Gaius of Derbe that is mentioned in the book of Acts (20:4).

- And then there was a Gaius in Corinth (this is one that Paul greets in his letter to the Romans). And when Paul wrote his letter to the Corinthians, he said, “*I thank God I didn’t baptize any of you but Crispus and Gaius.*” (1 Cor 1:14) He lived next to the synagogue in Corinth.

However, there is no reason to believe that the Gaius here is any of those three.

Early tradition in the church said that this particular Gaius was sent by John to be the overseer of the church in Pergamos—which was not too far from Ephesus (where John ministered).

As I said, scholars are not exactly sure who this Gaius is—but John certainly did love this man whoever he was—“**Whom I love in truth**” (v.1)

Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest—

“John calls him “beloved,” four times in this brief letter, here, and in verses 2, 5, and 11. The adjective describes this man as being well-beloved by his fellow-saints, an outstanding member of the local church to which he belonged. The word “beloved” is agapētos (ἀγαπητος), the word used of divine love.”

3 John 1:2 (NKJV)

² Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.

I have heard those in the Word of Faith Movement use this as their Scriptural basis for teaching that it's God's will for all of His children to be prosperous and in good health.

This, however, isn't a *doctrinal* pronouncement (in other words, it isn't a biblical truth that God wants all of His children to be in good health and prosperous financially)—it's a New Testament *salutation* (greeting or introduction that precedes the body of a letter).

The Greek word for '**prosper**' literally means “*to have a good journey*”—it's like saying, “*I hope things go well for you.*”

One author says,

“Both verbs [for prosper and be in health] belonged to the everyday language of letter writing... This phrase was so common that sometimes it was condensed into only initials, and everyone knew what the writer meant just from the initials.”

And so, when John says to Gaius, “**I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers**”—it would be like us saying, “*I hope you're being as blessed outwardly as you are inwardly thru your relationship with Jesus!*”

Again, not a doctrinal proclamation but a simple New Testament salutation.

If it was John's way of making a doctrinal pronouncement—there would have been corroborating Scriptures to back this teaching up—instead we read:

1 Timothy 5:23 (NKJV)

²³ No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities.

Matthew 6:19 (NKJV)

¹⁹ "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal;

3 John 1:3-4 (NKJV)

³ **For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth *that is in you, just as you walk in the truth.*** ⁴ **I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.**

John is an Apostle, but he's also a Pastor (Shepherd)—and all true pastors, rejoice when those under their ministry **“walk in God's truth”** (are living what they are learning and claim to believe).

As a pastor, it really saddens me when I hear that Christians (some of whom attend my church) are not walking in God's truth. (Comment)

I think that much of the problem in local churches today and why so many who are attending church aren't living like Christians is because—they probably aren't Christians!

Why does the Church have so many unbelievers in it today?

They are the product of the “seeker-friendly” approach to ministry and the Word of Faith Movement with its promises of health and wealth.

These two things more than anything else has flooded the Church with “professing Christians” who have never been confronted with the true gospel (the ‘pick up your cross, deny yourself and follow Jesus’ gospel).

It's part of the Last Days strategy of the devil of sowing the Church with Tares so as to choke out the fruitfulness of the Wheat (God's true people).

I. Commendation of Gaius' Hospitality (vv. 5–8)

3 John 1:5-7 (NKJV)

⁵ Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, ⁶ who have borne witness of your love before the church. *If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well,* ⁷ because they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles [unbelievers].

Now, in John's second epistle, he warned a woman who had a group of Christians meeting in her home for church (house church), a woman he referred to the "elect lady" not to open her home to any prophet or preacher that didn't hold to the doctrine of Christ the Apostles had taught.

But here in his third epistle, he is commending Gaius for opening *his* home and showing hospitality to traveling preachers and prophets who demonstrated they were sent by God because of what they taught about Jesus and how they conducted their ministries.

In his second epistle, John is talking about phony apostles, prophets, evangelists and preachers—these John said the house churches were to be on guard against and keep out.

But how could the local churches always be sure who these phonies were—how could they know the true from the false?

Well, often they didn't know, and so many did open their homes to these deceivers unknowingly—and had been taken advantage of by these crooks.

That was a real problem for the first century church and so the apostles came up with a document called the '*The Didache*' (Greek for "The Teachings").

One author writes concerning The Didache—

"The Didache, one of the earliest Christian writings after the New Testament, gives several guidelines for discerning true from false prophets.

First, a true prophet will be known from a false prophet in that, a true prophet will only stay at someone's house a short time (one day or at the most two if need be—but if he stays three days, he is a false prophet.) (Explain the reasoning)

Second, if a prophet, apparently speaking under the inspiration of the Spirit, says 'give me money, or something else'—he is a false prophet, unless the money is 'for others in need.' (The idea being that a true prophet doesn't make money an issue and never asks for money or anything else for himself—he simply trusts God and is content with whatever he is offered for the work of his ministry.)

Third, a true prophet's lifestyle will correspond to the righteous standards he teaches. A false prophet very likely will teach one thing and practice another.

A true minister of the gospel will demonstrate what Paul wrote, "For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ" (2 Cor. 2:17)."

And so, once a man was identified as a false prophet—the word was circulated among the churches in the area and that man was kept out of the churches from that time on.

However, God had sent true prophets, like Agabus, who traveled around to the local churches interpreting and teaching the Word of God as revealed to the Apostles. (Elaborate)

These true prophets are the ones John had in mind in his third epistle—the ones he is commending Gaius for welcoming into his home, giving them food to eat, a place to rest before sending them on their way to continue their ministry for God (with a letter of recommendation for the other churches to read).

Gaius not only opened his home to itinerant preachers and teachers of the gospel—he also opened his heart and his 'wallet' and gave them financial help as well.

The phrase **“you send them forward on their journey”** (v.6)—literally means, *“you assist them on their journey.”*

We can't all be missionaries, physically serving the Lord in Africa or in some other remote place in the world—but we can partner with them thru prayer and thru our financial support.

This is what John meant when he said, “**We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth**” (v. 8)—repeating something Jesus told His followers when He said:

Matthew 10:41-42 (NKJV)

⁴¹ He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. ⁴² And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold *water* in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward."

I. Commendation of Gaius's Hospitality (vv. 5–8)

II. Condemnation of Diotrephes' Behavior (vv. 9–10)

3 John 1:9a (NKJV)

⁹ **I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them...**

The word ‘**preeminence**’ means “*to be first in importance*”—a word that is perfectly acceptable when used of Jesus:

Colossians 1:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸ And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

However, when the word applies to man it becomes sinful—an expression of pride.

We would use it with regard to someone who loves to be the focus, who loves to be the center of attention, in the limelight, a person who loves and seeks to be first in the sense of getting ahead of everyone else no matter what it takes—in short, a person who has a lot of pride.

Warren Wiersbe—

“Diotrephes was motivated by pride. Instead of giving the preeminence to Jesus Christ (Col. 1:18), he claimed it for himself. He had the final say-so about everything in the church, and his decisions were determined by one thing: “What will this do for Diotrephes?” He was most unlike John the Baptist who said, “He [Jesus Christ] must increase, but I must decrease” (John

3:30). *The Greek verb indicates that it was the constant attitude of Diotrephes to promote himself.*"

Diotrephes, in the role of a pastor, ran the church like a dictator, putting himself first, demanding his own way and throwing anyone out of the church that dared to oppose and confront him.

He apparently didn't know (or didn't care) what Jesus had taught His disciples in Matthew 18 and 20:

Matthew 18:1, 4 (NKJV)

¹ At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" ... ⁴ ...[Jesus said] whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 20:25-28 (NKJV)

²⁵ But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. ²⁶ Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. ²⁷ And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave-- ²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

3 John 1:9 (NKJV)

⁹ **I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us.**

Diotrephes' pride was so great that he wouldn't even let the Apostle John or any of his associates into his church.

One author said—

"We can just hear him say, 'Who is John? I'm a better leader than him. My ministry is just as good if not better than his. Why should all these big shot apostles get all the attention and honor?!'"

That sounds very much like the sin of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram in Numbers 16. (Explain)

3 John 1:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰ **Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with**

malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting *them* out of the church.

Diotrephes not only failed to receive John and any believers (brethren) that were loyal to him, but he also spoke against them—“**prating** (incessant blabbering) **against us with malicious words.**”

“**Malicious words**” means ‘*evil talk*’ or ‘gossip’.

“**Putting *them* out of the church**”

Diotrephes not only used his influence to forbid others in his church from showing hospitality to John or his associates—even going as far as excommunicating those in his church who tried to show them hospitality.

This kind of ‘dictator’ in leadership needs to be publicly rebuked—as John said he would do in person when he came to the area.

There are those Christians that have a soft, sentimental view of God’s love who believe that publicly rebuking someone by name involved in public sin is unloving and therefore un-Christian.

Maybe they should reread Matthew 23 where Jesus publicly rebuked the Scribes and Pharisees 8 times for their sin and hypocrisy.

Romans 16:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.

2 Timothy 4:14-15 (NKJV)

¹⁴ Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works. ¹⁵ You also must beware of him, for he has greatly resisted our words.

Too many Christians want to be kind and loving to the rebels in the church or even the wolves—when they should be more loving and protective of God’s true sheep.

One pastor said—

“Instead of preaching the truth, these men spread their own religious propaganda, using deceit and clever speeches. We have the same problem today, and Christians must beware of false teachers. They come to your front door with magazines, books, and tapes, trying to convince you that they are teaching the truth. Paul gives two instructions: mark them (identify them), and avoid them.”

III. Consistency of Demetrius’s Testimony (vv. 11–12)

3 John 1:11 (NKJV)

¹¹ Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God.

Jesus said that just as a tree is known by its fruit—the same is true of a person claiming to be a Christian. (Explain)

John made this claim also in his first epistle—

1 John 2:29 (NKJV)

²⁹ If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.

1 John 3:7, 9 (NKJV)

⁷ Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous...⁹ Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.

3 John 1:12 (NKJV)

¹² Demetrius has a good testimony from all, and from the truth itself. And we also bear witness, and you know that our testimony is true.

In contrast to Diotrephes, the evil witness—John mentions Demetrius the faithful and good witness!

Demetrius along with Gaius were godly Christian men who were faithfully walking in God's truth.

Because of it, John praised them for their witness to the Body of Christ and encouraged the church to follow their example—as Paul the apostle said, *“Follow me as I follow Christ.”* (Comment)

IV. Conclusion and Closing Benediction (vv. 13–14)

3 John 1:13-14 (NKJV)

¹³ I had many things to write, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and ink; ¹⁴ but I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak face to face. Peace to you. Our friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.

It's interesting that John chose to call his family in Christ, **'friends'**—apparently, John wanted to highlight the truth that Christians should be friends as well as family.

“As friends Christians should show hospitality to and should support one another, the specific expression of love that John urged in this letter.”