



# A Tale of Three Men

## 3 John

1. Gaius (verses 1-8) - A Servant to the Saints
2. Diotrephes (verses 7-10) - A Guardian of the Gate
3. Demetrius (verses 11-12) - A Testimony of the Good

Every Christian lives his (or her) life with a single goal in mind. We long to reach the end of our lives and appear before Jesus and hear these words, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master" (Matthew 25:23).

This is what we live for. We long to be faithful to the Lord during our time here on earth. So that we can please our Savior and anticipate a full reward.

Now, some do that well. And others do not. Paul was one who did well. At the end of his life, he said, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. And his eyes were upon his reward. In the very next verse, he said, Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

Solomon is one who didn't do it well. God granted him more wisdom than any man ever possessed. "God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and breadth of mind like the sand on the seashore, so that Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all other men, wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Calcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol, and his fame was in all the surrounding nations" (1 Kings 4:29-31)

And yet, Solomon squandered all of his privilege by pursuing the pleasures of the world. He pursued the gold and the glory and the girls. As a result, "And the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods. But he did not keep what the Lord commanded" (1 Kings 11:9-10)

And when Solomon stood before the Lord, he did not hear the Lord say, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:23). His life was a disappointment. These sorts of examples beg the question: What sort of race are you running with your life? Are you running well? Will you hear those words, "Well done, good and faithful servant"? Or will the Lord be disappointed with you?

Our text this morning brings us to these questions. The key verse in 3 John is found in verse 11, "Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God." John will bring up the names of three men in the book, Gaius, Diotrephes, and Demetrius. Two of them are presented as good examples for us to follow to gain our full reward (2 John 8). So, as we work through the examples of these three men, you should ask yourself which sort of man are you like? Am I imitating any of them? Where will this lead me?

Anyway, the book of 3 John is the shortest book in all of the Bible. Although 2 John has more verses in our English text, 3 John has fewer words in the Greek; it has a mere 219 words. Like 1 John and 2 John, 3 John is written by the apostle John, who simply identifies himself as "the elder." As I mentioned last week, this comes into our English with a nice idiom, "the old man."

John writes this little postcard to a man named Gaius, which was a common name in the ancient world. So, we don't know if the four other Biblical uses of this name [\[1\]](#) refer to him or not. I think it's probable. But, as we are not certain, we will leave those texts alone, as any connection would simply be speculation. Still, there is certainly enough here in 3 John to get a good glimpse of how this faithful man lived. And I am certain that Gaius received a full reward for his labors (see 2 John 8).

Now, as I read this little book of the Bible, I want for you to listen to the names of the other two men. And as you hear them mentioned, and as you hear John speak of them, ask yourself what sort of reward they may have received.

3 John

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

Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul. For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be

fellow workers for the truth.

I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.

Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God. Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself. We also add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true.

I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink. I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face.

Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends, each by name.

Let's just dig into our text by looking at the first person that John mentions. His name is Gaius. John, obviously, loved this man. He writes, ...

John 3:1

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

This is very similar to what John told the "elect lady" in 2 John.

2 John 1

The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth.

The idea here is that John's love was because of the truth. John believed what Gaius believed. And that created a bond of love between John and Gaius.

This happens on the natural realm all of the time. It is the political season. When someone puts forth that they like a particular candidate for president, "I like Hillary Clinton" or "I like Donald Trump." And when there is agreement on the other side, there is a natural affection for each other. Because, both people know that they are on the same team. They will vote the same way. They are united for the same cause.

And that's exactly what John says about Gaius, only in the spiritual realm. John says, "We are on the same team." Our team is united around the truth. We have seen our sin. We have acknowledged our need for a Savior. We have both believed in Jesus Christ who has come in the flesh (1 John 4:2). And now, we are walking in the truth."

How did John know this about Gaius? Well, because of the report that John received about him. Look at verse 3, ...

3 John 3-4

For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

Gaius had come to know the truth. Gaius was walking in the truth. And there was a bond that was formed between them. And such a bond forms all over the world when believers come to know one another.

When Yvonne and I take our trip in 2 1/2 weeks to India, we will meet with people that we barely know. But, a bond of love will be formed because of the truth. That will go far deeper than any political common bond, because this bond is for eternity.

And the longer and deeper you know someone in the truth, that love only deepens. That's why John wasn't content with a letter like 3 John. He wanted to come and be with Gaius. Look at verses 13 and 14, ...

3 John 13-14

I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink. I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face.

But in his absence, the letter would suffice. At least he could pray for him. That's what verse 2 is about. It's John's prayer for Gaius. He says, ...

3 John 2

Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul.

This is one of the rare prayers in the New Testament for one's physical well-being. Usually, the New Testament prayers are for spiritual well-being. Like Paul, who prayed for God to "give the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him" (Eph. 1:17); and for God to "grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being" (Eph. 3:16); and for "your love [to] abound more and more,

with knowledge and all discernment" (Phil. 1:9).

But here, John prays here for physical well being.

3 John 2

Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul.

But did you notice here that John's prayer ties the physical and the spiritual? Essentially, he is saying this: "I pray that your physical well-being match your spiritual well-being. Would you like such a prayer to be prayed for you? "I pray that your physical health would match your spiritual health!"

For some of you, such a prayer may be a wonderful thing, as your body is failing, but your spirit is alive and well. "Oh, that my body would feel alive and well like my spirit!"

For others of you, such a prayer may be a frightful thing, because, the truth be known, things aren't so well with your soul. May God give wisdom to seek the things above.

Did you notice the extent of John's joy in the well-being of Gaius?

3 John 3-4

For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

When he heard of the ways in which Gaius was "walking in the truth," he "rejoiced greatly" (verse 3). In fact, John said that he has "no greater joy," than to hear such news, that his spiritual children were "walking in the truth."

From time to time, I have the opportunity to speak with others who once were a part of ministry with me, but have moved. It is my joy great joy when I hear that they are doing well spiritually. This is because they are demonstrating the gospel to be true in their lives! I'm encouraged to see that their spiritual life is not dependent upon me! It is going to last! And, the converse is true. It is discouraging when people fall away.

What's true about disciples is also true of physical children. Parents, please take this to heart when dealing with your own children. Your greatest joy will be when your children are doing well spiritually.

Yet, sadly the reverse is often the case. A parent is asked, "How are your children doing?" And the answer comes:

"They are doing great! My oldest graduated from college a few years ago, and landed a wonderful job in the city. She has already paid off his student-loans and has bought a house.

She seems so happy in the city. There's always so much to do. She has season-tickets to all of the local sports teams. She loves the opera. She seems so full of life!

My son is also doing great. As you know, he didn't go to college, but landed a great job that takes him all over the world. He's a sales rep for a great company.

Last week he was in China. The week before that it was Japan, I think. He's hardly around, but he loves the travel. And he seems to be good at what he does.

When he is around, he loves working outside on his farmette he recently purchased, where there's a nice little fishing pond, where he can wind-down whenever he's home."

Such is a worldly joy that John knows not of. John's joy in Gaius is wrapped up in his spiritual prosperity.

3 John 3-4

For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

How much better is this answer:

"My children? Oh, my children are doing great!

My oldest found a godly man who loves Christ. They purchased a small house on the out-skirts of town. It's not big, but it's near their church, which they love.

In fact, about all I hear about is their church. They love their small group of young marrieds, where there are finding help for their parenting. They are always talking about the books that they are reading, and what they are learning from the Bible.

They have found special joy in raising their children in the "nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4).

My son is also doing great. He's engaged to a girl who he met at church. Right now, she's living with the pastor's family, learning a lot about what it means to follow Jesus.

As a result, he has had a lot of time with the pastor of the church. I have never seen him so excited about what he is learning from the pastor. He works with some people who don't go to church, but are interested in spiritual things. So, he leads a lunch-time Bible study every Friday. He thinks that some of them are softening to the gospel.

I'm so happy for both of them.

Parents, is this where your true happiness lies? Can you say with John, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth" (3 John 4)?

This past week in the Weekly Word, I put a link to an article entitled, "The Dangers of First-Time Obedience."<sup>[2]</sup> First-time obedience is what we aim for with our children. "Children be obedient to your parents in all things," (Colossians 3:19). And yet, there's a danger that the reason behind it is wrong. We don't aim for our children to obey the first time to be "in control" of our children. Nor do we aim that they obey us because we want all to see how good of parents we can be. We aim that they obey our loving instructions to them that they might learn to walk in the truth. So that when they are outside of our homes, they will give us great joy.

Sadly, there are many parents who do a great job at first-time obedience, when the children are young, because they are simply controlling their behavior. But, as they grow older, these same children often rebel against the heavy handed parents.

Parents, I simply say this: aim to teach your children to walk in the truth. So that you can pray that their physical health would match their spiritual health. Is this what you are aiming for in the raising of your children? Are you praying for them?

I was talking with Yvonne about this yesterday. It's not like we make a concerted effort toward these things, but I don't think a day goes by when we don't pray for all of our children. Whether it's at the dinner table or family worship or at night before bed, the spiritual well-being of our children is on our minds and we are praying for them.

Well, let's come to verse 5, because it is here that we see how Gaius is walking in the truth. And it's here that we see our lesson from Gaius. He is ...

## **1. Gaius (verses 1-8) - A Servant to the Saints**

And his ministry is worthy of being followed. Look there at verse 5, ...

3 John 5-8

Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.

Apparently, some missionaries had come to their church. And Gaius loved them and served them and helped them.

John doesn't give us the details of exactly what Gaius did. But his efforts were known to John and to all the church, because, verse 6 says that they "testified to your love before the church."

And perhaps what was so striking about these guys coming was that they were "strangers." Gaius didn't know them. Nor did the church know them. But, they received them and helped them all the same. This is true hospitality--welcoming strangers.

Now, I suspect that these men had some sort of reputation in the greater church of being faithful laborers for the gospel, because John had told the "elect lady" in 2 John,

2 John 10-11

If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.

But, on the contrary, if you help a faithful laborer of the Lord, receiving him into your house, giving him a greeting, then you "take part in his fruitful works." And this is exactly what Gaius did. And by "serving the saints," he was "walking in the truth." John's counsel to Gaius was...

3 John 6

... to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God.

What that means is that you "help them financially." I say that because that's what John explains in verses 7 and 8.

3 John 7-8

For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.

These guys are going out into the world, preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. And they had determined that they were going to accept nothing from the Gentiles. They weren't going to ask for money. They weren't going to take an offering. In fact, it looks like they would even refuse to take any money given to them by the Gentiles. In this way, they were acting like the apostle Paul, who explained to those at Corinth, "If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more?" (1 Corinthians 9:11-12).

Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.

1 Corinthians 9:13-15

Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision. For I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting.

In other words, Paul explained that it isn't wrong to take money for preaching the gospel. But, there are circumstances where doing so would "put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ" (1 Cor. 9:12). When someone comes to speak, expecting something in return, their motives can be doubted. "You are just speaking this way, so that you will get paid."

But Paul (and apparently these missionaries who Gaius hosted) decided to take a different route. In order to demonstrate how free the gospel was, they came and spoke free of charge. But, someone has to support those who go out. I would suspect that these men, like Paul, worked with their own hands, as Paul did at times. But Paul was also supported by funds. These missionaries also were willing to receive support from those who have already believed. Thus, John says (in verse 8), ...

3 John 8

Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.

And I simply ask you, "Are you a servant to the saints?" Are you demonstrating your love for others by helping them? Especially those who are "going out for the sake of the name" (verse 7); are you helping financially? Do you give to any missionaries? I would encourage you to find a missionary (or two or three or ten), who you know, and who you trust is doing a good work, and support them.

And here's the good news. In doing so, we become "fellow workers for the truth" (verse 8). You may not be able to go. But, you may be able to help those who go. In so doing, you can form a partnership in the gospel (see Philippians 1:5).

Well, there is Gaius (verses 1-8) - A Servant to the Saints. Let's turn our attention now to ...

## 2. Diotrephes (verses 7-10) - A Guardian of the Gate

Gaius was a good example. Diotrephes is a bad example. Let's read what John writes about him.

3 John 9-10

I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.

Now, apparently, Diotrephes was some sort of leader in the church, as he had the ability to "put [people] out of the church" (verse 10). But his ways were all wrong.

First of all, we see that Diotrephes, ...

### 1. Likes to be first (verse 9).

Look there in verse 9, ...

3 John 9

I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority.

This is what the Pharisees loved! Jesus denounced their incessant love for prominence. He said, ...

Matthew 23:5-7

They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi

by others.

I have no doubt that this is where Diotrephes learned his leadership: from the Pharisees, who led for show and for honor and for power. But this is contrary to true spiritual leadership. Remember when Jesus said, ...

Mark 10:42-44

... You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.

Diotrephes was like the Gentiles. He lorded his authority over the church. He "stops" people in the church (verse 10). He "puts" people out of the church (verse 10).

He thought that spiritual leadership was about exerting your power, rather than extending your love in service toward those whom you lead. Of course, this was the example of Jesus.

Mark 10:45

For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Instead of exerting his authority, Jesus laid down his life. Those who lead his church are called to do the same.

Diotrephes also, ...

## **2. Resists authority (verse 9).**

In the case of Diotrephes, he resisted the authority of John. John, of course, was one of the apostles who knew Jesus during his ministry upon the earth. He wrote the gospel of John from eye-witness testimony. He received the vision of the future and recorded it in the book of Revelation. Paul called him a "pillar" in the church (Galatians 2:9).

But none of that mattered to Diotrephes. He refused to acknowledge John's authority (verse 9). Though John would rather be known simply as "the elder," he was willing to assert his authority and set Diotrephes in his place. Look at verse 10, ...

3 John 10

So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us.

This is how he resisted authority. He spoke badly of those who were respected in the church, thereby giving reason why to disregard their words. We don't know if such a confrontation took place. We have no record of it in Scripture. But if it did, I am sure that the people of God would have seen through the ways of Diotrephes. And I'm equally sure that some would have followed Diotrephes right out the door.

It's the nature of church conflict. Even when the ways are clear, wicked men will have their following. John speaks further of his wickedness in verse 10, ...

3 John 10

... And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.

Diotrephes ...

## **1. Likes to be first (verse 9)**

## **2. Resists authority (verse 9)**

and

## **3. Stops ministry (verse 10)**

Unlike Gaius, Diotrephes wasn't welcoming the brothers into the church (verses 5-6). Instead, he was even resisting those who wanted to do so. Which, reflecting back upon Gaius and his deeds, they become even more commendable, as they were done with resistance from Diotrephes, a leader in the church.

This is where I get the main lesson of Diotrephes for us this morning: Diotrephes (verses 7-10) - A Guardian of the Gate.

There are leaders in the church who see their whole purpose in leadership as standing guard at the gate of the church, making sure that nothing bad comes in. And I simply say this: as a leader in the church, there is nothing more frustrating than having a "guardian of the gate" on your leadership team. One who constantly stops the ministry opportunities that come along the way.

One of the tasks of a leader is to stir things up. I'm travelling to India to stir things up. We give opportunities to be a part of that by giving gifts that we will give. I meet with the kids at Kids Klub to stir things up. We have Vacation Bible School this summer. I'm seeking to support the Krauss' in stirring things up.

I make known opportunities like Kids Hope USA, tutoring in the schools an hour each week and hosting high school kids from China. I seek to put good resources in your hands (the Weekly Word, books, ...)

But, when you have someone who tries to stop every initiative, it is wearying. By God's grace, this is not Phil or Darryn. If anything, they have allowed me to run. And whenever they have stopped me, I know that it is them looking out for my good when I want to put too much on my plate. They have been like Jethro to me, who came to Moses and helped him see a better way, that he might not burn himself out.

Lest you think that you can't be following the example of Diotrephes because you are not in any leadership position at a church, I encourage you to think again. It is very possible for such a spirit to raise havoc in a church. All you need to do is be on the negative end and constantly discourage the initiatives of the leadership by vocally expressing your disapproval. Now, I'm not asking that you go along with everything that the leadership of a church recommends. But if your default position is one of doubt and resistance, then you may very well be following after the example of Diotrephes.

Our last man this morning is Demetrius. This is my third point, ...

### **3. Demetrius (verses 11-12) - A Testimony of the Good**

3 John 11-12

Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God.

Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself. We also add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true.

Verse 11 is mostly a transition verse. It instructs to not imitate evil. As in, do not imitate Diotrephes.

As you read verse 12, you will have to look long and hard for any specific of what made Demetrius such a good example for all. All we know is that he "received a good testimony from everyone." And without any specifics, it means that his example can be applied in all sorts of circumstances, from the one who silently serves the widows to one who vacuums the floor after every service.

So, do you have a good testimony? How do people describe you? Can others add their testimony about you as a good testimony? Is your life such that the truth is being lived out?

3 John 11

Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good.

May we all hear those words, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:23).

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on April 10, 2016 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see [www.rvbc.cc](http://www.rvbc.cc).

---

[1] Acts 19:29; 20:4; Romans 16:23; 1 Cor. 1:14

[2] <https://singingandslaying.com/2016/03/09/dangers-of-first-time-obedience/>