

## The Letter of 3 John (An Introduction)

Good morning everyone. I hope your day has gotten off to a great start! We are beginning a new book (letter) of the Bible today called "3 John". It is called 3 John because it seems to be the 3<sup>rd</sup> letter in a series of letters from the Apostle John to the same area of churches...although this letter and 2 John were written to specific individuals who lived in that area.

As a way of introducing this letter, let's look at the first verse. We'll start with some overall observations and then break this verse down.

*"The elder, to my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth."*

### **WHAT DOES IT SAY?**

- I. From the elder
  - A. To my friend Gaius
  - B. whom I love in the truth

As always, when starting a new book (letter) of the Bible it is good to read through the letter a couple of times. This gives us a topographical look at it before we dig in and tear it apart verse by verse. After doing this, within just a few minutes I discovered some interesting things.

There are 4 names mentioned in this letter. **John** (verse 1, elder – we will talk about this in a minute), **Gaius** (verse 1, a dear friend of John's), **Diotrephes** (verse 9, who has some measure of authority in the church where Gaius attends), and **Demetrius** (verse 12, who is the leader of a traveling group of teachers sent by John).

The overall purpose of the letter was to thank Gaius for his ministry to the groups of traveling teachers who had visited the area before (5-8) and to encourage him to continue to do so, especially to Demetrius' group who either delivered this letter or was planning to visit soon (11-12).

Diotrephes, however, had stopped welcoming these groups of teachers. He also was making trouble for anyone in the church who was helping them (10). John had written Diotrephes directly to talk with him about his matter (9) but he would not cooperate with John, deciding to stop following John's leadership and refusing to honor John's apostolic authority.

### **WHAT DOES IT MEAN?**

This is a personal letter. It is structured like this: a greeting (1), a prayer for good health (2), the body of the letter (3-13), and another greeting (14). In my research, I came across and read another letter from this same era. This letter was from a ship captain to his brother (had nothing to do with the Bible) and it had the exact same format: a greeting, wishes for good health, the body of the letter, and another greeting at the end. So we conclude that John's format was common for the day. So this letter, in one sense, is a personal letter from one friend to another, written in the common style of the day, but it is also a letter that contains God's Word to us, as we will see over the next several days.

The author of this letter refers to himself as *The elder...* - Although nowhere in the letter does it say the name John, Biblical scholars (from church leaders who lived at this time and wrote other letters, as well as, scholarship up through the ages) almost all attribute this letter to the Apostle John.

The word elder simply means an older man. John was writing to a friend who would know him by this description. John was an aged servant of Christ and the Church. This term was also used to describe officials in the church at that time (Acts 14:21-23). Isn't it interesting that John does not start his letter putting his authority over the churches out in front? He simply starts with "this is from the old servant of Christ". John seems very humble, doesn't he?

*...to my dear friend Gaius* - Gaius is called a dear friend three times in this letter (2, 5, 11). They were obviously close... had spent much time together... had the utmost confidence in each other. The name Gaius was a very common name back then. In fact, this name is mentioned several times in the Scripture...a man named Gaius from Macedonia ministered with Paul at the riot in Ephesus (Acts 19:29), a man named Gaius from Derbe ministered with Paul in Greece and on into Jerusalem (Acts 20:4), it was a man named Gaius who Paul

stayed with in Corinth and who Paul baptized (Rom. 16:23, 1 Cor. 1:14) and lastly, the man named in this letter.

*...whom I love in the truth* - This phrase was also very common. It simply means that this person is a brother in Christ and they enjoy ministry together. They were bound as friends and fellow ministers with the truth of God. It was God's truth that brought them together, kept them together, and gave them a common purpose.

### **WHAT DO WE DO WITH IT?**

1. I find it interesting that there were these types of problems in the early church. I mean...we sometimes think of the church back then as being a bit more pure and productive. But those churches had "issues" too. Can you imagine refusing to follow an Apostle... a person who knew Jesus personally while HE was on the earth... a person who walked with Jesus, talked with HIM, and was personally trained by HIM? What's with you Diotrefes?

In some strange way this concept comforts me. I mean if the Apostles had church problems...we should expect to have them too. There will always be disagreements. We will have differences of opinion. And sometimes a problem arises because of a carnal, self serving person associated with the church. That is just part of the journey.

Jesus compared this idea to that of harvesting wheat (Matthew 13:24-30). He said those truly following God were wheat and those who were not were tares (weeds). He also said Satan intentionally sows weeds into God's field of wheat (25). Unfortunately, wheat and tares grow so closely together that to tear the weeds out before the harvest time would probably damage the wheat crop, as well. Jesus said only at the time of the judgment will the two be thoroughly separated. The point? There will always be weeds among the wheat. We are to just keep growing and following the Truth. God will judge and separate with perfect judgment one day. Be encouraged. Just keep your eyes on Christ and not on the weeds.

2. I love the fact that the Apostle John had a "dear" friend. I'm not sure if you went to the Romans 16 reference a few moments ago. If you can, turn to it now. Read verses 1-16.

Look at all the friends and close companionships that Paul had. Paul remembered them by name. Did you notice verse 13? Paul said for

those in the church at Rome to *"Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too."* Wow!

My point is this. **Working and building the kingdom of God is all about relationships.** It is not about authority and positions, although they are needed. It is not about programs and policies, although they have their place. Because of the Gospel we meet and love people. It is about sharing your lives with others...about making such an investment in the lives of others that they never forget it...about loving the truth together and making sure we each submit to it.

It is about opening up your life (I know it feels risky) to others. It is about learning to consider other believers as family. It is about not drawing as much of a distinctive line between birth family and family of God. It is about having such a commitment to our brothers and sisters in Christ that even when they do or say dumb things we don't judge or withdraw from them but continue to love them with Christ's love. It is about accepting people for who they are and where they are and loving them into God's perfect will. It is about letting God determine what His perfect will is for them (and not us ☺).

I think this is exactly the kind of love Jesus was talking about when he told his disciples, *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."* (John 13:34-35).

Did you notice the word *"must"*? It means that it is not an option. How about the last phrase of verse 35? Jesus said that by loving each other with the same love Christ has for us...people everywhere will know we belong to Him.

Can you even imagine what would happen in churches across our cities if we loved each other this way? The secular community would see Jesus in us and would know we belonged to Him. They would want to be part of a community that is really living out the life/character of Jesus. I already see it beginning to happen and it is truly life changing.

Think on these things today. Are our relationships healthy? Are they maturing? Are you making new relationships? Would you ask the Father if He is pleased with the quality of those relationships and if not, what you should do about it? *Pastor Will*

## The Letter of 3 John

*<sup>2</sup>Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well. <sup>3</sup>It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth. <sup>4</sup>I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth. (2-4)*

### **WHAT DOES IT SAY?**

#### I. Dear friend:

- A. I pray you may have good health
- B. I pray all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well

#### II. It gives me great joy

- A. To have some brothers...tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth.
- B. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

### **WHAT DOES IT MEAN?**

*<sup>2</sup>Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.* - As I mentioned yesterday, while this is a very sincere prayer/wish for Gaius, this part of the letter was part of the normal format of all casual letters. To write a proper letter back then, you always followed the greeting with a prayer or wish for good health.

Even though this was part of the normal format of a letter, John means that he has actually prayed that Gaius would have good health and that all in his life would go well, just as his soul is obviously doing well (he tells us why his soul is doing well in verses 3 and 4). We know John's sincerity because he begins with the words "*Dear friend*" which means beloved friend...close friend.

In our Christian culture today some believers think they see in John's words a type of promise to all believers. They read verse 2 and say that John was declaring a principle that all believers should claim

and live by. The principle is...if your soul is prospering then you should be prospering physically (no sickness) and prospering in all areas of life (have lots of money). They also say that if you are not experiencing physical and financial prosperity then your soul is not right with God. Usually you find this type of teaching in the churches that are in association with the PTL and TBN television networks.

On the surface it sounds wonderful, doesn't it? I mean the "no sickness" and "lots of money" part 😊. All you have to do is to love God and you would never be sick and you will be rich. If God were to ever put this one up for a vote...I'd be for it.

But sadly, our brothers and sisters who think this way are mistaken. They unfortunately do what many do when it comes to interpreting Scripture. They take the words in a verse out of context, read into it a meaning the author never intended; one in which the rest of Scripture does not support.

If one would take but a simple walk through the Scriptures one would find that even some of the great spiritual giants of the 1<sup>st</sup> century (Paul and Peter) were not always healthy (2 Cor. 12:7-10) nor wealthy (Acts 3:6). John's words in verse 2 are not a promise...they are simply a prayer and a wish for a friend to enjoy good health and God's blessing in every area of life.

*<sup>3</sup>It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth.* - Obviously... some other Christians were traveling through the area where Gaius lived and had the chance to spend some time with him. The next time they saw John they told him that Gaius lived a life of truth and holiness.

John said that it gave him "*great joy*" to hear how Gaius' spiritual life was growing and maturing. In fact, he says that nothing gave him more joy than to hear that one of his "*children*" was "*walking in the truth.*" Gaius was probably saved under John's ministry and John had a kind of "spiritual father/mentor" position in Gaius' life.

### **WHAT DO WE DO WITH IT?**

1. The first thing that caught my attention in today's study was the phrase "*walk in the truth.*" It is repeated twice (3, 4). It reminds me that truth is not only to be intellectually digested but it must also find expression in the day to day of life through obedience.

John had joy because Gaius walked in the truth. He not only knew the truth but lived it out. He made choices to do the truth. No matter what life threw at him, he chose to follow truth to the point that his life was characterized as one who was *"faithful to the truth."*

What do people know of you? If someone were to ask a friend or a family member to describe you...to characterize you...would they use the phrase "faithful to the truth" in their description? Would your co-workers say that you were committed to God's truth...to doing the truth...no matter what? Would your wife or husband or daughter or son say that you walk in truth?

When the opportunity to lie or steal or gossip comes along, what do you do? When the temptation to hate someone or to get revenge or to lash out in anger comes to you, what do you do? Do you do what's right or what's convenient? Do you call upon God and ask Him to help you follow His truth or do you react out of instinct?

If Gaius' lifestyle made John happy...can you imagine how it made God feel? It really matters to God whether or not you are a truth doer!

2. Did you notice what the *"brothers"* who had visited Gaius and then later spoke to John about him, did? They spread good gossip about Gaius. Think about it! They had witnessed something good about Gaius and then went and told someone else.

Isn't that cool? Instead of spreading things that would hurt him or tear his reputation down, they were part of building him up and encouraging him. They blessed his reputation and helped other people think well of him.

I wonder what would happen in your life if you would commit to being a "good" gossiper. By that phrase I don't mean someone who gossips very well 😊. I mean someone who refuses to harm with his words but who is committed to lifting up with his words... someone who sees the good in others and tells others about that good in others.

I guarantee if this became your habit it would revolutionize the way you looked at life and others....and it would forever change how others looked at you.

You are in my prayers today. *Pastor Will*

## The Letter of 3 John

*<sup>5</sup>Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you. <sup>6</sup>They have told the church about your love. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. <sup>7</sup>It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. <sup>8</sup>We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth. (5-8)*

### **WHAT DOES IT SAY?**

Sometimes when you are trying to outline a passage, it is helpful to notice subjects and verbs and see if there are patterns developing. Did you notice the back and forth with "you" and "they"? Let's outline the passage using these as reference points.

#### I. You

- A. are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers
- B. will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God.
- C. ought to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth

#### II. They

- A. are strangers to you
- B. have told the church about your love
- C. went out for the sake of the Name, receiving no help from the pagans

### **WHAT DOES IT MEAN?**

*<sup>5</sup>Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you.* - In the church back then, there were three different kinds of ministries within the community of faith. There were the apostles (those who saw Jesus face to face and were among the first leaders), traveling groups of teachers (who would travel from region to region to strengthen and revive the brethren and win new converts), and then there were the church pastors (who stayed with a particular group of Christians to shepherd, teach, and grow the church).

Early on in first century Christianity a problem developed. On occasion, groups of traveling teachers would come to visit who did not come from the apostles, who taught wrong concepts about God, and who would seek to financially gain from the church community to whom they were visiting. In fact, some bad people saw this type of ministry as a way to make money and mooch off of sincere people, all the while satisfying their selfish egos.

In fact, John's 2<sup>nd</sup> letter addresses this type of group. In it, John told Christians to not help those who came teaching something different from what the apostles had taught them (2 John 10-11). Consequently, all groups of traveling teachers suffered because of the reputation of a corrupt few. Some communities of faith were not helping even the good guys any longer.

It might also be helpful to know that back in that culture, travel was hard and inns (motels) were often filled with filth and disease, as well as, people who wanted to take your money. It was very common (and smart) to make arrangements to stay with people you knew or with people who knew someone who knew you. So John is writing to Gaius, first of all, to tell him that he has done well up to this point because he had been helping the good guys, even when others would not.

*<sup>6</sup>They have told the church about your love. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God.* - Those groups who Gaius had helped told other churches how loving and faithful he was. Word spread and eventually got back to John. John commends Gaius for what he has done and encourages him, whenever he has the opportunity, to send these groups of traveling teachers on their way in a way that would please God.

*<sup>7</sup>It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans.* - John speaks to the motive the "good guys" had for becoming traveling teachers. He said they do it for the "*sake of the Name*". In other words they go out because they love Christ and want every person to hear of His name and Gospel. They don't do it for profit. In fact, they pay a big price for always being on the move. They often sacrificed family, friends, a home, and all the benefits of living life consistently in one place.

*<sup>8</sup>We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth.* - John ends this passage with saying that

every Christian ("*we*") should always show hospitality to the ministers who sacrifice much to be faithful with the truth. He said in so doing, we are working together for the sake of the truth. So John's second reason for writing is to encourage Gaius to continue to show hospitality.

### **WHAT DO WE DO WITH IT?**

There are a couple of applications that come to mind today.

1. Let's be careful not to stereotype Christians or particular groups of Christians. These traveling teachers were stereotyped because of the dishonesty of a few. Consequently, people put the good guys into the same mix with the bad guys and the work of the Kingdom suffered. People stopped trusting. They stopped showing God's love. They stopped supporting ministry that God had called the teachers to do and them to support.

2. Notice the word "hospitality". The word means to give a generous and cordial reception to guests...to welcome and offer a pleasant environment. God says a lot about hospitality in the Scriptures. Let me give you a few examples. In Romans 12:13, Paul tells us it is necessary for the saints to be given to hospitality. In I Timothy 3:2, Paul tells Timothy that Christian leaders should be in the habit of giving hospitality. In Titus 1:8, Paul talks about being lovers of hospitality. **One more...** In 1 Peter 4:9, Peter tells the church to offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.

Our culture can be scary sometimes. There are a lot of mean and selfish people out there. It seems that every time I turn around, somebody wants some of my money...some of my time. At times, we get bombarded with people who don't have our best interest in mind.

It is tempting to withdraw...to never answer the door...to never answer the phone...to hide from everyone. Sometimes, we can get so overwhelmed by the world that we shut even our brothers and sisters in Christ out too.

Let's be careful to not allow the fallen world we live in to influence us to abandon hospitality. Let's be led by the Spirit (whose fruit is love, Galatians 5:22). Let's not let our world rob us of the joy of fellowship...from the goodness of trusting in friendships...from doing the right thing in treating everyone with generosity and friendliness.

3. The last verse in today's passage says, *"We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth."* I think the equivalent of *"such men"* for us today would be our missionaries. They leave family, home, and career to go to far away places to share the Name and Gospel of Jesus Christ. I know a missionary family where the wife left a thriving law practice and a six figure income to go to a foreign field and live in an old run down makeshift of a home, all because they were convinced God had invited them to. They love it.

John says that it is only right that we show hospitality to them when we can. This may mean for us to help them have a comfortable roof over their heads and their basic needs met when they return to America and visit our churches on furlough. It would certainly mean that we should help financially so they can spend their full time loving and caring for people who haven't heard the Good News of Jesus Christ.

I know we are all feeling the hurt in our wallets these days. The dollar isn't going as far as it used to. But let's not let that stop us when God invites us to participate in what He is doing through others.

Have a great day,

*Pastor Will*

Will Mackey  
Day 4

## The Letter of 3 John

*<sup>9</sup>I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. <sup>10</sup>So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church. (9-10)*

### **WHAT DOES IT SAY?**

Good morning! I hope your day has gotten off to a great start. If not, let's do something about that right now ☺. Let's spend some time in His Word.

Allow me to refresh our memories regarding the story going on in this letter. There are 4 names mentioned in this letter. **John** (verse 1, the apostle), **Gaius** (verse 1, a dear friend of John's), **Diotrephes** (verse 9, who has some measure of authority in the church where Gaius attended) and **Demetrius** (verse 12, who seems to be the leader of a traveling group of teachers).

The overall purpose of the letter was to thank Gaius for his ministry to the groups of traveling teachers who had visited the area before (5-8) and to encourage him to continue to do so, especially to Demetrius' group who either delivered this letter or was planning to visit soon (11-12). Unfortunately, there is a problem...namely a man named Diotrephes. Here is where we begin today's study. Let's outline verses 9 and 10.

- I. I wrote to the church (to address this matter) but...
  - A. Diotrephes
    1. who loves to be first
    2. will have nothing to do with us
    3. he is gossiping maliciously about us
    4. not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers
    5. he also stops those who want to do so (help the brothers)
    6. he puts them out of the church

## **WHAT DOES IT MEAN?**

*I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes...* - Our passage today focuses on a man named Diotrephes. We are not certain who this man is. It appears that he might be the pastor of the church in that area. At the very least, he is a person who has been given (or has taken) a significant amount of authority over this local community of faith.

John, one of the original apostles (who probably oversaw a large region of churches) had evidently sent a man named Demetrius to minister to this community of faith. Demetrius seems to be part of a group of traveling teachers.

John had written ahead of time to the pastor or leader of this community of faith named Diotrephes. Diotrephes evidently wrote back and told John three things. (1) He would not submit to John's authority - *but Diotrephes who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us.* (2) He would not welcome anyone that John sent - *he refuses to welcome the brothers* and (3) If any of his church members tried to help John, he would put them out of the church - *He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church.*

This did not sit well with John. Based upon what Diotrephes wrote, John discerned that Diotrephes has some serious spiritual problems and was really not fit to lead this church (verse 11). He listed these problems out for Gaius. (1) Diotrephes was selfish - *but Diotrephes who loves to be first* (2) He was spreading hateful lies about John and his ministry team - *<sup>10</sup>So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us.* (3) He was personally trying to stop God's Truth from being taught - *he refuses to welcome the brothers.* (4) He was manipulating other people so they would do what he wanted - *He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church.*

For that moment, all John could do was to go around the problem (Diotrephes) and ask Gaius to welcome Demetrius and his group of teachers. For, if they could find lodging and the ability to earn money for food, etc. then they could stay in the area for a while, ministering and teaching God's Truth.

However, John has no intention of ignoring the problem with Diotrephes for long - *<sup>10</sup>So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing...* John believed that if he could go to this church in person, he could solve this matter, once and for all.

### **WHAT DO WE DO WITH IT?**

1. This is one of those times when we look at a main character in the Scriptures and learn what not to do... learn who not to be like. From Diotrephes' bad example, we learn four characteristics of a good leader (or any Christian for that matter).

- A good Christian leader (or any Christian for that matter) does not put himself first. He puts God's interests first, other's needs second, and himself last.
- A good Christian leader (or any Christian for that matter) does not use his speech to destroy the reputations of others. The word "gossip" is not in his vocabulary. He uses his speech to build people up... to bring unity.
- A good Christian leader (or any Christian for that matter) has a heart and a respect for others and God's call on their lives. He realizes that he is not "all that" and that he needs God's ministry through others.
- A good Christian leader (or any Christian for that matter) does not try to manipulate the thoughts and actions of others. At times he may need to lead with strong assertiveness but he never forgets to respect the right of others to think on their own...to choose their own ways...to follow their own consciences.

2. What is the difference between what Diotrephes was saying about John and his ministers (*gossiping maliciously about us*) and what John was saying to Gaius about Diotrephes in verses 9 and 10? Was John gossiping about Diotrephes to Gaius? If so, how so? If not, why not? Does verse 11 help us figure this out? We'll talk about this tomorrow.

For today...think on #1 above. Are you modeling the characteristics of a good Christian leader (or any Christian for that matter 😊)? Are you putting God's interests first? Are you using your speech to build up others? Do you respect the ministry of others and realize you need them? Do you respect the rights of others to think on their own and to follow their own consciences?

Why don't you talk to our Father about each of these areas today and allow Him to show you where you are on this journey?

Have a blessed day...

*Pastor Will*

## The Letter of 3 John

<sup>11</sup>*Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God.*

<sup>12</sup>*Demetrius is well spoken of by everyone—and even by the truth itself. We also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true. <sup>13</sup>I have much to write you, but I do not want to do so with pen and ink. <sup>14</sup>I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. Peace to you. The friends here send their greetings. Greet the friends there by name. (11-14)*

### **WHAT DOES IT SAY?**

In the passage for today, John was finishing his short letter to Gaius. It is quick and to the point. Let's outline it to see its content.

- I. Do not imitate what is evil but do imitate what is good.
  - A. Anyone who does what is good is from God
  - B. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God
  
- II. Demetrius is well spoken of by everyone and even by the truth itself.
  - A. We speak well of him
  - B. Our testimony is true
  
- III. I have much to write to you
  - A. But I don't want to do so with pen and ink
  - B. I hope to see you soon so we can talk face to face
  - C. Peace to you
  - D. The friends here send their greetings
  - E. Greet the friends there by name

### **WHAT DOES IT MEAN?**

<sup>11</sup>*Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good.* - Did you think about the questions I left you with yesterday? They were: *What is the difference between what Diotrephes was saying about John and his ministers (gossiping maliciously about us) and what John was saying to Gaius about Diotrephes in verses 9 and 10? Was John gossiping about Diotrephes to Gaius too? Well, what did you think?*

Let's examine it. John obviously believes that what Diotrephes is saying about him is gossip and what he is saying to Gaius about Diotrephes is necessary to advance the Kingdom of God. John labels what Diotrephes is saying and doing as sin. He listed them out: selfishness, gossiping, interfering with the Truth being taught, and controlling/manipulating people.

Let's look at each man's motives for a moment. Diotrephes' motive was to be first (9), to refuse the apostle John any influence upon his church (9), to ruin John's reputation (10), to stop teachers of the truth from having access to his church (10), and to stop those in his church from helping the apostle John (10).

Now let's look at John's motives. His motives for talking about this publicly were threefold. First, he wanted those in Gaius' community to be able to hear the Truth taught (9). Second, he wanted to help Diotrephes **be** accountable to the church, to stop sinning, and to restore a proper people/leader relationship (10). Third, he wanted to protect Gaius from being bullied or spiritually influenced by Diotrephes - *do not imitate what is evil but what is good, (11).*

The difference between gossip and public talk about sin is in the motive of the individual. Gossip seeks to put down and destroy. Strong, open talk regarding someone's sin seeks to convict the conscience and restore the person to right living.

It appears that John had already tried to talk with Diotrephes person to person, but to no avail. Jesus himself told us in Matthew 18:15-17 that if the person to person situation doesn't work we might need to bring in a few others to help the person who is sinning to repent and reconcile. It looks like John was on step 2 of a 4 step process.

Sometimes strong, open talk is needed to get to the bottom of a sin. Sometimes sin has to be brought out in the open, particularly if it is happening with a leader in the church. It is not pretty. It is hard but necessary to keep the sin from growing and from influencing others to follow in its path.

*Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God.* - John is giving the young Gaius a lesson in theological ethics. By "**good**" he means (in context) Godly things that support the truth. By "**evil**" he means things that fight the truth and

try to hinder it. John is clear; a man who is in relationship with Christ does not live in a way that Christ forbids. He does not give his life to hindering God's truth from getting through to people.

*<sup>12</sup>Demetrius is well spoken of by everyone—and even by the truth itself. We also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true. -*  
Remember, Demetrius is the traveling teacher who may also be the leader of a group of these type of teachers. He is probably delivering this letter to Gaius.

John is simply saying that Diotrephes had no good reason to refuse to welcome Demetrius. He gives three reasons why Gaius can support him. (1) Churches all over the region had testified to what a good ministry Demetrius had. (2) The quality of his work could only have been produced by the truth itself. (3) John and other church leaders knew him personally and highly recommended him.

*<sup>13</sup>I have much to write you, but I do not want to do so with pen and ink. <sup>14</sup>I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. Peace to you. The friends here send their greetings. Greet the friends there by name. -* John had so much he wanted to talk with Gaius about. He anticipated a trip to the area soon and would wait until he could talk face to face.

The end of verse 14 was a common way to end a letter. The word "*peace*" (eirene) as John used it here isn't necessarily a religious one (like shalom). It simply means, "to live in quiet rest, with success". John says, "*the friends*" (philos) from here, say hello. Tell "*the friends*" there, hello. These friends were fellow Christians who wished to convey love and support.

### **WHAT DO WE DO WITH IT?**

1. Did you notice the spiritual battle described in this letter?

Let's zero in on Demetrius (the teacher) for a moment. Look at this through his eyes. He was in a full time ministry. He was answering God's call on his life. He had stepped out in faith...perhaps leaving a family behind for weeks or months at a time...perhaps leaving a steady job behind and all the comforts of home.

The devil tried to hinder his ministry. He gained influence in the life of a man (Diotrephes) who had power in a local community of faith. The enemy, through Diotrephes, successfully stopped Demetrius from

teaching Truth in that church (temporarily). Aren't you glad that this is not the end of the story?

The Spirit used John to speak to Gaius who also lived in the same area as Diotrephes. The Spirit (through John) told Gaius to receive Demetrius and support his ministry so that Truth could be taught in that community. Here is the point: when the devil successfully shut a door...God opened up another one.

The Spirit also used John to speak to Diotrephes. He confronted him once by letter and when that wasn't successful, he was going to visit him personally. During that visit he was going to bring Diotrephes' attitudes and actions to the church's full attention and try to bring him to a place of repentance and restoration. Notice the redemptive nature of the Spirit. God wants all people everywhere to come to the truth no matter what they have done.

Notice the weapons in this battle: Truth on God's side and lies on the devil's side. The battlefield is the hearts and minds of individuals. Humans influence the earth they live on and the people they live with. The enemy seeks to use that influence for his purposes. All he has to do is to get us to disobey God's Truth. When this happens, we naturally begin to follow lies. And when that happens, our influence on others begins to take on a darker character.

The enemy's constant struggle is against Truth ...against Truth being explained...being revealed...against it getting a foothold in a life...a group of people...a community. Our ministry is to take Truth to where people live...to speak it...to demonstrate it...to unfold it in such a way they can understand it. We are to live it so distinctively that people recognize it, desire it, and seek it.

What about your life? Can you see your life through these Biblical lenses? Can you spot the spiritual battles going on in the day to day ebb and flow of your life? Perhaps the battles surface at work?...or at home?...or in the neighborhood?

How are you doing with taking the Truth to where people are? Are the natural influences you have in the lives of others being used as a transport for the Truth? Tough questions...important answers.

*Pastor Will*

## The Letter of 3 John

Good morning! I know we “technically” finished our study of all the verses in 3 John yesterday but I think there is one more devotional left in it ☺. I went back through the five devotionals we’ve done so far. I especially re-read the application parts...the “WHAT DO WE DO WITH IT?” parts again. Let me give us a quick look back.

The Lord taught us truth in the following areas: *church conflicts, Kingdom relationships, walking in truth, being faithful to truth, how to be a “good” gossiper, how not to stereotype other Christians, financial generosity, hospitality, good/bad leadership, destructive gossip verses needed redemptive conversation, and spiritual battles in our everyday lives.* John’s small letter had a lot in it, didn’t it?

How about one more application? Step back and let’s look at the entire letter as a whole. What is it? It is a letter of encouragement from an older, experienced Christian to a younger, less experienced Christian. As I read and re-read this letter, it occurred to me that not only did God, through John, teach us truth regarding all of the above mentioned areas of life...but he also modeled for us how to write an effective letter of encouragement. Let me show you what I mean.

### SIX INGREDIENTS OF A SPIRITUALLY ENCOURAGING LETTER:

1. Affirm your love and commitment to the person.

*<sup>1</sup>The elder, To my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth.*

2. Share a prayer you have for the person.

*<sup>2</sup>Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.*

3. Share some good gossip you have heard about the person.

*<sup>3</sup>It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth. <sup>4</sup>I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.*

4. Encourage the person by highlighting his/her faithfulness, spiritual fruit, and influence on others.

*<sup>5</sup>Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you. <sup>6</sup>They have told the church about your love. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. <sup>7</sup>It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. <sup>8</sup>We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth.*

5. Encourage the person to continue to be faithful by drawing attention to a possible future temptation and by giving insight he/she may need to successfully walk in victory.

*<sup>9</sup>I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. <sup>10</sup>So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church. <sup>11</sup>Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God. <sup>12</sup>Demetrius is well spoken of by everyone—and even by the truth itself. We also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true.*

6. End the letter by planning/scheduling an opportunity to spend some personal time together.

*<sup>13</sup>I have much to write you, but I do not want to do so with pen and ink. <sup>14</sup>I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. Peace to you. The friends here send their greetings. Greet the friends there by name.*

John's letter serves as a great example of how to write a note that will spiritually encourage someone. Is there anyone out there that you need to write?...a son?...daughter?...a friend? The format of this letter would also work if you were writing someone older than you, like a mom, dad, or grandparent.

May the Lord bless your writing efforts and cause encouragement in the hearts of others!

*Pastor Will*