

To Gaius

3 John

November 7, 2010

As we come to the end of John's three letters, we find one that is written to an individual. This brief letter is written to a man named Gaius, who, as with the rest of the church, was loved by John. We are used to John referring to the church members as, "dear friends." We should not be surprised to see Gaius referred to as "dear friend" twice at the very beginning of this letter. This was a man about whom John cared and it was this care that caused John to write to him.

John begins by praying for Gaius the same things we pray for each other. John prays that Gaius is healthy and that his life is going well. John's prayerful expectation is that Gaius' physical and spiritual needs are getting met and that he is getting along well in all areas of his life.

As with last week, after the greeting John expressed joy that he had received good news about the spiritual faithfulness of those to whom he was writing. Last week it was the church. This week John had received news from some men he had sent to Gaius' church that Gaius was among the faithful there and was walking in the truth. I can agree with John that nothing brings greater joy to a pastor than to hear that those in whom he or she has invested time, teaching, and effort, are living faithful lives and growing in the grace of God. It is this sort of message that we live for. Well, that and to hear Jesus say, "Well done."

It would seem that John had sent some representatives to Gaius' church to see how things were

going and help out however they could. Even though Gaius did not know these men, only that they claimed to come from John, he invited them into his home and provided for them during their stay. From what John has written it seems a couple of the men had returned to him with their report while the rest stayed with the church and with Gaius.

It is in response to the report that came back to him that John wrote. We have already noted that John was happy to hear about Gaius' faithfulness to God and hospitality to the men John sent. John told Gaius that the news about him had gotten back, not only to John, but also to the larger church. They were all celebrating together the **unity** that is found in people who are submitted to Jesus' will and obedient to the leading of the Holy Spirit. John is now encouraging Gaius to send them on their way with his blessing and the supplies they need for their journey. Specifically, John wrote, "*You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God.*" (v.6) Whenever we have the opportunity to support and help someone who is in service to God, we would do well to remember what a high calling it is and to make sure they have adequate support.

There are those, especially people on TV who call themselves "evangelists," who say that this means they ought to have the best and most expensive of everything so that they will be honored as servants of God. Nothing could be further from the truth, and that is not what John means here. Those who ask for large sums of money for themselves, or who promise that if you send them a lot of money God will give you even more, preach another

gospel, and not the message of salvation in Jesus. Those who deserve your support will teach salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, and how that salvation effects our lives and relationships by changing us.

After telling Gaius to send the men on their way in a manner worthy of God, John reminded him why they went out in the first place. Of course, all John says about why is that, “*It was for the sake of the Name that they went out.*” (v.7) John didn’t need to go into any more detail. It was ministry in the name of Jesus that had caused these men to go. It was their desire to be faithful to their Master and Savior that had led them to make the journey to begin with as they sought to help John teach and strengthen the churches. Because of this, and because the world was already becoming increasingly hostile to Christians, these messengers would receive no help from those who didn’t believe. Likewise, they wouldn’t seek it.

Since carriers of the gospel of grace do not seek or receive help from those outside the community of faith, John reminded Gaius that we ought to show **hospitality** to them. His reason is interesting. Look at why John argued for showing hospitality to strangers who come in the name of Jesus: “. . . *so that we may work together for the truth.*” (v.8) This brings us back to the theme of truth, which John mentioned at the beginning of this letter, and which is such an important theme in all of his writings.

We are called to work with one another, and with all who are in Jesus Christ to live in the truth and to share the truth. We don’t have to manufacture a story to

get people interested. God has given us the greatest story ever told. We don’t have to come up with some way to get people interested or to change their minds. Jesus said, “*I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.*” (John 12:32) Jesus was speaking there of His crucifixion, but the fact remains, where the **gospel** is preached, the Holy Spirit uses it to draw people to the Father through Jesus. It was true on the day of Pentecost, it was true when Paul went to Athens, it is still true today. All that is required of us is that we hold fast to the truth that has been delivered once for all to the saints, and that we share that truth with a world hungry to hear it. That is what it means to “work together for the truth.”

Now that John had spoken of his joy at hearing of Gaius’ faithfulness, thanked him for showing hospitality to his messengers, and asked him to send them away appropriately blessed and provisioned, John came to another reason for this letter. There was a leader in the church who wanted nothing to do with John or the truth. His name was Diotrophes. Diotrophes had a passion to lead and be in charge, but he did not have a passion for **Jesus**. He wanted to lead the church, but he would not follow anyone else’s lead, even the esteemed apostle, John. Diotrophes wanted to be first and in charge, so he didn’t accept the messengers from John. John’s description of him is telling.

John did not tell Gaius to get together a group of people and expose Diotrophes for what he was. That might just seem to be a power grab by one group of leaders from the leader who had authority by virtue of having the congregation’s ear and a dominant

personality. John gave no instructions to Gaius concerning the problem with Diotrephes at all. This was a problem John intended to handle himself.

John wrote, *“So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing.”* (v.10) It is a little surprising to see the word, “if” here. We would expect John to say, “when I come.” Paul certainly commanded Timothy and Titus to exert their authority when needed and to not allow people like Diotrephes to function in the church. John may just have been acknowledging that God is in control, travel was dangerous, and one never knew if one would reach their destination. John may have been planning to go deal with the situation, but humble enough to recognize he was not in final control. Hence, his “When I get there,” became, “If I come.” It is hard to believe that John would allow Diotrephes to continue, not only because of Diotrephes’ rejection of John’s proper authority, but also because of the damage the man was doing to the church.

Look at John’s description of what Diotrephes was 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.”* (v.10) First, this man who wanted to be a church leader was spreading lies and talking maliciously about other church **leaders**, even the apostle John, himself. To raise himself up, he would bring others down. Gossips and people who speak with the intention of hurting others have no place in church leadership.

Second, not only was he not satisfied with speaking ill of others in leadership, he **refused** to show hospitality to those who came in the name of Jesus. This

may be part of the reason John wrote about how important showing hospitality is. Gaius had set himself apart as an example against the inhospitality of Diotrephes.

Even more, Diotrephes had managed to keep others from showing hospitality to John’s messengers. Not only did he not give them aid, he wouldn’t let **others** in the church offer them aid either. He sinned, and he was also guilty of using his authority to cause others to sin as well.

Finally, and worst of all, Diotrephes put out of the **church** those who sought to do the right thing instead of listening to him. Not only did Diotrephes insist on taking a sinful position, he had enough authority in the church to put out of it anybody who stood for the truth and against him. That’s pretty bold. It also would destroy the church if left unchecked.

John did have some encouraging instructions for Gaius concerning the situation. John wrote, *“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.”* (v.11) While John did not expect Gaius to handle Diotrephes, he did expect him to not follow the bad example. He reminded Gaius to do the right thing, which Gaius was already doing. We see that Gaius accepted into his home the men from John with some cost to his standing in the church. It would have put him in direct conflict with Diotrephes. **Gaius** was to continue imitating what is good, not what is evil.

Note that John called Diotrephes’ actions evil. There is no other word for someone who would speak ill

of God's appointed leadership and those who are working for the truth, who work to cause others to sin, or who bring division into the church or hurt her reputation. John said he would deal with Diotrephes by calling attention to what he was doing. Paul had a clear command for Titus when he faced the same situation.

“Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him.”

(Titus 3:10) Paul's instructions to Timothy were similar. Not only should Diotrephes have not been allowed to put people out of the church, he should have been put out himself until he humbled himself, accepted the truth, and would come back under John's authority. Indeed, John tells us that people that act like that have not seen God. They may be in the church, but they are not in Christ. The church is comprised of, and should only be led by, those who are in **Christ** and submitted to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

John had good things to say about Demetrius. Like Gaius he was well spoken of—by the people, by the truth, and by John. It may be that Demetrius had gone to John with some of the men John had sent. He may even have been the one carrying the letter to Gaius. He was someone John trusted to live for the truth and to help lead the church in the right way.

As we saw last week with John's short letter to the church, John ended this letter to Gaius by saying that he had much more to say, but he was saving it until he could visit. He wanted to sit across the table with Gaius and talk face to face rather than through the mail. That having been said, he gave them his blessing of peace, sent greetings, and brought the letter to an end.