

THE THIRD EPISTLE OF JOHN

May 18, 1992

3 John 1-14

Intro: Last week we considered 2 John. Today we will be looking into 3 John. We saw last week that 2 John was written to a lady, an unnamed, but "elect lady." Third John, on the other hand, was written to a man: "the wellbeloved Gaius." Actually we do not know any more about Gaius than we do about the unnamed "elect lady." There are several Gaiuses mentioned in the NT, but we cannot prove that this Gaius was the same as any one of them. We have to remember that these epistles were written long after the other NT epistles, and so the "elect lady" and Gaius probably were second generation believers.

While there are similarities between these epistles, there are also some significant differences in addition to the fact that one was written to a lady and the other was written to a man. Second John is personal in character; Third John is pastoral in the sense of being directed to Gaius as a part of the church. The word "church" does not appear in 2 John, but we have it three times in 3 John: in verses 6, 9, 10. Of course a letter written to individuals about their personal needs is pastoral, but I am using that term today with reference to the ministry of the local church.

Although both epistles are straightforward in their content, yet there is a tenderness which was characteristic of John in his early life, and we can see that it continued with him even to old age. John did not hesitate to identify problems nor to confront those whom he felt were out of step with the Word of God, but to the "elect lady" in 2 John, and to Gaius in 3 John, there was obviously a great love in his heart for both of them which was impossible for him to conceal.

We have seen what he said to the "elect lady"; now let us go on to see what his message was to Gaius.

Let me give you an outline which I hope will help you see what the Apostle John was doing in this epistle:

- 1) The Introduction (v. 1).
- 2) Reassurance for Gaius (vv. 2-8).
- 3) Repudiation of Diotrephes (vv. 9-11).
- 4) Recommendation of Demetrius (v. 12).
- 5) Conclusion (vv. 13, 14).

I used this outline many years ago when I taught 3 John. I can't remember if this was my outline, or if I got it from someone else, or if it is a combination from several others. But, whatever may be the case, I commend it to you as giving us the main divisions of the epistle.

And so let us look, first, at:

I. THE INTRODUCTION (3 John 1).

V. 1 If you would like to know about the other Gaiuses in the NT, let me tell you where they are mentioned:

- 1) Gaius of Corinth, in 1 Cor. 1:14.
- 2) Gaius of Macedonia, in Acts 19:29.
- 3) Gaius of Derbe, in Acts 20:4.

But, as I have said, there is very little possibility that John was writing to any of them. It is more likely that all of them were with the Lord when John wrote this epistle.

Whoever he was, and wherever he lived (possibly in Ephesus), he was very

dear to the Apostle John. There is no reason to translate the word here, "wellbeloved," because John used the same word in verses 2, 5, 11. It was a term of endearment which the early Christians used for each other. Paul used it. Peter used it. And here we see that John used it. He used it five times in 1 John (3:2, 21; 4:1, 7, 11). But he did not use it at all in 2 John. It may not have been proper for a man to address a lady in this way, while he could address men and ladies together by this title.

Whatever may have been the usage, it meant that the younger Gaius was very dear to the old Apostle John. And the reason there was such a bond of affection between them was because of "the truth." This would mean not only their mutual relationship with Christ, but because of their fellowship together in the Word of God. We don't have the same kind of fellowship with all believers. The Lord often draws us to some in a special way, and we will see in verse 4 why Gaius was especially dear to the Apostle John.

Now we come to:

II. REASSURANCE FOR GAIUS (3 John 2-8).

The Apostle John was actually commending Gaius in these verses, and for two reasons:

A. For his walk (vv. 2-4).

B. For his work (vv. 5-8).

First, his walk.

V. 2 This is a prayer. The ASV translates this verse, "Beloved, I pray..."

Gaius was a godly man. His soul was prospering. He mentioned this before he mentioned his walk because it is the condition of the soul that determines a person's walk. If in our daily lives we are failing, it is always traceable to trouble in the soul. The inner man must be right or the outer man cannot be right.

But how does the soul prosper?

Verse 4 gives us one answer. Gaius was a man who was known by his brethren as a man who was walking in the truth. Our souls cannot prosper unless we are living in obedience to the Word of God. As verse 4 indicates, the truth was "in" Gaius. It was transforming his life. It produced a healthy soul.

We can see also that Gaius had a healthy soul because, as we learn in verses 5 through 8 he was not only interested in the spread of the Gospel, but he was involved in the spread of the Gospel. Gaius believed in doing the work of the Lord. He believed in evangelizing the lost. He believed in supporting missionaries. Something is very wrong with a person who is not vitally and actively concerned that others hear the Gospel so they can be saved.

We don't know anything about Gaius' financial affairs, nor about his health. But it seems that spiritually he prospered more than he did financially, or physically. I think we can assume from this verse that Gaius was not a wealthy man; perhaps he was financially needy. And he may

have had some real physical problems. And so John was praying that his material condition and his physical condition would keep pace with his spiritual condition. It behooves us to ask about ourselves. What part of us prospers the most? And how many Christians do you know for whom you could pray this prayer? Verse 2 is a verse full of important lessons for all of us.

V. 3 John evidently had been visited by some brethren who were in the same church with Gaius, and, as they responded to John's questions about the people in the church, they seem to have singled Gaius out as one who was outstanding for his walk in the truth. Note: It was not Gaius who was saying this about himself; his brethren gave this testimony concerning him. This made John rejoice greatly. And then he expanded on this in verse 4.

V. 4 We have no reason to believe that Gaius was John's son in the flesh. But it seems very clear that he was John's son in the faith. But, as Spurgeon pointed out, if parents have children who are Christians walking in the truth, this is a verse that they can use. Nothing gave John any more joy than to hear that Gaius was walking in the truth.

This is a verse for pastor's, too. If a pastor is truly a pastor, nothing will give him greater joy than to see that his people are walking in the truth.

This verse ought to provoke some serious thinking for all of us. What do we want more than anything else for our children? What do we want for the churches which we attend?

Churches that are in the position we are in here at Trinity need to be very, very careful. We are small. We don't have our own building. It would be very easy for us to want our own building so that we can grow, and to make this the greatest priority in our work. But are these things really our greatest needs? A large church is not necessarily a spiritually prosperous church. Neither is a small church necessarily prosperous. That which makes a church prosperous in the eyes of the Lord is what made Gaius prosperous to the Apostle John, and to the Lord. A prosperous church is a church made up of people who are living out the truth of the Word of God.

Do you remember our Lord's letter to the church at Laodicea? Please turn to Rev. 3 and let me read to you verses 14-20. (Read.) Would the Lord write a letter like this to our church, or to the church that you attend? Let us pray for ourselves, our children, and for all of the Lord's people we remember in prayer that their souls will prosper. May the Lord make us prosperous saints. Remember what the Lord told Joshua in Joshua 1:8. (Quote.) Beautiful facilities are nice to have, but if that is all we have, we have nothing. It is good to have our churches filled, but it is possible to fill our churches with people who are not walking with the Lord, and even with people who do not know the Lord. When our churches get concerned about the souls of our people, it will be a new day in the work of the Lord. There probably weren't many in Gaius' church who were serious about their walk with the Lord, but Gaius' testimony was clear.

We all want our children to do well in life. We want them to be healthy. We want them to prosper in their chosen professions. But I hope that the Lord knows that the thing that we want the most for them is to see them walking with the Lord, walking in the truth of the Word.

And how can we help them in that?

- 1) By making sure that we are walking with the Lord. Gaius probably had a prosperous soul because that is what the Apostle John had.
- 2) By praying for them.
- 3) By encouraging them, and teaching them what it means to walk in the truth, as we have the opportunity.

I know of a pastor who prays continually that the Lord will give him men, men mature in the faith. What he wants is some Gaiuses in his congregation, and you don't find too many of them in our churches today. We need men, women, young people, and even children, who find their greatest joy in walking daily in fellowship with the Lord.

But let us go on. From verses 5 through 8 the Apostle John spoke of the service that Gaius had been rendering to the Lord.

V. 5 Here the Apostle John was reassuring Gaius that he had done the right thing in assisting some of the Lord's servants who had come his way.

Gaius was a faithful man.

Solomon wrote in Prov. 20:7 about 1,000 years before Gaius lived,
 Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness:
but a faithful man who can find?

And the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church,
 Let a man so account of us,
 as of the ministers of Christ,
 and stewards of the mysteries of God.
 Moreover it is required in stewards
 that a man be found faithful (1 Cor. 4:1, 2).

John said that Gaius was doing "faithfully" was he was doing by way of helping the servants of the Lord that he knew, and those he did not know. What did John mean by this? What is a faithful man?

A faithful man (or woman) is a child of God who does what the Lord wants him to do, and continues to do it, trusting the Lord for his blessing. A faithful man believes the Word of God, and trusts God to bless His Word in fulfilling His own wonderful purposes. I repeat, Gaius was a faithful man --faithful in his life, and faithful in serving the Lord. According to what Solomon said, it is hard to find faithful men.

V. 6 Notice that Gaius did not talk about his faithfulness in his life, nor about his faithfulness in the work of the Lord. Here, for the second time in this epistle, the Apostle John mentioned what Gaius' fellow-believers were saying about him. They had told the Apostle John about how Gaius had shown his love for them by what he had done for them.

It seems very clear, in the light of what the Apostle John said in verse 7 that Gaius, although as we have seen in verse 2, was not financially prosperous, yet he gave as he was able to give out of what he had. I think it has always been true that the main supporters of the Lord's work are not those who have much, but those who have little. Many wealthy people give generously to the work of the Lord, but there are not many of them. We do not have to have a lot of money in order to serve the Lord with our money; we simply need to use what we have.

The words, "after a godly sort," lit. mean, worthy of God. The Apostle John's words here would not be limited to pastors or missionaries, but to

all of the people of God. We are to welcome them, support them where support is needed according to the leading of the Lord, and to treat them as we would treat the Lord (is the idea of this verse according to John Stott). We do not worship them, but we treat them with the same love and respect that we would show toward the Lord if He were to come to our homes. This is doing well.

In verses 7 and 8 John gave several reasons why Gaius was doing the right thing.

V. 7 First, because these particular brethren had gone forth for the Lord's sake. They were ambassadors for Christ. They had gone forth to spread His Name, to proclaim Christ, to tell of His saving work and saving grace. They did not go out to make a name for themselves, nor to act on their own behalf. They were witnesses of and for the Lord Jesus Christ! What a privilege it is to have any part in spreading the Gospel of the grace of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ!

A second reason that Gaius had done the right thing was because these brethren were not accepting financial help from unregenerate "Gentiles." They were trusting the Lord to meet their needs. They did not ask Gaius for his support. They trusted the Lord to provide for them through the people that the Lord would lead to help them.

Think of what it would mean to have a godly man like Gaius supporting you not only with money, but by prayer. When the Lord's servants trust the Lord to provide for them, he will give those who will not only give once, but who will continue to give as they are able. We need to leave financial matters in the Lord's hands. Churches do wrong in asking for pledges, and so do the Lord's servants. We need to learn to leave our affairs in the hands of the Lord. We have become very materialistic and very worldly-wise in the way we conduct the work of the Lord.

Illus: Dr. Ironside taking an offering at the Moody Church in Chicago.

And then in verse 8 we have another reason which the Apostle John gave to Gaius as to why he did the right thing in supporting those servants of the Lord who had come to him.

V. 8 The "we" is in contrast with "the Gentiles" in verse 7.

"Ought" suggests an obligation, a debt. Not a debt because a pledge has been made, but a debt of love which we owe to the Lord because of what He has done for us. Some go, and others help them to go. According to what Paul told the Corinthians, we are workers together with God. According to what the Apostle John wrote here we are workers together with each other in the wonderful work of the Lord. But let us be sure that we are supporting those who actually spreading the Word of God. Sad to say, there are many who claim to be missionaries today who are not really involved in the spread of the Gospel. The Lord has ordained that His work be supported by His people, but His people are not to give just to anybody who comes along. We are to make sure that those to whom we give are really the Lord's servants.

Gaius is an example that all of us would do well to follow. But that is not true of Diotrefes. We now come to the next section of this little epistle. Diotrefes was just the opposite of Gaius. You will find both in many churches, and so we need to beware.

III. REPUDIATION OF DIOTREPHES (3 John 9-11).

V. 9 Diotrephes is never mentioned any other place in Scripture. All that we know about him is found in verses 9, 10. He may have been an elder. He may have even been the pastor. John had written to the church, probably the church at Ephesus. Diotrephes had intercepted it and refused to have it read. This may have been the first that Gaius knew about it.

Diotrephes was jealous of the Apostle John, and did not hesitate to take a stand against the last of the Apostles and the place of authority which John had over him. Diotrephes was what some have called, the first church boss. But he was not the last! He was a man full of pride. He loved to be first! He had not only rejected the authority of the Apostle John, but he had rejected the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. And in rejecting Christ, Diotrephes was rejecting God!

Listen to what the Lord told His disciples in John 13:20 when He was with them in the Upper Room, and think of what is implied by His words:

Verily, verily, I say unto you,

He that receiveth whomsoever I send, receiveth me;

and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.

And so if we reject the one the Lord has sent, we are rejecting the Lord as well as rejecting the Father.

V. 10 John was not going to ignore this situation. He expected to visit that church, and when he did he would remember what Diotrephes had done, and deal with him. Problems like this do not usually go away. As difficult as it is, they have to be dealt with. To prate against the Apostle with malicious words was to speak against the Apostle in such a way as to do harm to his person and to his ministry. This was a most serious thing which Diotrephes was doing. It would undermine the authority of the work of the Lord. He was excommunicating anybody who did not see things his way.

V. 11 In the early part of this epistle the Apostle John had declared that the spiritual character of Gaius was to be seen in the way he was living. The same thing could be said about Diotrephes, only in the opposite way. Gaius showed by his life that he knew the Lord; Diotrephes was showing by his life that he did NOT know the Lord.

The difference between believers and non-believers is the difference between good and evil, or between light and darkness, or between sin and righteousness, or between truth and error.

Diotrephes was exercising great power and influence in the church, but he was not saved. Just because a person is a leader in the church is not proof of his salvation. We see the true character of people by their lives. And, as John said in this verse, we are not to follow such a leader, we are not to pattern our lives after theirs. A true spiritual leader is one whose life is good, and whose words are good. Diotrephes was disqualified on both points.

Let us realize that the problem with Diotrephes was not just a first century problem. It has existed in every generation from that day until this. Beware of the man who does not give evidence in his life that he is born of God.

The next verse is one of great contrast and great relief after reading

about Diotrephes.

IV. RECOMMENDATION OF DEMETRIUS (3 John 12).

V. 12 It is possible that Demetrius was one who had been kicked out of the church by Diotrephes. Perhaps the malicious accusations of Diotrephes against Demetrius had bothered Gaius. Therefore the Apostle John wanted to reassure Gaius that Demetrius stood approved on three counts:

- 1) "All men," probably "all" in the church would testify that he was a genuine and faithful child of God. We can see in this epistle how important the testimony of one's fellow-believers was.
- 2) Demetrius stood approved by the Word of God.
- 3) The Apostle John could vouch for him.

What else could be expected? Notice that the Apostle John here did not include what Demetrius would say about himself. He did not need to. The evidence given here was sufficient to clear Demetrius of any charges which Diotrephes may have brought against him. Let us make sure that, by the grace of God, we have the same faithful testimony which Demetrius had.

And now the message of the epistle is over, and we come to:

V. THE CONCLUSION (3 John 13, 14).

V. 13 Verse 13 of this epistle is very similar to verse 12 of 2 John. The Apostle John had written about the most urgent matters, but he had more to say when he visited the church.

V. 14 The Apostle John's concluding words were warm in their expression of his love for Gaius, of the believers' love for Gaius, and for John's desire to be remembered to the fellow-believers where Gaius was. This would have been very encouraging to the people of God who were obviously going through a most difficult time.

Concl: What are the special lessons of this epistle?

We have learned about the importance of:

- 1) A prosperous soul.
- 2) The greatest joy.
- 3) Our personal testimony.
- 4) The distinctive character of the work of the Lord.
- 5) The ever-present Enemy.
- 6) The life is the measure of the person--whether saved or unsaved.
- 7) The importance of both letter writing and personal visits.