

**PROSPEROUS, OR A PROBLEM**

3 John 1-14

**Intro:** I doubt if the Apostle John, when writing this epistle, knew that he was writing by divine inspiration, and that over two thousand years later groups of believers all over the world would be reading it as a vital part of the Word of God – and ultimately in their own languages. I doubt if he realize the same when he wrote the epistle which we considered together last Sunday - 2 John. We don't know what any of the writers of the Bible from Moses on down to the Apostle John knew that they were writing a part of that which would be compiled together and given to the world as the Word of God! But that is exactly what it is. And it is just as true of 3 John as it is of the book of the Psalms. The Holy Spirit directed in the writing of every book of the Bible down to the very words which were given in the Old Testament and the New. And yet the Holy Spirit used the Apostle John's knowledge of the truth, and his godly character so that we are right in calling it a letter from the Apostle John. I can't explain to you how the Spirit of God did that, but I believe with all my heart that what was true of the Apostle John, was true also of all of the writers of the books of the Bible.

So, being a part of the Word of God, we believe it has a message for us today. And that is why it is important for us to study it as though your name or my name was here as Gaius' is. I doubt very much if the Apostle John could say about me what he said about Gaius, but he probably intended for all of us to be aimed in that direction, that is, having a testimony in our generation like Gaius did in his.

Now it is easy for us to notice how this epistle was divided. Basically the Apostle John was writing to a man by the name of Gaius, and the first eight verses have to do with him. Then he wrote a man who was entirely different from Gaius, in verses 9 through 11. This man's name was Diotrephes. In verse 12 we have the name of a third man, Demetrius. He is more like Gaius. Then the last two verses are the Apostle John's conclusion which is very much like his conclusion to the letter to the elect lady in 2 John.

Both the elect lady of 2 John and Gaius of 3 John were members of some church somewhere in the Roman Empire. Whether they were members of the same church, we can't say. John Stott in his commentary says that there are five men by the name of Gaius mentioned in the NT, but it

seems doubtful if this Gaius was any of those five. Remember that the Apostle John lived longer than any of the other apostles, and that the people he wrote to probably were very young when Paul, for example, wrote his epistles. Besides, if the Holy Spirit had wanted us to know the answer to these questions, He would have told us. I m inclined to think that “the elect lady” of 1 John, and her children, were all led to Christ by the Apostle John, and certainly the same was true of Gaius, and maybe Demetrius also. It is interesting to think of what relationship all of these people had to the Apostle John, and even to each other. But the Holy Spirit has not made any of these things clear in these letters, so we can only guess at what might be the case, but let us remember that they are only guesses.

### **I. Gaius (3 John 1-8).**

The first verses of both epistles are very much alike, aren't they? John called himself “the elder” in both letters, which must mean that he had been their pastor at one time, although not necessarily in the same church. He expressed his love for both of them “in truth,” meaning that his love for them both was genuine, but based upon the truth – and probably the Apostle John was pointing to the Gospel not only for the fact that they knew each other, but that it was a fellowship in the Lord Who is the Truth.

Verse 2 is a most amazing verse. It seems to indicate that Gaius had some physical problem, that he had some health needs. We often may say to ourselves, or about others, that we have been praying that their spiritual health would be as good as their physical health. But here the Apostle John said just the opposite. The Apostle John said that he desired that Gaius' physical health would be as good as he was spiritually. It is often the case that the Lord uses physical problems to cause us to grow spiritually.

Either in our Tuesday Class or here last Sunday I reminded you of Paul's thorn in the flesh, a physical problem. He didn't like it anymore than you and I like physical problems. And so he asked the Lord to take it away. But the Lord said, “No.” However, the Lord promised Paul that His grace, God's grace, would be sufficient for him. And Paul's response was, “Most gladly will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Cor. 12:9b). And then Paul added in 2 Corinthians 12:10-11a:

10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

11 I am become a fool in glorying . . .

Whatever Gaius' physical problem might have been, it produced such great spiritual blessings in his life that people thought he was a fool he because he gloried in his trials.

There is a real message for all of us in this, isn't there?

Verse 3 tells us what Gaius' physical problems had produced in his life. Notice this verse says that the truth, the truth of the Word, had entered into his heart, and this had produced a life of walking in the truth. This is what we all need this morning – the truth of the Word “in” us! That is the work of the Holy Spirit as we read it and as we hear it taught. When the Word gets in us, it will make a difference in the way we live. This what it means to grow in grace. Anybody can read the Bible, but it is different for a person who knows the Lord because the Holy Spirit gives us understanding of the Word, and that is how changes take place in you and me.

What was the Apostle John's greatest joy in the ministry? It was not in the number of people who came to hear him preach. Nor was it in the name recognition that his preaching and teaching had brought to him. Nor was it in the way the Lord met his material needs. No, the greatest joy that he had among all of his joys, was the joy of even hearing that his children in the faith were walking in the truth. “Walk” is stated here in such a way as to indicate that he was talking about a consistent, continuous walk, day in and day out, night and day. He knew that they would not reach perfection in this life, but to see that the desire in the hearts of his children, those he had led to Christ, was primarily to please the Lord – he had no greater joy than this. Think of how it must have pleased him when he *saw* them walking in the truth.

Those of you who have had children, know how exciting it is when your child takes his or her first step. You expect to read about it in the morning Oregonian. But then gradually as they learn to walk, your joy overflows. Later on you may yearn for those days before they could walk when you would put them in a certain place, and they had to stay there. But that is another subject, isn't it?

We have no record that the Apostle John ever married, and had children.

### 3 John (4)

So he was not talking about his own flesh and blood, but about those whom he had been instrumental in bringing them to Christ. Regardless of how old a person may be when he or she is saved, when they start to walk in the truth (instead of in the ways of the world), and keep walking in the truth, every true Christian will rejoice to see it, but no one will rejoice like the one who has been their spiritual father or mother.

Now in verses 5 through 8 the emphasis changes from dwelling on the personal life of Gaius to his ministry to others – others whom he called “brethren and strangers.” These were people who were devoting their lives to the spread of the Gospel. We would call them missionaries. And it seems to me that when the Apostle John spoke of “brethren” and “strangers,” he didn’t mean saved and unsaved, but he meant by “brethren” people he had known before, and “strangers” were believers that Gaius had not known before

In verse 6 he said that these missionaries had testified before the church of Gaius’ love for them, and how he had helped them to be able to move on in their work. But notice the phrase, “after a godly sort.” Matthew Henry said that this means that Gaius did not help the itinerant missionaries to receive praise from men, but he did it because he loved God and wanted to please Him!

In verse 7 the Apostle John made it clear that he was talking about servants of the Lord who went forth “for His Name’s sake,” doing the will of God in a way that would honor Him, “taking nothing of the Gentiles.” Here the Apostle John was speaking not about Gentile believers, but of Gentile unbelievers. These servants of the Lord did not appeal to the people of the world for their support. Read the stories of Hudson Taylor of the old China Inland Mission, and of George Mueller and his work with orphans in Bristol, England, and of Amy Carmichael and her work in India rescuing girl babies from a life of temple prostitution, and many, many others.

This is one reason we don’t pass an offering plate in our services. We want people who don’t know the Lord to come to our church, but we don’t want them to feel obligated to support our work. The Lord is not dependent upon the world for the support of His work. Churches need money, but it is to be given by the Lord’s people because they love Him.

So the Apostle John says that churches are to support those who go out to

spread the Gospel. We don't want the world's money. We want them to hear the Gospel and be saved. Then after they are saved, their gifts can be for the glory of God. But even then the only reason we keep records is for tax purposes. But just a few know who gives what, and they keep that information to themselves. I have been in ministry since 1947 and I have never looked at the church records to see who give what and how much. We want the Lord's people who can't give much to feel just as much a part of this ministry as those who give the most, whoever that may be.

Our responsibility, and the church's responsibility in every age, is to be fellow helpers of those who go out trusting the Lord to meet their needs.

Now we most on from all of these good things to a man who was not so good. His name was:

## **II. Diotrephes (3 John 9-11).**

It is amazing how often the wrong people get into high places of leadership in churches. Diotrephes was such a man. He loved to be first before everybody else. And he didn't like it for itinerant missionaries to come into the church. He felt threatened by them. He wanted always to be in the spotlight himself. His main problem was PRIDE. He was the kind of a man who had not patience with the Lord's teaching that the one who desired to be great in the church, must be the servant of all.

Diotrephes didn't even accept the Apostle John. He even prated against the Apostle John as well as everyone else who seemed to threaten his position. What does "prating" mean? It means that he was always bringing false charges against people, even against the Apostle John. He probably resented the help that the church gave to the Apostle John. And he did not like the missionaries, did everything to keep them out of the church, and if anyone in the church spoke up in favor of the missionaries, he would put them out of the church. He is the kind of a person who will kill a church if he is allowed to continue with his vicious, deceitful charges.

It is hard to tell if the Apostle John had had trouble with him before, or if he had gotten his position since the last time the Apostle had been at the church. The Apostle John intended to show the church what needed to be done about Diotrephes, and to help them do it. And the Apostle John's advice to the church is given in verse 11. His words are strong, but true.

Diotrephes may have even moved into the pastor's spot in this church, but verse 11 seems to indicate that Diotrephes was not a child of God, and the Apostle John felt that the church was under no obligation to follow such a man.

Now let us think about the third man mentioned here.

### **III. Demetrius (3 John 12).**

Who was Demetrius? We don't know any more about him than we do about Gaius or Diotrephes. We do not doubt but that they were real people, all, it would seem, involved in the same church. But we don't know where their church was. Perhaps the Apostle John purposely omitted mentioning the particular church because he wanted the people to know that this was a common problem for churches, and he wanted his readers to make the application wherever they might be, that is, wherever a similar problem was found. I think that it is very likely that Demetrius might have been one which Diotrephes had put out of the church, and he could even have been the pastor.

The Apostle John seems to be appealing for him, perhaps his restoration to the fellowship of the church they were all involved in.

Demetrius had three points which recommended him:

- 1) He had a good testimony "of all men," meaning both in the church, and outside of the church.
- 2) He was a man who had a good report when examined by the Word.
- 3) The Apostle John also vouched for him.

We will have to wait until we get back to heaven what the outcome was. But the evidence seems to point to the ouster of Diotrephes and the reception back into the fellowship of Demetrius.

**Concl:** This is given to us in verses 13 and 14.

The Apostle John (as in 2 John) had other things that he wanted to write, but he decided not to. He did hope to visit Gaius, and we could probably add, the church. He prayed that they would have peace. Friends with the Apostle John sent greetings to the friends with Gaius. Peace was the primary need of churches which had been through what this particular church had experienced - "Peace be to thee."