

3 John

Hymns: #83 O Come O Come Emmanuel

- 1) **V.1-4** *"The elder, To my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth. 2Dear 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. 3It 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. 4I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth."*
- a) In many ways, 3 John is a letter of many contrasts with that of 2 John. The first contrast we notice is that this letter is one of only two NT letters that are personally addressed to an individual; Philemon being the other. Whereas 2 John was addressed to an unidentified church, 3 John is addressed to a clearly defined individual, a man named Gaius.
 - b) We don't know much about Gaius other than he was likely a member of a church in Asia where there was an internal problem with a dominant leader. John's address is literally to "Gaius, the beloved". What a term of endearment and love from John. The elder to the beloved.
 - i) John had a "truth based relationship with Gaius". He says "whom I love in the truth". As we saw last week, there is big difference between unwise relationships that have degenerated to the level of selfish sentimentality rather than truth. Gaius was not a "yes-man" nor was he a wallflower pushover. He and John were in a truth based relationship, so both were comfortable in their own skin, their own gifts and thus with each other.
 - c) Gaius appears to have had some reputation of spiritual maturity as seen by his "soul getting along well." John's prayer that Gaius might "enjoy good health and that he might lit. "prosper concerning all things" reminds us that we should be concerned about the health and wellbeing of our "beloveds" even in the temporal needs of this life. This includes body, as well as soul and spirit.
 - d) Like 2 John, the word truth is used four times in just four verses and John says that it gave him great joy to hear of Gaius' faithfulness. In fact, John says he had no greater joy in life than to hear that "his children" were walking in truth.
 - i) Here's another contrast: John speaks of this joy in "your children" in 2 John 4, but here his joy is in "his children". This might suggest Gaius was a direct convert of John's or else a member of a church that John was responsible for.
 - ii) Do you know this kind of joy? I had a taste of this earlier this year when an unsaved friend came to visit me who I had not seen in 30 years, but had prayed for her often. While she was here I was able to share the Gospel with her and lead her to Christ. I cannot explain to you the joy I had in my heart for the next couple of weeks. It was such a joy that I felt like I could have gone home to heaven right then. Fewer, if any, things compare to the joy of spiritual children who are walking in the truth. Equally, fewer things are more grievous than to know that your children, biological or spiritual, are not walking in the truth. May the Lord give us more of this joy as we lead others to him and develop truth based relationships while on the pilgrimage home.
- 2) **V.5-8** *"5Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you. 6They have told the church about your love. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. 7It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. 8We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth."*
- a) What had happened was that some traveling teachers and preachers, sent most likely from John and the church in Jerusalem (this letter was written in the early 60's, before the fall of Jerusalem and before John's exile to Patmos) had been welcomed and shown hospitality by

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Gaius when they came to his church, even though they were strangers to him. They returned and reported to John this loving faithfulness of Gaius.

- i) In those days, these itinerate teachers and preachers were very important to building up the Church. But when they travelled they couldn't simply check into the local "Holiday Inn" for food and lodging. They needed the hospitality and support of Christians in the places where they travelled to. Gaius was working together with these men for the truth. He offered sacrificial hospitality to these travellers and at some personal risk as we shall see.
 - ii) You know, we can never fully estimate what true co-labouring hospitality can result in. There is a story of a Christian business man in Chicago who called his wife to get her okay for him to bring home a visiting foreigner as a guest for dinner that night. At the time, the wife had three children in school and one pre-schooler, so there were plenty of important things to do besides entertaining strangers. But she consented and the meal went off without a hitch. The foreigner, an important Spanish government official, never forgot that meal. Years later, some friends of that family went to Spain as missionaries. Their work was brought to a standstill, however, by government regulations. When the Spanish official got word that the missionaries were friends of that hospitable couple in Chicago, he used his influence to clear away the restrictions. Today, there is a church in that province of Spain due in part to that one meal.
 - iii) Here we see another contrast with 2 John. In that letter, John emphasises NOT giving hospitality to false teachers. But here he urges TO give hospitality to true teachers. In fact he says "...to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God". This implies a whole hearted support and sending as they recognized God at work in what these teachers were doing.
 - iv) Warren Wiersbe observes that "It is one thing to fight apostasy and refuse to entertain false teachers, but quite another to open up our homes and wallets to promote the truth."¹
- b) V. 7 Begins in the Greek with the words "For" linking it to the previous verse and it links the reason here for why these men should be sent on their way in a manner worthy of God. John reminds Gaius that it was "for the sake of "The Name" that is for the sake of Jesus and the Gospel. "The Name" and "The Way" became titles for followers of Jesus and the name of their belief before the term "Christian" was used.
- i) Acts 9:2 "1Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest 2and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to **the Way**, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.
 - ii) Acts 19:19; 23 "But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned **the Way**." ... "23About that time there arose a great disturbance about **the Way**."
 - iii) Acts 22:4 "...I persecuted the followers of this **Way**"
 - iv) Acts 24:14; 22 "However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of **the Way**, which they call a sect..." "22Then Felix, who was well acquainted with **the Way**, adjourned the proceedings."
 - v) John didn't just issue orders, he gave reasons for his requests. The linking of verse 6 and 7 here is done in the same way John linked verses 6 and 7 in 2 John with the word "Because". It was because many deceivers had gone out into the world that they were to hold onto the original form of apostolic teaching received.
(1) Beware of the "authoritarian- because I said so" leaders. True leaders are to be "persuaders" who rely on truth based dialogue as the arena and channel of service.

¹ Warren Wiersbe; Be Alert; Victor Books; 1987 (p. 120)

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- (a) I can't remember where I found this quote, but it has been written in the margin of my bible for nearly 30 years. "If the desire for truth is not the basis for leadership in the Body, then the trust which can be generated by their service is just another more subtle form of power- the power we call manipulation." The point is John was neither a manipulator nor an authoritarian.
- vi) John reminds Gaius that these true teachers went out "receiving no help from the pagans. We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth."
- (1) Zane Hodges comments that "Naturally, it was inappropriate for those who (went out to teach) to seek support from those who did not believe in or honour that Name...But the fact that faithful Christian preachers sought no help from the unsaved meant that Christians were under a special obligation to assist them."²
- (2) This obligation continues to this day as Wiresbe helps us see: "This ministry of hospitality and support is not only an opportunity, but also an obligation. Galatians 6:6 makes it clear that those who receive *spiritual* blessings from the minister of the Word ought to share with him in *material* blessings... 'You pay your board where you get your food'".
- (3) John says to support those who bring you spiritual food is to "work together for the truth". This is more than simply "tithing". It means a personal, prayerful and provisioning participation in a shared vision and direction called "truth".
- 3) V.9-11** *"I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. 10So 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. 11Dear 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."*
- a) John made this entire appeal to Gaius because of the dominating behaviour of Diotrephes, an overbearing self-willed authoritarian who was guilty of three things:
- i) First, Diotrephes loved to have the pre-eminence among them. He refused to have anything to do with "us", that is the Apostle John and presumably other apostolically gifted men. He demonstrated this by "gossiping maliciously" literally he was "prattling nonsense with evil words against" John's apostolic authority. It would seem that Diotrephes was a selfishly ambitious "little man" who felt threatened by true apostolic power and authority. So he did his best to tear down the reputation of John. He reminds us of the wife who said: "My husband and I have managed to be happy together for 20 years. I guess this is because we're both in love with the same man." Diotrephes was in love with himself. He was the exact opposite of the steady, strong and humble Gaius.
- (1) It's worth noting here another contrast. This verse reminds us that we are to test the accusations brought against leaders within the church. Paul tells us in 1 Tim. 5:19 "Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses." Whereas back in 1 John 4:1 we are told to test those who come to us from without : ...do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."
- ii) Second, "not satisfied with that" Diotrephes refused to welcome or show hospitality to the brothers who came to them as true teachers and preachers of the word.
- (1) Unlike Gaius, Diotrephes was not walking in "faithfulness to the truth."
- iii) Third, Diotrephes was doing everything he could to impose his will on others even to the point of dis-fellowshipping anyone who offered hospitality to the men John was sending.

² Zane Hodges; 3 John; *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*; Dallas Theological Seminary; Victor Books, 1983; pp. 913

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He was using the threat and act of “church discipline” to force the members of the church to be inhospitable. In doing so, Diotrephes became an enemy of the Gospel for he was no longer “working together for the truth”

- (1) “The New Testament does teach church discipline, and these instructions ought to be obeyed. But church discipline is not a weapon for a dictator to use to promote himself. It is a tool for the congregation to use to promote purity and glorify God...It is the Lord exercising spiritual authority through a local church in order to rescue and restore an erring child of God.”³
 - iv) John reminds Gaius that when he comes, he will deal with Diotrephes in a very public way by “calling attention to what he was doing” and presumably implement the Pauline instruction in 1 Tim 5:20 where “Those (leaders) who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning.” In the meantime, Gaius is encouraged not to imitate the evil of Diotrephes.
- 4) V.12** *“12Demetrius 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.”*
- a) Demetrius (Not to be confused with the Demetrius of Acts 19:24 who was an enemy of the Gospel) appears to be another apostolically approved traveling teacher who is being sent by John to the church where Gaius and Diotrephes are. He is also likely the one who carried this letter with him.
- 5) V.13-14** *“13I have much to write you, but I do not want to do so with pen and ink. 14I 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.*
- a) “The use of the term “friends” twice in these closing statements is perhaps one final reminder to Gaius that Christians in every place are or should be a network of friends who are ready to help one another whenever a need arises. It is part of the genius of Christianity that one can meet people whom he has never seen before, in places far from home, and discover through a shared faith an immediate bond of friendship.”⁴

³ Warren Wiersbe; Be Alert; Victor Books; 1987 (p. 124-125)

⁴ Zane Hodges; 3 John; The Bible Knowledge Commentary; Dallas Theological Seminary; Victor Books, 1983; pp. 913