

3 John

Leon L. Combs, Ph.D.

2012

3John 1:1-4

The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth. Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers. For I was very glad when brethren came and bore witness to your truth, that is, how you are walking in truth. I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.

Note the comments on “the elder” from 2 John. The name Gaius was a common name in this era. It is mentioned elsewhere in Scripture (Acts 19:29; 20:4; Rom 16:23; 1 Cor 1:14). He probably was an important person in the church community to whom John is writing. John obviously thinks highly of this person as he loves him in the truth, meaning the true doctrine of the church. Praying that Gaius would be in good health was a common greeting and does not imply that he was ill. John has heard great things about the Christian walk of Gaius and he prays that his physical health may be as great as his obvious spiritual health. Traveling among the various churches was common in the first and second centuries so it would have been common for John to have received information about people in other churches. The news about Gaius was excellent and John was very glad to receive such news about his walk in the Lord. John states that he could have no greater joy than hearing about those he had either led to the Lord or been involved in their spiritual growth continuing to walk in the truth. Probably people reading this also have been excited to hear of people they have discipled continuing to walk in the truth.

3John 1:5-8

Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and especially when they are strangers; and they bear witness to your love before the church; and you will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. For they went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to support such men, that we may be fellow workers with the truth.

John especially commends Gaius for the way he offered hospitality to visiting missionaries from other churches. There were not a lot of places for missionaries and traveling teachers to stay so they depended upon local churches for a place to stay and for food while they minister to the church. John especially applauds Gaius for his dealing with such people who were unknown to Gaius. Some of these people were probably from John’s church for he has heard of the love Gaius showed these people. Saying that he will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God indicates that Gaius also provided them with some essentials for their travel after they left his church. This is the only book in the Bible that does not mention Christ by name but He is implied when John writes “sake of the Name”. It was for the sake of Christ that these

people went about their missionary duties. If the travelers had accepted assistance from the Gentiles it would have indicated that their own people were not supporting them adequately. John writes that all Christians should support such people for providing assistance for missionaries makes us fellow workers with the spreading and teaching of the truth. Hospitality was required of Christians (Matt 10:10; Rom 12:13; 1 Tim 3:2; 5:10; Heb 13:2) However in 2 John 10 we read that there are cases where hospitality should not be given when the teachers were spreading a false gospel message.

3John 1:9-10

I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, neither does he himself receive the brethren, and he forbids those who desire to do so, and puts them out of the church.

John now gets to a problem he needed to address that was happening in this church. Diotrephes was in love with himself! His desire was to be first at the table and he does not put himself under the authority of John and even may have destroyed the previous letter written by John. This sin is the original sin of Satan as he desired to be like the Most High:

Isaiah 14:12-14 "How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, You who have weakened the nations! "But you said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, And I will sit on the mount of assembly In the recesses of the north. 'I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.'

This attitude is also the direct opposite of that of Jesus Christ:

Phil 2:5-8 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

The example of every Christian should be Jesus and not Satan. Rejection of apostolic authority was an indication of a heart problem. This same problem is seen in churches today as people attend churches with the most charismatic preacher regardless of whether or not he accepts the authority of the Bible. Diotrephes even was slandering the writings of the apostles although we do not know exactly what he was saying against them. He also was not participating in hospitality of the traveling teachers, which was also in direct violation of the direction of the apostles. Diotrephes was even taking charge of the congregation by forbidding others to show hospitality and even excommunicating those who defied him.

John could have threatened excommunication of Diotrephes but he makes no such threat as he also demonstrated the attitude of Jesus in that he wanted him to repent. He does say that he

will expose the actions of Diotrephes as unworthy of a Christian. He will have to repent of his arrogance and evil deeds against John. Everyone will have his deeds exposed one day and it will be better if John were to expose Diotrephes and bring him to repentance rather than him having to stand before God for judgment:

Rom 14:12 So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God.

1Cor 3:12-15 Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.

3John 1:11-12

Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. The one who does good is of God; the one who does evil has not seen God. Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself; and we also bear witness, and you know that our witness is true.

John is exposing Diotrephes as an example of evil and Demetrius as an example of good. Demetrius was probably the carrier of John's letter, which is why John can say that "we also bear witness". The readers are prompted to imitate the examples of those who do good. The Bible exhorts Christians in other portions of Scripture to be imitators of those who imitate God:

Eph 5:1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children;

Heb 13:7 Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.

1Cor 4:16 I exhort you therefore, be imitators of me.

1Cor 11:1 Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.

1Thess 1:6 You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit,

1Thess 2:14 For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews,

Heb 6:12 that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Paul in other writings does not use the word "imitate" but exhorts Christians to follow his and other apostles' examples:

2Thess 3:7-9 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that

we might not be a burden to any of you; not because we do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, that you might follow our example.

Even in the church there will be good and bad examples to follow or imitate so we must choose our examples carefully. Our choice of whom to imitate reveals a lot about our heart for if we choose to imitate good examples we are demonstrating that we also are “of God”. If we choose to imitate bad examples then we reveal that we are not God’s children. John could have asked the readers of his letter to imitate him but he chose a person in their congregation who was well known for his good deeds and attention to the truth (sound doctrine). We do not know the specific good deeds of Demetrius but the congregation and Gaius did and John says he should be imitated. God will put everyone in the proper order according to His judgment:

Matt 19:30 "But many who are first will be last; and the last, first.

Luke 1:52 "He has brought down rulers from their thrones, And has exalted those who were humble.

3John 1:13-14

I had many things to write to you, but I am not willing to write them to you with pen and ink; but I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.

This ending is similar to the ending of 2 John except that he adds a more personal ending. There will always be tribulations in the world and even in the church but the promise of Jesus will always stand regarding peace:

John 14:27 "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.

John 16:33 "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."