

3 John

- This is our second week of our 2-week run through the shortest books of the New Testament
 - Last week we studied 2 John
 - I hope you agree we found a lot more than we might have expected for such a short letter
 - Scripture is still the word of God, whether 25 chapters or 25 verses
 - 3 John is even shorter, but still offers some important lessons
 - But unlike 2 John, 3 John is a very personal letter, similar to 1 & 2 Timothy
 - John probably wrote this letter at about the same time as his other letters, and the book of Revelation
 - Sometime in the last decade of the first century
 - This letter shares some similarities with 1 John and 2 John, though it stands apart in many ways as well
 - The letter is only 15 verses, so it's short and to the point
 - In fact, it's the only NT book that never mentions Jesus Christ by name
 - John's letter focuses on three commendations for Gaius
 - His obedience as ministry
 - His hospitality as ministry
 - His financial sacrifice as ministry
 - And then John highlights the behavior of another individual to contrast with Gaius
 - Diotrephes
 - Finally, he ends with a recommendation for the courier, Demetrius

- Let's start in v.1

3John 1 The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.

- As with 2 John, there is a bit of mystery around John's audience: Gaius
 - The name is a common Greek name in the day
 - So although there are a handful of other Gaius characters in scripture, we have no reason to think they're the same person
 - Unlike the "lady" in 2 John, there is no reason to suspect that Gaius was anything other than a real person
 - But we also notice that John continues to refer to himself as an elder as he did in the previous letter
 - More than likely, this was a means of protecting himself and the church from persecution
 - We'll see that he ends the letter in a similar fashion as 2 John for the same reason
 - And once again, John expresses love in truth
 - The expression reminds us what we studied in our previous week
 - That is love in truth is a unique form of love, one unique to the body of Christ
 - It describes a supernatural source of love that unites all believers by the power of the Spirit living in us
 - The command to love one another does not come without the power to obey
 - On the contrary, the presence of the Spirit is why the Bible confidently proclaims we will love one another

John 13:35 "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have **love for one another.**"

- Our love in truth for one another is how we are identified as different from the world
 - The world loves in human terms
 - We love in godly terms

- The world loves conditionally
 - We love unconditionally
- The world loves selfishly
 - We love with agape love
- Then John begins the first of his three commendations for Gaius

3John 2 Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers.

- John says he prays for Gaius, and this prayer is focused on prosperity
 - It's such a shame that this word - prosperity - has been hijacked by Satan in recent decades
 - But let's put the distorted and false understanding of prosperity out of our minds for now and focus on what he says
 - John says he prays that Gaius would prosper
 - The word in Greek means a good journey
 - It's a euphemism that means simply all would go well for him
 - It includes the sense of financial well being, but this is not the major emphasis
 - John is speaking in terms of Gaius' entire life and circumstances
 - John specifically mentions physical health and spiritual well being
 - John has been praying for this man in all regards, both physical and spiritual
 - Our prayer life would be more powerful if we sought the same balance in our intercession
 - We should actively seek to find that balance in our concerns for other people
 - Many requests come in the form of financial, health and other earthly concerns

- And it's never wrong to intercede for someone on the basis of those needs
 - On the other hand, let's recognize that just as we often consider our physical comfort above our spiritual needs, so do we often put the cart before the horse in prayer for others
 - If given a choice between praying for someone to prosper financially, physically or spiritually it should be no contest
- Remember, a soul prospers into eternity, while the flesh can only prosper to a point
 - Again, we aren't saying that we never pray for prosperity in the flesh
 - But we need to keep that in balance with spiritual maturity
- Why has Gaius been on John's mind and in his prayers? John explains

3John 3 For I was very glad when brethren came and testified to your truth, that is, how you are walking in truth.

- John begins v.3 saying "for" meaning because he had heard some things about Gaius
 - Fellow Christians had visited John and testified to Gaius' truth
 - And by his truth, John explains that they testified that Gaius was walking in the truth
 - Walking in the truth means to walk according to the commandments of Jesus and the apostles
 - We studied the metaphor of walking in 2 John, and John is drawing on that concept again here to commend Gaius
 - Notice the chain of events in this case
 - Gaius chose to live according to what he had been taught
 - His lifestyle made an impression on the other believers
 - And then they, in turn, testified of what they knew
 - And then that testimony led Gaius to receive this public commendation

- A public commendation by the last living apostle, a man who was the apostle Jesus' loved, was no small matter in the church
 - This letter was to be read and circulated in the church, like all letters from apostles
 - When a letter like this came to a church, it was treated like scripture from the very beginning
 - So imagine the feeling Gaius had to hear this letter read aloud in the church gathering, praising his name in such glowing terms
- The point of John's letter is to commend certain things, and Gaius gave John that opportunity by his godly behavior
 - Gaius was walking in the truth, and John wanted the church to understand that Gaius was a man to be emulated
 - Others knew of his success and now they know that the apostle approves as well
 - And the end result was a commendation in a public way

2Cor. 10:18 For it is not he who commends himself that is approved, but he whom the Lord commends.

- This is exactly the pattern we are called to exhibit in our walk on earth
 - We are to walk with the Lord, in obedience, so that we might established a good testimony before men and God
 - Paul states this plainly again in Philippians

Phil. 2:14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing;

Phil. 2:15 so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world,

Phil. 2:16 holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.

- Our goal in walking in truth is to be blameless and innocent
 - Whenever you see the words blameless or innocent, it usually references our testimony before men

- Notice here Paul says we are live in contrast to the crooked and perverse world around us
- We are to be blameless, in the sense that Noah was called blameless
- He could not be accused by his generation as a sinful man, especially in comparison to the sin of the world
- That is our goal as well
- Paul says the point of that lifestyle is that we might appear as lights in the world
 - The Greek word for appear is also the word for shine or to be visible
 - The point of a blameless walk in truth is to make a statement into the world on behalf of God
 - Not a pious or sanctimonious statement
 - Rather, a statement of truth about God
- But then Paul goes on to say that in holding fast to the word, we then have reason to glory in the day of Christ
 - The day of Christ is a reference to the day we are judged and receive a reward
 - That day will be a day we can glory in, provided we have walked well in truth
- So Gaius' situation demonstrates this relationship on a smaller scale
 - His blameless life had become a light shining in the dark world
 - He was commended for that lifestyle by John
 - And that commendation was to his glory
 - And though I'm sure he appreciated John's commendation, the real commendation Gaius sought was the Lord's
- Next John says that his report caused John to have great joy

3John 4 I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.

- John says his greatest joy as an apostle was learning that his children were walking in the truth
 - John had spent most of his adult life following Christ and endeavoring to call other men to know and follow Christ as well
 - As an Apostle, John knew how important obedience was and how much was on the line for those who failed
 - He wrote letters, suffered persecution and lifted up prayers on behalf of his spiritual children
 - So when he saw his children living out their faith, he says he felt joy
 - What John doesn't say, but I suspect we can assume, is that he must have felt great sadness to watch believers failing to live according to the Lord's commands
 - John knew the jeopardy these believers were in
 - He understood the eternal loss they would experience
 - Though I cannot compare to John or any other apostle, I can identify with them on this point in the sense of how teachers hope for their students to perform well
 - As I teach the word of God, my desire and greatest joy is to see lives transformed to please their Lord
 - To receive the truth gladly and then to live according to it
 - This is John's perspective for the church
 - And it's the Lord's perspective of us all
- John's next section, the second commendation, begins with the word "beloved" again

[3John 5](#) Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and especially when they are strangers;

[3John 6](#) and they have testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God.

- John credits Gaius with hospitality for believers, even when he didn't know them

- Hospitality in John's day was an especially important and honored tradition, so we might ask why Gaius would be credited with it?
 - If everyone was expected to show hospitality, why would Gaius have been praised for it?
 - The answer comes back to persecution
 - There was real risk for Christians opening their home to strangers, even those claiming to be Christians
 - A stranger could be a spy looking to expose Christians to the Roman empire, or Jews
- Nevertheless, Gaius accepted the risks of hosting others, showing kindness and love to anyone calling themselves a Christian
 - There is always risk in opening your home to someone, especially a stranger
 - But it is a unique privilege for any Christian to be able to open their home to a fellow believer and show the love of Christ
 - In fact, it's a command of scripture

[Heb. 13:1](#) Let love of the brethren continue.

[Heb. 13:2](#) Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.

- Because he obeyed scripture again, he obtained a good testimony...again
 - Notice John says that these strangers gave John the good report
 - Gaius likely had no way to know that these strangers knew John or were likely to meet him
 - But because Gaius did the right thing, he is now receiving a commendation from John for his love
 - And I'm sure he would also receive one from the Lord
- Gaius went a step further in his willingness to host strangers in the faith
 - He sent them away in the manner worthy of God
 - When the time came for these men to leave, Gaius took the extra step of ensuring they didn't leave empty handed

- He may have given them provisions, money, clothes, or all of the above
- Notice John says he sent them away in a manner worthy of God
 - Worthy means in keeping with God's honor
 - That if the Lord Himself had made the gift, it would have reflected well upon the Lord
 - So we can imagine it was a generous supply given by Gaius
- Gaius showed hospitality at personal risk and self-sacrifice, and he received a commendation, and eternal reward we can assume
 - This is the standard the scripture is holding us up to, but are we ready to do what's required?
 - My wife and I have always insisted that our home have at least one bedroom set aside to host guests
 - But I will admit that my wife has been more willing to extend it at times than I have been
 - My personal concern for some privacy and a retreat from the world means I don't lean toward opening the door as easily as she does
 - Whenever she would suggest inviting someone down-on-their-luck to stay with us for a while, I would usually respond by asking what was our "exit strategy"?
 - I wanted to know before they entered my home, how long the stay would be
 - But the Lord was good to give me a wife who would balance this part of my personality and lead me toward hospitality
 - When we have guests who are in need, we also like to send them away with something, but then the question becomes how much?
 - Here again, it becomes a matter of personal sacrifice
 - The point is to sacrifice the flesh to make room for the growth of the spirit
 - So that we may be blameless before men and receive praise from the Lord

- Gaius' commendation reminds us that hospitality to the saints requires sacrifice if we are to obtain a testimony and a reward
 - Gaius took risks, which meant he put the needs of the body ahead of his own
 - And when we are given an opportunity to show hospitality, we need to understand that sacrifice is expected
 - In my case, I know my flesh will justify my desire to withhold hospitality because it's too much of an imposition
 - But scripture tells me that this is the perfect opportunity to earn praise and rewards
 - If hospitality requires no sacrifice, then we are doing no more than others might do
 - It's only when we confront our flesh that we step beyond the natural and do the unexpected...which is love
- Then John explains why Gaius' hospitality was so important

[3John 7](#) For they went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles.
[3John 8](#) Therefore we ought to support such men, so that we may be fellow workers with the truth.

- The men that Gaius hosted in his home were traveling preachers of the Gospel
 - They went out for the sake of the Name, meaning for the sake of the name of Christ
 - What an honor it was for a man to travel and greet people in the Name!
 - There was no more important task, and these men deserved honor for it and Gaius gave it to them
 - John says that Gaius' support was all the more important because these preachers had made a point of not accepting support from Gentiles
 - The term Gentiles isn't exactly what we might think
 - To a Jew, a Gentile meant a pagan unbeliever

- Obviously, this is a Jewish stereotype, but since John is Jewish and he's writing to Jewish churches, he used the conventional term
- Today, we would use a different term; we would simply say unbeliever
- Why did these preachers not accept support from unbelievers as they traveled and preached?
 - These men were committed to living according to the standard Paul gave in 2 Corinthians

2Cor. 6:14 Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?

- These men were determined to separate themselves from dependence upon the unbeliever
- The point of the rule wasn't to diminish unbelievers; it was to elevate the Lord
- By allowing the Lord to pay for the work of ministry, these men gave opportunity for the Lord to show Himself strong
- This is a powerful witness that the Western world has largely jettisoned in the spirit of independence and self-reliance
 - When we make opportunity to support our own needs using whatever means the world offers, we potentially rob the Lord from receiving glory for His provision
 - If we rush to pay for things on credit rather than waiting for the Lord to provide the money
 - When we deny others the chance to fund our mission work, we rob the Lord of His glory through the provision of giving
 - There was a seminar student who tells a testimony of attending seminary on a conviction that God would pay for the tuition
 - He never tells anyone of his needs so that no man would ever offer to pay his bills
 - Nevertheless, he testifies that checks appeared in his mailbox from people he didn't know

- In various ways, the Lord paid his tuition bills, and the student finished seminar without ever asking anyone for money
- His conviction mirrors the one of these men
 - They knew that all money comes from God, whether through Gentiles or otherwise
 - Just as that seminary student knew that if he asked and a man gave him money, it was still from the Lord
 - But in both cases, by leaving room for the Lord to act on His own, He then received all the more glory for His faithfulness and power
 - That's the attitude these men had in Gaius' day
- And then John tells Gaius that his hospitality was all the more important because he stepped in to support that need
 - Gaius was that person God used to support these men in their convictions
 - That's an important lesson too
 - When we leave room for the Lord to take care of our needs, we also give room for the Lord to use someone else to bless us
 - In our self-sufficient culture, we need to understand the power of becoming vulnerable so that the Lord can show Himself strong
- Then in v.8 John reinforces Gaius' good deed with a reminder that the church is supposed to support those who make sacrifices to teach and preach the word
 - Obviously, as I deliver this teaching point I'm conspicuously aware that it may appear self-serving
 - But if that's how it appears to anyone, then the only thing I can say in love is "Get over it!"
 - I speak these things not for my own sake or the sake of anyone in particular but because they are in the text of scripture
 - We are all commanded by scripture to support financially those who God has sent to support **us** spiritually
 - This is not optional; the Bible makes clear this is a requirement

- John gives a positive benefit for doing so
 - He says we become fellow workers in the truth
 - We may look upon someone who is teaching us and imagine they are doing great work for the Lord
 - Well, if this is so, then we can be considered a part of that work, a fellow worker, merely by supporting that work financially
 - Or through other material means like hospitality
- Have you ever considered that you can gain a measure of the reward that a hard working teacher will receive merely by assisting financially
 - The teacher has worked hours and hours to teach, and traveled around the world to deliver it
 - The teacher has endured persecution, hardship, deprivation and sacrificed other good things so they could bring you the word
 - And John says you can become a fellow worker and receive reward through your support
 - That's a pretty good deal
- Paul points out a second self-interest in supporting those who teach us the Bible or minister to us through the word:

1Cor. 9:9 For it is written in the Law of Moses, "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING." God is not concerned about oxen, is He?

1Cor. 9:10 Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops.

1Cor. 9:11 If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?

- Paul refers to the Law of Moses to remind the church that supporting those who minister in the word yields a benefit for the church
 - A farmer that muzzles his own ox is starving the very animal he depends upon for his livelihood
 - If the animal is weak from hunger, it can't thresh the grain
 - So giving the ox a little of the farmer's grain allows the ox to produce more

- Then Paul makes the application that we stand to gain so much more spiritually, by sacrificing a little of our earthly material
 - But if we starve the teacher, we lose in the long run
- So John has given three commendations - on obedience, hospitality and generosity - and now turns to calling out two men for good and evil

3John 9 I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say.

3John 10 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, he himself does not receive the brethren, either, and he forbids those who desire to do so and puts them out of the church.

- Within the church there was a man, Diotrephes, who was a leading man in the church
 - His name means nourished by Zeus
 - His situation is probably included to illustrate a bad example
 - John had just commended a good example
 - So now John illustrates the opposite example
 - John apparently wrote to this church in the past, but Diotrephes rejected the letter and did not accept it as binding
 - He was motivated by pride and did not want to compete with the Apostles
 - He is a petty man living in sin and rebellion
- John says he is guilty of committing six offenses
 - First, he wanted to be above everyone, even the apostles themselves
 - Clearly, pride motivated the man to be in charge
 - He wanted to Lord over the church in a position of authority
 - Every man in ministry must guard himself against this possibility
 - Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely
 - Secondly, he doesn't accept the apostles' teaching

- Naturally, the teaching of the apostles would have convicted his heart
- Their teaching would have set the record straight
- So he rejects it, preferring to stay with his own desires
- Third, he unjustly accused the apostles using wicked words
 - Rather than be subjected to the apostles' teaching, he attacks theirs
 - He wants to undermine their authority so he can do as he pleases
- Fourth, he does not receive Christians
 - John directly contrasts Gaius with this man
 - In fact, we can begin to see that John picked this man to highlight the difference between obedience lived out in Gaius, compared to disobedience
 - Since we know these visiting men were teachers of the word, that would explain Diotrephes' unwillingness to receive them
- Fifth, he forbids other Christians from receiving the teachers
 - Once again, this is an indication that he felt threatened by their teaching
 - Any other authority was an affront to his position and pride
- Finally, he put out a Christian who contended with him
 - He used intimidation to stop dissent
 - And if they would not listen he removed them
- This is the recipe for a cult, and this man is clearly someone John intends to correct
 - John says he will call attention to this man's deeds
 - Call attention is a single Greek word meaning to remind or bring to mind
 - John would remind everyone of his deeds when he came to visit

- It's interesting that John does not threaten to remove him, but just to expose him
- Perhaps John knew that exposing him would be enough for him to lose his chance to lead anyone
- This is a helpful reminder that our fight against false leaders and teachers doesn't revolve around their positions, but around the truth
 - We want to expose the truth, which will then naturally diminish the man
 - We don't need to attack them personally or forcibly remove them
 - Simply showing them to be the men they are will destroy their base of power in the eyes of most Christians
- Finally, John gives his positive example to reinforce what he says about Gaius

3John 11 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.

3John 12 Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself; and we add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true.

- So John has given the church two examples to consider: Gaius and Diotrefes
 - John now says don't imitate the evil man; imitate the good man
 - The one who does good is of God, meaning he is representing God's heart
 - This is the man who is working to please God
 - And therefore, if we imitate him, we are learning how to please God ourselves
 - On the other hand, John says that the one who does evil has not seen God
 - This doesn't necessarily mean that this man is not a believer
 - In the context, John is comparing the one who is of God (i.e., revealing God by his life) vs. the man who is not of God (i.e., not reflecting God's heart)

- Certainly, it's possible that this leader was not a believer, but he could simply be a very rebellious believer
- Demetrius is the courier bringing this letter, so John tells Gaius that this man has a good reputation and deserves to be well-treated
 - Perhaps this man was one of the traveling preachers
 - In any case, John says that Demetrius has a good testimony from three sources
 - First, all the brethren who know him give a good testimony of his life
 - Secondly, the truth itself testifies, meaning this man was a good handler of the word of God
 - He divided rightly the truth
 - Thirdly, John added his approval of the man, which Gaius knows is trustworthy
 - So Gaius had no reason to reject this man when he came to deliver the letter
 - I'm sure once he read the letter, he was glad to have received him
- Finally John ends the letter in a way similar to 2 John:

[3John 13](#) I had many things to write to you, but I am not willing to write them to you with pen and ink;

[3John 14](#) but I hope to see you shortly, and we will speak face to face.

[3John 15](#) Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.

- Persecution prevented John from speaking more forthrightly in his letter
 - He was not willing to write them and risk persecution for himself or his church family
 - But he says he intended to see them in person shortly
 - And he looked forward to seeing them face to face
 - He ends simply: peace to them
 - The friends of his church greet them and vice versa