

# Sermon: Support Those Who Work for the Truth.

Text: [III John 1:1-15](#)

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**Introduction:** I hope you don't think that this sermon is meant to be self-serving. I do, however, want to share with you what I think John's heart was regarding the three main characters of this shortest of letters in the NT. The three men we are looking at in their order of appearance in this epistle are: Gaius, Diotrephes, and Demetrius.

It seems to me that the major reasons for [III John](#) being written were to give instruction as to who should be supported, a pointing out of wickedness and sin within the church, and finally to solicit imitation of those who are good and walk in the truth.

[II John](#) had warned about itinerant preachers that had evil and self-serving motives, who were teaching heresy and leading people astray. They did not deserve the church's support. [III John](#) was more about supporting those who *were* preaching the truth and who were worthy of the church's support.

There was an early church document called the Didache that laid out some guidelines for deciding if a person who claimed to follow God deserved support from local churches. (From Bob Utley) This early non-canonical Christian writing from the early second century called The Didache or *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* has these guidelines:

## CHAPTER XI-CONCERNING TEACHERS, APOSTLES, AND PROPHETS

"Whosoever, therefore, cometh and teacheth you all these things that have been said before, receive him. But if the teacher himself turn and teach another doctrine to the destruction of this, hear him not; but if he teach so as to increase righteousness and the knowledge of the Lord, receive him as the Lord. But concerning the apostles and prophets, according to the decree of the Gospel, thus do: Let every apostle that cometh to you be received as the Lord. But he shall not remain except one day; but if there be need, also the next; but if he remain three days, he is a false prophet. And when the apostle goeth away, let him take nothing but bread until he lodgeth; but if he asks for money, he is a false prophet" (p. 380).

**Illus.** My Plymouth Volare wagon was stolen from in front of the church in Deming, NM. I have never been shy when it seemed necessary to solicit funds for Christian missions or church projects. I will take money from Gentiles or non-believers unlike John's suggestion for Christ's work. I am many times not eager to ask for myself. I always figure that God knows my needs and He will take care of me if I ask Him. After my car was stolen, I walked back and forth for a few days and two people gave us a total of \$2000. with which I was able to buy a nice used car.

## CHAPTER XII-RECEPTION OF CHRISTIANS

"But whosoever saith in the Spirit, Give me money, or something else, ye shall not listen to him; but if he saith to you to give for other's sake who are in need, let no one judge him. But let every one that cometh in the name of the Lord be received, and afterward ye shall prove and know him; for ye shall have understanding right and left. If he who cometh is a wayfarer, assist him as far as ye are able; but he shall not remain with you, except for two or three days, if need be. But if he willeth to abide with you, being an artisan, let him work and eat; but if he hath no trade, according to your understanding see to it that, as a Christian, he shall not live with you idle. But if he willeth not so to do, he is a Christ-monger. Watch that ye keep aloof from such" (p. 381).

We all have seen people who were in ministry for the money and had a poor work ethic. **Illus.** John Methot, a converted Roman Catholic priest who had a mission work in LaChute, Quebec, took all kinds of money from U.S. supporters and did very little of God's work the summer I went up to be a co-laborer with him. I was very disappointed.

The forms of these kinds of letters are not unlike those written in the culture between acquaintances. Raymond Brown, *The Epistles of John*, pp. 701-702, gives us a basic formula or structure:

Sender - the Presbyter, i.e., the elder or aged one. We believe this is John, the Apostle.

Addressee - to the beloved Gaius, i.e., John's dear friend, Gaius

Health wish - **v. 2** John wishes spiritual wellness and also physical well-being.

Body of the letter - **vv. 3-14**

Concluding formula - **v. 15** (peace and greetings)

This shortest book in the NT could be considered somewhat secular because the name Jesus and the title Christ are not mentioned. And the three names that are included are Graeco-Roman, i.e., Gentile. Where **II John** was more than likely written as a general (catholic) letter to the church, **III John** is meant for the most part to be for an individual about others.

### I. Cast of Characters John Addressed

#### A. Gaius

**Illus.** Gaius was a very common (frequent) name, a little like Gary a few years ago (VW garage in PA there were three other Garys back in the workshop where they were working on cars). Even the guy who worked on my Austin Healey years ago, his name was Gary. Gaius, though, was a name associated with the emperor Gaius Julius Caesar who was assassinated in 44 B.C.

Gaius is addressed as “beloved” throughout this letter. The NIV calls Gaius “my dear friend.” **III John 1:1 ESV** <sup>1</sup> **The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.**

John’s relationship with Gaius is the result of both being in the truth and living truthful lives for Jesus. There is nothing fake here. Their relationships are honest and true because they both love Jesus who is the Truth.

Everytime you see/hear the word “beloved” (4 times) in **III John**, it is a reference to John sharing his heart and mind with Gaius concerning the church. The word church (*ekklesia*) literally means those who are called out (from the world). Christians exist in a spiritual realm that is at odds with that of the world.

John goes on about Gaius here: **III John 1:2 ESV** <sup>2</sup> **Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health (can be spiritual as well as physical), as it goes well with your soul.**

I do not think that there is necessarily an exact connection between a person being spiritually well and good health and vice versa. Think of the Apostle Paul and his thorn in the flesh. Jesus died in his 30s and his relationship with God the Father was perfect.

Steven Cole tells this personal story: “In 1987, Marla and I had the privilege of traveling to Hong Kong, Macau, and China for ministry. In Macau, we were visiting with some missionaries and through their translation, talking with two courageous young Chinese women who slipped across the border into China each week. From there they mailed dozens of Bible correspondence courses. If caught, they would have been imprisoned.

I asked these young women if they had ever heard of the “health and wealth” or “prosperity” teaching. They had not. When I explained to them that some in America were teaching that it is God’s will for all of His children to be healthy and wealthy, these young women shook their heads and laughed softly. They said, “I don’t think that Christians in China would fall for that!”

John is praying for his friend, Gaius, that he would prosper and be in good physical health to the same degree as his soul actually was prospering.”

**III John 1:3-4 ESV** <sup>3</sup> **For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. <sup>4</sup> I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.**

Some of you must be able to resonate with these verses when you see others who you have influenced and taught the word grow in their faith and walk with the Lord. It is a joyous realization.

**Verses 3-4** might be a contrast between Gaius and Diotrephes like **verse 11**, but certainly that does not diminish the praise for Gaius' life in the Lord.

It is a wonderful feeling to be in fellowship with those who love the truth and conduct their lives accordingly. And even though they may be strangers, they are our family in Christ. **Illus.** When I went to San Luis Potosi, Mexico to work with Wayne Hayes, I wanted to be a blessing, and I hope I was, but it was I who was blessed well beyond what I thought I would be.

Another area that Gaius is receiving praise from the Apostle is his work with missionaries who are speaking for the Lord as they travel through the region. **III John 1:5-8 ESV** **5** Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, **6** who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. **7** For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. **8** Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.

William Barclay (pp. 173-174) is helpful here. In the ancient pagan world, hospitality was considered a sacred duty. "strangers were under the protection of Zeus Xenios, Zeus, the god of strangers (**ξενος**).

In the ancient world, inns were notoriously unsatisfactory...Plato compared innkeepers to pirates who hold their guests for ransom, before they allow them to escape.

So God's people must be hospitable to strangers (qualification of an elder, **I Tim 3:2, Tit 1:7-8**), especially brothers and sisters in Christ and even more so for those who are called to preach/teach representing God! God can and does provide hospitality through his people. This was one of Gaius' gifts.

Even though the actual word "hospitality" which from the Greek word (**φιλοξενον**) literally means "lover of strangers" is not in this section, the concept is. The word in **verse 8** **υπολαμβάνειν** is translated "show hospitality" in the NIV, "be fellowhelpers" in the KJV and the ESV says "support people." Showing hospitality is an important Christian quality.

**I Peter 4:9 ESV** **9** Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.

**Hebrews 13:2 ESV** **2** Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

Here comes the major reason for writing this letter: **III John 1:9-10 ESV** 9 I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. 10 So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.

## **B. Diotrephes**

In **verse 9**, we see the 2nd of 3 uses of the word church in this letter. John does not even use the word “Church” in his Gospel or the **I John** and **II John**. It is prevalent in the book of Revelation. In that study we will see how evil can be present within the church, but Jesus says it must be corrected.

**Q.** What is the problem with Diotrephes?

**A.** Well primarily, he is not of God, but the Adversary (Satan). Diotrephes is proud, not a servant, he does not accept the authority of the Apostle John, or the word of godly outsiders with proper references such as these itinerate missionaries.

Further in **v. 10**, John is going to pay a visit to confront this ungodly leader. Diotrephes is gossiping maliciously (NIV), “talking wicked nonsense” (ESV). This certainly is slander. This very strong leader lacked one essential quality - LOVE. C.H. Dodd said “There is no real religious experience which does not express itself in charity (love).”

A follower of God and Jesus will be charitable, hospitable, giving, loving, serving and not need to be the only leader or the one who makes all decisions with no questioning. And not only does Diotrephes not do what is right for the church, he prevents others from being used by God to show their love to the brothers who need assistance. He also had threatened to remove people from the church if they dared to question his authority.

In **verse 8** the Apostle John is saying we ought to support people who are speaking the truth. Diotrephes is saying, “not without my permission, you don’t.”

A.T. Robertson, a well-known scholar of the early twentieth century, said: "Some forty years ago I wrote an article on Diotrephes for a denominational paper. The editor told me that twenty-five deacons stopped the paper to show their resentment against being personally attacked in the paper."

The last person we will briefly mention was probably the carrier of this letter that also served as a letter of recommendation for his support from the churches is:

## **C. Demetrius**

We will handle **verse 11** shortly, but it appears that it is simply a comparison between good and evil and a warning to behave in a proper manner.

Here is a short estimation of Demetrius' worth and value to the church:

**III John 1:12 ESV** <sup>12</sup> Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself. We also add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true.

Demetrius was a common name then as well. "He has been identified with Demetrius, the silversmith of Ephesus, and the leader of the opposition to Paul (**Acts 19:21**). He may have later converted...He has been identified with Demas (which is a shortened form of Demetrius), who had forsaken Paul because he loved this present world (**Colossians 4:14; Philemon 24; 2 Timothy 4:10**). He may have returned to the faith and needed a character reference.

## II. Be Careful Who You Imitate.

**III John 1:11 ESV** <sup>11</sup> Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God.

Present tense is talking about the habit or continuous activity of doing good or doing evil. Certainly all of us have sinned...

Paul probably explains as well as anyone how you can tell evil people from good or godly people. Isn't it by the fruit of their lives - what they both say and do? John says:

### A. Do Not Imitate Evil (People)

How do we recognize evil people? They follow the fallen nature and are not led by the Holy Spirit. **Galatians 5:19-21 ESV** <sup>19</sup> Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, <sup>21</sup> envy,[a] drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do[b] such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

**They have no connection to God in any positive way.**

**Footnotes:** [a] Galatians 5:21 Some manuscripts add *murder*

[b] Galatians 5:21 Or *make a practice of doing*

### B. Do Imitate Good (People)

**Galatians 5:22-26 ESV** <sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. <sup>26</sup> Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

**Choose your models wisely.**

### C. The Church Is a Place for Correction and Fellowship.

**III John 1:13-15 ESV (Final Greetings)** <sup>13</sup> I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink. <sup>14</sup> I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. <sup>15</sup> Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends, each by name.

This is very much like the closing verses of **II John**. One thing seems clear that both discipline and fellowship are better done in person. This benefits both parties in both cases.

Bob Utley commented here: **v. 15** "Peace be to you" This is obviously a reference to the Hebraic idiom *shalom* (cf. **Luke 10:5**). It can mean "hello" or "good-bye." The French word "bonjour" is like this. It can be used as a greeting or a blessing and may mean both at the same time. *Shalom* expresses not only the absence of problems but the presence of God's blessings. These were the resurrected Christ's first words to the disciples in the upper room (cf. **John 20:19,21,26**). Both Paul (cf. **Eph. 6:23**) and Peter (cf. **1 Pet. 5:14**) used this as a closing prayer for God's people *as well*.

**Conclusion:** God wants us to prosper, but not so much in the way as one might imagine. It might be fine to be rich, but it is better to be rich toward God.

**Illus.** by Steven Cole: The story is told of a Texas millionaire who wanted to be buried in his Cadillac. So when he died, the undertakers dug an enormous grave and placed the Cadillac on a huge lowering device. They dressed the corpse in his sportiest clothes, put a cigar in his mouth, seated him behind the steering wheel, and set the speedometer at 80 miles per hour. The mourners gathered around the grave. As the unusual coffin slowly sank into the ground to the appropriate words of committal, a millionaire friend of the deceased brushed a tear from his eye and sighed, "Man, that's living!"

But, of course, it's not living—it's death! True prosperity is not to live as a millionaire and be buried in your Cadillac. True prosperity is to be rich toward God (**Luke 12:21**). True prosperity is to have a prosperous soul. The way to that eternal prosperity is to walk in the truth and in love, to submit to apostolic authority as revealed in the New Testament, and to imitate godly examples. Then it may be said of you, "Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers." And your pastors will have great joy to hear that you are walking in the truth.

**Psalm 133:1-3 ESV** <sup>1</sup> Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! <sup>2</sup> It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes! <sup>3</sup> It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.