

THIRD JOHN "A Tale of Two Church Guys"

3 John 1-15

I gave you some homework to do, a case study. It involved the real life experience of a well-respected and talented Christian musician. How many of you looked at this? Thoughts? Reactions?

We have had this recurring theme in 1, 2 and (as you will see today) 3 John and that theme is truth. What we claim to be truth, what we believe, what we know to be right, it's important! Repeatedly I've pointed out 3 things that John ties together (you cannot have one without the others): truth, love and obedience. We need to have truth in love. There must be obedience to the truth. So then our foundation is truth. And John clearly defines what that truth is for us in First John.

The first question on your sheet says, "As Christians, what should be our standard of morality? Of righteousness?" What truth do we rely upon to govern our lives? What is it? Is it our own experiences, convictions, feelings, desires, passions OR is it something else? And is it a sliding scale, ever-evolving and negotiable or is it firmly fixed? *[Get class responses]*

Our whole basis for truth should be what? Scripture, the Bible, which we believe to be the inspired, inerrant word of God. God's holy standard has been firmly established; revealed to us in His word; proclaimed thru His prophets, apostles, His own Son, and various messengers; inspired and affirmed by the Holy Spirit; divinely preserved thru the centuries for us today. It seems clear. We don't have any problem with that concept.

The whole purpose for this exercise was to show you how easy it is for even Bible-believing Christians to compromise the truth that God has given to us in His word. Life happens. I've learned something about myself. I am a fallen, sinful, selfish, fickle individual. I can justify just about anything that I say or do. And so can you. Our standard for life must be something outside of our own selves. And that is found HERE. That's the whole reason why we meet together every week in this place – to read and study what

God's word has to say to us. I found thru the years that the best investment of my time is being here in God's house, studying God's word with God's people!

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity [disbelief]..." You will recognize this as the famous opening paragraph from Charles Dickens' "A Tale of Two Cities." In that novel Dickens contrasts two cities and what life was like in them during the French Revolution, late 18th C. There was peace and prosperity in London while utter chaos and turmoil raged in Paris. I've entitled our study of Third John, "A Tale of Two Church Guys." In this very short and personal letter the Apostle John contrasts two very different men, both part of the same church body. One man, Gaius, is commended for doing the right things for the right reasons. Meanwhile the other man, Diotrephes, well let's just say that John is not very pleased with him.

READ 3 John 1-15

In our case study I pointed out that 1 and 2 John emphasize the importance of truth in a believer's life. Truth shows up again here in 3 John. Truth is a common theme in John's letters.

READ 3 John 1-2

Here we have the opening greeting. As in 2 John the writer of this letter refers to himself simply as "the elder." The early church recognized that this letter along with 1 and 2 John were written by the Apostle John even though he never identifies himself by name. John is now in his late 80s, maybe early 90s. He is still actively ministering in Ephesus. John writes this letter to a man named Gaius, "the beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth." Gaius is a Christian man beloved by his church community, by God and by John. We know nothing about him other than what we see here in this letter. There are 3 other men identified in the N.T. named Gaius, but none of them are this guy. Gaius was actually a very common

Greek name in the 1st C. John prays, v 2, that this letter finds Gaius doing well physically and spiritually.

As I mentioned last week when we studied 2 John that it was common during this period of time for the apostles and their trained “second and third generation” disciples to travel around and preach at various house churches. The early church met in people’s homes and most of church groups did not have their own pastors. With few inns available, the people in these churches would extend hospitality to the traveling preachers that went from house church to house church. The people would put these guys up for the night and feed them. Gaius, just like the elect lady that we saw last week in 2 John, is one of the church people who is showing hospitality to these traveling preachers.

READ 3 John 3-4

V 3, John commends Gaius for “walking in the truth.” Gaius doesn’t just possess truth. He knows it, he believes it and, best of all, he actually lives it.

We know from reading on ahead that the brothers John is referring to in these verses are these traveling preachers. When they returned back to their home church they gave a good report – how well they had been treated by this man Gaius. That made John very happy, v 3: “I rejoiced greatly.” John apparently knows Gaius though we don’t know how. Perhaps he mentored him at some point – v 4, he (John) is filled with joy at hearing that one of HIS children is walking in the truth. So there is some sort of past connection between John and this man Gaius.

READ 3 John 5-8

Gaius has been showing hospitality to “these brothers,” v 5, these traveling preachers.

John points out that [*unlike the people the elect woman of 2 John was showing hospitality to*], these brothers are not false teachers. They are the real deal, preachers of righteousness. They are more like missionaries who have been sent out by the church at Ephesus. John knows these brothers and he vouches for them. He refers to them in v 8 as "fellow workers for the truth." So what Gaius is doing is a good thing & he's commended for it.

In v 5, John says, "it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts..." For me this is a personal verse. It reminds me of the way I should view my role as a teacher here in the Level Ground Class. I am nothing more than a faithful servant. I am an imperfect vessel. I am flawed in many ways. I'm not the most talented teacher. I am simply called to give you my best effort. So then, I want you to know that I am committed to being here as often as I can be physically. I will continue to work diligently every week preparing the lessons. I will regularly pray for each one of you. I will come to this place every Sunday morning and "teach the truth in love." "A trusted and faithful servant." That's how John describes this man Gaius. He has been willingly, faithfully doing his best in serving the Lord. And that's all God asks of us.

"These brothers" testified when they returned in front of the whole church to the love that Gaius had showed them. Gaius received them into his home. He cared for them. He met their physical and spiritual needs. And when their mission was complete he sent them on their way. John vouches for the character of these brothers who John calls "fellow workers for the truth." They're not like those false teachers in 2 John who were only in it for personal gain or glory. No, these "brothers" are preaching in various places "for the sake of the name," v 7.

Their motivation was to bring honor and glory to Jesus Christ.

In effect Gaius thru his hospitality is investing in the ministry of these Christian brothers. So the bottom line here, John is saying is, "Well done, Gaius! Keep up the good work!"

So there you have Gaius – a man who is walking in the truth, being faithful to the work of God, showing love, extending hospitality to strangers, doing what God wants him to do, helping these brothers, these traveling preachers.

But in this same church there is another man who is NOT helping. In fact he is hindering God's work. His name is Diotrephes.

READ 3 John 9-10

What a contrast Diotrephes is to Gaius! He is a man who loves being in control, having power, being the center of attention, having the place of prominence in the church. He is selfish and arrogant. He refuses even to recognize the authority of the Apostle John. Think about that. Here is the old apostle, one who was Jesus' disciple, part of the inner circle of disciples, wrote the Gospel of John, serving faithfully as a pastor in Ephesus, standing up for the Gospel to the point that he would eventually be banished to the Island of Patmos. He is well respected, loving and strong, the last remaining disciple and yet – even with that resume, John gets resistance from someone in the church, a prominent and powerful person in the church, perhaps even a deacon!

Why is Diotrephes "talking wicked nonsense" against John and those brothers who went out from his church? Why does Diotrephes refuse to show hospitality to these brothers? Why is he stopping them and even putting them out of the church (an attempt at excommunication)? What is his motivation? John tells us in v 9 – he "likes to put himself first." He desires to be the #1 guy in the church. He is going to push back against anyone who comes along and threatens what he sees as his rightful place of prominence. This is HIS church! Now, let's just stop and think about this. Who should be #1 in the church? Who is the Head of the church? Jesus Christ (Eph 5:23). So the sin of Diotrephes is that he is trying to assume a position that belongs to Jesus. Diotrephes wants to be the ruler, the one in control. And so John tells Gaius that when he comes, v 10, he is going to "bring up what he is doing" – expose Diotrephes' wickedness.

By the way I am currently taking a church history course and you see this same kind of thing repeated over and over throughout church history where individuals in authority in the church – the various popes, false teachers, bishops, and church leaders abuse their positions again and again. They place themselves in the position reserved for Jesus alone. They force their own ideas, agendas and opinions on everyone in the church. They place their own viewpoints ahead of the clear teachings of Scripture. And the result is that there has been nothing but continuous disunity in the church for centuries. Their actions have hurt the church's testimony and hindered the spread of the Gospel. It is a sad commentary.

READ 3 John 11

John's message for Gaius is a message for all Christians: "Do not imitate evil, but imitate good." If you do what is good, what is right, then you are from God. Your actions will prove who you belong to. You either belong to God (do good) or to Satan (do evil). This is what Jesus told the religious elite of His day in John Ch 8. When the Pharisees challenged and resisted Jesus and falsely accused Him, Jesus pushed back against them. He told them this: "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires..." (Jn 8:44). John and the other disciples were standing there in the temple the day Jesus said that. What you believe impacts the way you act. Truth, love and obedience are a package deal!

READ 3 John 12

We are introduced briefly to a third man named Demetrius. We know nothing about him other than that he, like Gaius, is a good man. Why does John mention him?

John is vouching for Demetrius, his character. This man is one of us. Please don't hesitate to receive him into your house.

Here's the takeaway from all of this section. Don't see people who teach the truth as a threat. This is not a competition. Work with them. Don't undermine them. Embrace them. Support them. Treat them with

respect. We are co-laborers for Jesus Christ. That's all we are. And what a privilege!

READ 3 John 13-14

John repeats to Gaius exactly what he told the elect lady at the end of 2 John. There is so much more I need to say. When I come in person we will talk face to face.

READ 3 John 15

John wishes Gaius the peace of God. He passes along greetings from the friends in Ephesus. He asks Gaius in closing to greet the people in his church by name. That is an interesting closing thought. People are so important. Our fellowship and friendship as brothers and sisters in Christ is so special. We should value it. *[10,000 reasons to bless the Lord, I have over 100 names of church friends thru the years that have blessed me, including all of you]*. People are so important! [Show group photo] People like Janis, Debra, Neale, Carleen, Richard, Ginger, Cheryl, Darryl, Tom, Debbie, Robin and Cindy – and those not pictured Ron, Sue, Heather and Doris. I love you all!

There you have Third John, Any closing thoughts? Live your life according to biblical standards. Pattern your life after the Lord Jesus Christ. Praise God for the wonderful godly friends He has sent across your path thru the years. Now go out there and bring more in!