



3 JOHN

Commendable & Deplorable Role Models

“Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren,
and especially when they are strangers.”

3 John 1:5



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Commendable and Deplorable Role Models

Purpose

To *commend* Gaius for his faithful service and to *condemn* Diotrephes for his church tyranny

Summary

In this brief letter, John highlights three men – the godly Gaius, the devilish Diotrephes, and the devout Demetrius. John spends the first half of his letter commending Gaius for his exemplary service to the church; he supported traveling preachers by opening his home, meeting their needs, and offering provisions for them to carry on. Another commendable Christian that John highlights is Demetrius, who received approval from everyone who knew him; more importantly, his lifestyle was consistent with the example and teaching of Christ. On the other hand, John also exposes a church tyrant by the name of Diotrephes; his dictatorial control over the church was hindering the gospel.

Though this letter is short, it is convicting. We are faced with a challenging question. Which of these examples are we going to follow, that of unselfish and unwavering support and hospitality, that of commendable integrity, or that of a manipulative church bully?

Themes

- **A Good Name:** Whether we realize it or not and whether we like it or not, our name carries with it a set of characteristics and/or traits, good and bad. When our name is mentioned in a group, people conjure up their impressions of us, things we have said and done. Will people be more apt to listen or reject the gospel based on our actions and attitudes? Our good or bad name cause either help or hinder the cause of Christ.
- **Supporting Ministries:** God has a purpose for every believer; He gifts them in some way to advance His kingdom. While some people may initiate and lead ministries, others are called to a support role and assist them by giving of their time, energy, and/or resources. Gaius is commended by John for demonstrating hospitality to the traveling ministers of his day.
- **Church Tyrants:** The church is not exempt from trouble-makers, dictators, or bullies. Prideful people, who must be the center of attention and who must control everyone around them, damage the effectiveness of the gospel and hamstring a church's ability to minister to a community. It is vital to confront such people before they cause irreparable harm.

Leading Ideas

- Whether good or bad, our name precedes us, and it either helps or hinders the cause of Christ (1:1-4).
- When we support the ministries of others, we are partnering in their ministries (1:5-8).
- Even in the church, trouble-makers exist (1:9, 10).
- We should imitate those people who imitate the Truth (1:11, 12).
- Greeting people by name is an important skill to master (1:13-15).

Penman

John, the disciple of Jesus

Recipients

The letter is addressed to "the beloved Gaius," a commendable and much respected man in the early church.

Date Written

Approx. 90 AD
from Ephesus

Key People

John, Gaius, Diotrephes,
and Demetrius

Key Verse

"Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and especially when they are strangers."

3 John 1:5

3 John 1-4

¹“The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth: ²Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers. ³For I was very glad when brethren came and testified to your truth, that is, how you are walking in truth. ⁴I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.”

A Good Name

Proverbs 22:1
Philippians 2:15
Titus 2:8
1 Peter 2:12, 15
1 Peter 3:16

A Good Name

Be an Example to Others

Leading Idea

Whether good or bad, our name precedes us, and it either helps or hinders the cause of Christ.

John opens this letter in the same fashion as he did his second one (2 John). He refers to himself as “the elder,” which either reflects his age at the time (as the longest living disciple of Christ) or his spiritual authority in the early church. Either interpretation would be correct.

This letter is addressed to a man named Gaius (“rejoicer”). It is uncertain if this Gaius is the same one mentioned in other passages (Acts 20:4; Romans 16:23). However, it is certain that John loved this man dearly, as he uses the term “beloved” four times in fifteen verses (v.1, 2, 5, 11). The word “beloved” is not one we use today; it literally means “dearly loved” or “dear to the heart.” We use the word all of the time without knowing it, when we open letters or messages with the word “dear,” as in “Dear Friend.” It is an indication that the person being addressed is highly valued and greatly loved.

After his salutation, John mentions that he is praying for Gaius’ health. While wishing someone good health is typical in a letter, it may be that Gaius was actually advanced in age, or perhaps he was ill, handicapped, or hurt. What is interesting here is that John prays that his friend’s body would be as healthy as his soul. This statement could be taken in a couple of ways. First, John could be expressing his desire for Gaius’ external well-being to match his internal well-being, hoping that his body would reflect the restoration which God had affected in his soul through salvation in Christ. However, while here on earth, this wish is impossible, for we will not receive our new glorified bodies until the afterlife. Second, John could be expressing his desire to see Gaius care for his body as he has obviously cared for his soul. In other words, Gaius had matured in his faith and had grown spiritually; he had apparently put more effort into his spiritual condition than his physical condition.

John’s prayer for Gaius is uncommon in the American church. Today, we might pray that someone’s soul might be as healthy as his or her body. Americans tend to place much more emphasis on physical well-being than on spiritual well-being. We are apt to be more concerned about what we eat and drink and how much we exercise than what we read, watch, or spend time doing, much less the state of our spiritual condition. Even Christians are guilty of investing more hours and dollars on temporal activities than on eternal matters. It would be far better to have an unhealthy body and a healthy soul than to have a healthy body and a starving, anemic soul. While physical discipline is good for some things, spiritual discipline is good for all things, in this life and the life to come (1 Timothy 4:7,8).

Gaius is commended for “walking in the truth” (v.3). While John passes on the commendation in the letter, the real compliment is that others told John about Gaius’ example. In other words, he heard from other people how Gaius was speaking and living his faith, making a good name for himself and for Christianity. While Christ needs no help making a good name for Himself, our speech and actions, as one of His followers, can certainly tarnish the testimony of Christianity and hurt its influence in the lives of those who are watching and listening. *Just as nothing aides our Christian message more than a godly life, nothing damages our Christian message more than an unruly one.* We undermine the effectiveness of the Good News when people hear or see the bad news of our lifestyle. We propel the effectiveness of the Gospel when people hear or see the example we are in our works and words. May we strive to build a good name so that we may help and not hinder the cause of Jesus Christ.

As an Apostle and elder of the early church, John was more than likely the “father” of many converts to Christianity. He refers to those converts as his inheritance or his “children.” They are his “kids” in the faith. Thus, he expresses the joy that he experiences, as any parent would, when he hears that his “kids” are not only living for the Lord but making a difference for Him.

Fellow Workers

Partnering With Others

⁵“Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and especially when they are strangers; ⁶and 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. ⁷For they went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. ⁸Therefore, we ought to support such men, so that we may be fellow workers with the truth.”

Giving Generously

Proverbs 3:9, 10
Proverbs 11:25; 22:9
Romans 12:8
2 Corinthians 9:6, 7
Ephesians 4:28
1 Timothy 5:10
1 Timothy 6:17-19
Hebrews 13:2

Leading Idea

When we support the ministries of others, we are, in a way, partnering in their ministries.

In the first passage of this letter (v.1-4), John commended Gaius for his good name; his reputation of obedience and good works had preceded him, and it brought great joy to the Apostle. In this passage (v.5-8), John continues his commendation by sharing what he had heard and by encouraging Gaius to carry on. John notes two specific qualities that Gaius was exhibiting: faithfulness and hospitality.

First, John writes that Gaius was “acting *faithfully* in whatever he accomplished.” Webster defines faithfulness as “a firm adherence to allegiance and duty, a strict performance of promises, a loyalty or constancy” (*Webster’s 1828*). In my opinion, faithfulness is one of the most preferred and noble qualities that a person can possess. A faithful person takes seriously his commitments before the Lord, he keeps his word, he follows through with his responsibilities, and he can be counted on to do his best in whatever he undertakes. One who is faithful is consistent in all that he does, and, therefore, he is reliable, dependable, and trustworthy. A faithful individual adds credence to a cause, teeth to a task, and muscle to a ministry. Faithful people are comforting to have around, for their support is encouraging and their consistency is reassuring. Gaius must have been such a person.

The second trait that John recognizes in Gaius is hospitality. While the word “hospitality” is not used in the letter, there are several indications that hospitality is the subject. For example, Gaius acts faithfully with people “who are strangers,” he “sends them on their way,” he supports those who were “sent out for the sake of the Name,” and he is compared to the inhospitable Diotrephes. Hospitality is “the act or practice of receiving and entertaining strangers or guests with kind and generous liberality and, yet, without reward” (*Webster’s 1828*). Someone who is hospitable is courteous and considerate, sensitive to the needs of others, concerned for their comfort and well-being. Hospitable people are pleasant to be around because they make you feel welcome, accepted, and loved. Hospitable people are typically unselfish, giving, and generous. Their time, energy, and resources are secondary to the primary goal of loving and caring for people. These commendable traits were evident in Gaius.

Just as we have today, there must have been traveling preachers who visited churches and encouraged believers. Thus, they were “strangers” to the communities that they visited and more than likely had to survive on the kindness and generosity of people in those churches. These preachers felt the Lord leading them to this type of ministry, they obeyed Him and went out “for the sake of His Name,” they left their homes, families, and livelihood, and they put their trust in the provision of the Lord to meet their needs, “accepting nothing from the Gentiles.” Without the hospitality of godly people in those churches, these preachers could not have endured and their ministries would have been short-lived.

Therefore, what Gaius was doing, entertaining these strangers in his home, was a huge blessing to these men, and “they testified of his love” before John when they visited John’s city. That’s why John sent this letter, to recognize Gaius for his acceptance of these men, and to remind him (and others who would read this letter) that they “ought to support such men” and that they would do well to “send them on their way in a manner worthy of God.” In other words, in meeting their needs we enable them to continue their ministries. We become “fellow workers with the truth.” If Gaius entertained these traveling preachers, fed them, gave them a place to rest, and sent them on their way fully provisioned, and they, in turn, led dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of people to Christ, then Gaius played a role in making that happen. He would be a partner in their ministry and would gain an eternal reward for doing so. Likewise, in our assisting other ministries through giving our time, energy, and resources, we join in their work and reward. While God may choose some to initiate ministries, He just as well chooses others to support them; and, as partners, both are valuable assets to His Kingdom.

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

¹⁰For 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.”

Church Tyrants

Romans 16:16-18

1 Corinthians 1:10, 11

1 Corinthians 5:6, 7

1 Corinthians 12:26

Galatians 5:9

Jude 1:19

All Are Not Angels

Church Tyrants

Leading Idea

Even in the church, trouble-makers exist.

In the first half of this letter (v.1-8), John commends the godly Gaius for his faithfulness and hospitality. Now, John turns his attention to condemn the actions and words of Diotrephes (v.9, 10), a selfish man, a tyrant, who was causing a great deal of trouble in the church. John’s description of Diotrephes is not positive, and it should never be used to describe a genuine follower of Christ.

- **Arrogance:** At the root of all tyrants and trouble-makers is self-love, egotism, conceit, or pride. John said Diotrephes “loved to be first among them.” No doubt, his was the loudest and most opinionated voice in the church, and everyone deferred to his obnoxious presence. He spoke for everyone because he spoke over everyone. He always took the lion’s share although he was least deserving of it. His arrogance was overbearing and unpleasant.
- **Insubordinate:** Hard evidence of the existence of pride is rebelliousness to authority. Those who must have their own way find it hard, if not impossible, to submit to the way of their leaders. John said that Diotrephes “did not accept what we say.” As an Apostle of Jesus, John’s position was authoritative in the early church, and yet Diotrephes did not recognize it.
- **Slander:** Another way to tell if someone is a trouble-maker is to listen to his words. He will tear down, rather than build up, those around him, especially when they are not around. John wrote that Diotrephes “unjustly accused us with wicked words.” He was a malicious gossip, a rumor-monster, a slanderer who defamed others to make him look good.
- **Inhospitable:** While those who are genuine believers, having the love of God in their hearts, will reach out to other believers, especially strangers or visitors, self-absorbed tyrants see visitors as a threat to their “rule.” Therefore, they show themselves impersonal, impatient, and inhospitable. John said that Diotrephes “did not receive the brethren,” meaning that he was harsh and rude towards guests. He viewed them as competition rather than partners in faith.
- **Manipulative:** Not only will a church tyrant make known his will to all, he will attempt to control the will of others. Not having control of every person and situation is unnerving to a trouble-maker; he is easily frustrated that actions are taking place outside of his reach. John wrote that Diotrephes “forbade those people who did” receive the brethren. In other words, Diotrephes would not allow fellow church members to show hospitality to guests. A tyrant must control every situation and becomes irate and intimidating, to maintain control.
- **Bully:** Through methods of intimidation, a church tyrant becomes a “manipulative parent” who issues and removes privileges for other members (like giving or taking away candy from a child). It seems that Diotrephes did something similar to this; when anyone extended kindness to visitors, he “put them out of the church,” acting as the gatekeeper.

It is important to note here that churches are not perfect places, neither are all church members angels. It is doubtful that Diotrephes, or people like him, have been truly converted to Christianity, but even Christians can act like tyrants at times. The reason why there is trouble in any church is because it is full of sinners, all who are at varying stages of spiritual growth and sanctification.

Not only does John describe a church tyrant, he prescribes what we should do with one – “call attention to his deeds.” Typically, trouble-makers are all bark and no bite; they just need to be put in their place. However, if left to their ways, tyrants can and will harm and hinder the body of Christ.

The Three Witnesses

Living a Life of Integrity

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.”¹²Demetrius 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.”

Doing Good v. Doing Evil

1 John 2:3-6, 9, 10

1 John 3:3-10

1 John 4:7-11

Leading Idea

We should imitate those people who imitate the Truth.

After describing the godly Gaius (v.1-8) and the devilish Diotrephes (v.9, 10), the church tyrant (whose name means “worshiper of Jove or Jupiter”), John issues a command: “do not imitate what is evil (Diotrephes) but what is good” (Gaius). He follows his command with a truth: “the one who does good is of God (Gaius), but the one who does evil has not seen God” (Diotrephes). Continually doing good is one of John’s signs of true conversion (see margin); continually doing evil is a sign that one “has not seen God,” which is John’s way of saying that he has not received Christ. It is very difficult (if not impossible) for those, who have the Spirit of God indwelling them, to practice evil deeds, for the Spirit of God within them will want to do good, because His nature is completely good.

Unfortunately, we live in a time when it is popular to imitate evil. Evil is defined as “any deviation by a moral agent (mankind) from the rules prescribed to him by God” (*Webster’s 1828*). In other words, evil is any action that violates the nature or commands of God. Sadly, American society increasingly glorifies evil. Evil permeates our entertainment industry (movies, television shows, video games, and the Internet), and it is slowly becoming the norm in our culture. On the other hand, that which is good and right is regularly frowned upon. Take for example sexual abstinence, it was once the right and responsible choice, but now virginity is ridiculed and frowned upon, and sexual promiscuity and irresponsibility are glorified. That which is good is now evil, and that which is evil is now good. A culture that neglects the “rules of conduct prescribed by God” is doomed (*Isaiah 5:20*), and it calls for God’s wrath and judgment. How long can God tolerate a society that adores evil and abhors good?

Along with the example of Gaius, John commends the example of Demetrius (a Greek name meaning “follower of Demeter,” goddess of the earth or harvest). Evidently, Demetrius was a good role model, for he received a good “testimony” (approval) from three witnesses:

- **“From Everyone”** – Anyone who had contact with Demetrius (friends, acquaintances, strangers) vouched for his good name. In other words, no one had anything negative to say about him; nothing he had done or said could be used to shame him. Demetrius was the same everywhere he went. He was genuine and consistent with all people. He had nothing to hide.
- **“The Truth Itself”** – More valid than Demetrius’ reputation with people was his approval from the truth itself, meaning that his words and ways were consistent with the life and teaching of Christ. We should be careful not to compare a person to other people but to compare a person to the Lord and His expectations. It’s more important that one attain this goal than the first, for it is one thing to be approved by other people, but if our lives do not conform to the image of Christ, then what else matters? Note, this compliment does not insinuate that Demetrius was perfect, but rather it suggests that he desired and attempted to live a life worthy of Christ. No commendation is higher than that; may it always be our goal.
- **“Our Testimony”** – The final witness to confirm Demetrius as a good role model is that of John himself. While he added his stamp of approval to the others, notice that John did not do so until the others were listed. Before leaders (in this case, an Apostle or elder) hold up someone as an example for others to follow, they should first confirm that person’s reputation with those who know him and, more importantly, compare his words and ways to the expectations of Christ. Leaders should never be hasty in calling attention to individuals.

Apparently, Demetrius was a man of integrity. Though not perfect (which no one is), every area of his life was commendable. May we strive to be approved by God first but also by those who around us.

¹³“I had many things to write to you, but I am not willing to write them to you with pen and ink; ¹⁴but I hope to see you shortly, and we will speak face to face. ¹⁵Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.”

Greet Them By Name

Encouraging Others

Leading Idea

Greeting people by name is an important skill to master.

This passage is the closing of John’s letter. It is similar to the closing of his previous letter (2 John). In fact, John repeats the same message, that he had many things to write but that he would rather wait and communicate them face to face. Without a doubt, speaking face to face is the best means of communication (see comments from 2 John 12, 13).

In the last verse (v. 15), John adds the line, “Peace be to you.” This phrase is uncommon today. We might say, “I wish you well,” or “I wish you the best,” or “I hope everything goes well for you.” In essence, John is expressing a friendly farewell, and friends always hope for the best for each other.

In John’s last words, he passes along greetings to Gaius from fellow believers in his home church. Then, he asks Gaius to say hello to everyone for him, but he implores Gaius to “greet them by name.” In other words, John asks Gaius to go to each person in his church and say, for example, “Mark, John says hi and peace to you,” or “Mary, John says hello and he’s praying that things go well for you.” We don’t know if Gaius followed through with this request, but it was John’s instruction.

Greeting friends by name is a skill that I need to master. I am terrible about remembering names; I can remember faces, but names not so much. It seems that when people are out of sight, for any amount of time (the longer the worse), they are also out of mind, and my mind chooses to forget them. I hate to admit it, but it’s true. With my closest friends, I have no problem, because I see them on a regular basis; but, when it comes to distant friends, acquaintances, co-workers, church members, other people’s children, and the like, I am most likely to draw a blank on their names when I see them. As a result, I usually utter a very impersonal and, in my opinion, hurtful, “Hey, how are you.”

Greeting friends by name is *encouraging* both to them and to me. I love to give compliments, to express my support and confidence, and to edify people, but when I cannot remember someone’s name and do not use it in a greeting or conversation, in my mind I am breaking edification rule number one. If you’ve ever run across someone who did not remember your name, and they had no idea who you were, it is embarrassing and discouraging. Not remembering your name or using the wrong name sends the message that you are not important, you did not make a lasting impression on the other person, or he does not care about you. I do not want other people to think those things when talking with me; therefore, it is essential that I remember names. But, that assignment is easier said than done.

Here are some ways that I try to remember people’s names:

- Repeat a person’s name in a conversation as many times as you can (without over-doing it), especially in the greeting and closing (i.e. thank you, Tom, or see you later, Sue).
- Connect a person’s name to a physical feature or personality trait (i.e. tall Travis, kind Kelly).
- Review pictures and names often, using directories, yearbooks, lists, etc., so as to reinforce names and faces in your memory (especially for those people whom you see weekly).
- Spell a person’s name in your mind; seeing the name in your mind’s eye reinforces memory.
- Invent nicknames for people. I tend to remember nicknames better than real names.
- Be honest about not remembering a name; have a person repeat it at the beginning of a conversation, that way you can focus and avoid that uncomfortable awkwardness.

A person’s name is the most important word in their lives. It is their identity; everything about them is tied to it. Remember names! It will encourage you, but, more importantly, it will encourage others.