

# A Good Name

December 3 – 3 John 1:1-15

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Day 336 – 29 Days to Go

## Today in Your Reading

We read John's third letter, which is very short but very important. **Whether good or bad, our name precedes us, and it either helps or hinders the cause of Christ.** In John's letter, he highlighted three men — the godly Gaius, the devilish Diotrephes, and the devout Demetrius. Let's take a closer look at these three men.

First, there was Gaius, to whom the letter was addressed (v.1-8). Evidently, Gaius was one of John's "children" in the Lord, one of his kids in the faith (v.3). John had invested in Gaius, and it pleased him very much to hear that Gaius was "walking in the truth" (v.4).

It pleased John even more to hear reports from others who testified of Gaius' faithfulness, conduct, and love. Not only did John commend Gaius for his service to the church, but he also recognized his hospitality. Gaius was supporting and encouraging traveling preachers by opening his home, meeting their needs, and offering provisions for them to carry on (v.5-8). By doing these things, Gaius was partnering in their ministry and the furtherance of the gospel.

Second, there was Diotrephes, a troublemaker in the church (v.9, 10). John's description of Diotrephes is not positive, and it should never be used to describe a genuine follower of Christ. Diotrephes was arrogant. "He loved to be first..." (v.9). He was insubordinate or rebellious to authority. Those who must have their own way find it difficult to submit to leaders. John wrote, "He did not accept what we had to say" (v.9).

Diotrephes was slanderous, "unjustly accusing people with his words" (v.10). Instead of building others up, he was tearing them down. He was also inhospitable. Unlike Gaius, Diotrephes "did not receive the brethren," meaning he was harsh and rude towards guests. He viewed them as competitors or enemies rather than viewing them as co-laborers for Christ (v.10).

Diotrephes was manipulative. Not only did he make his will known to all, but he also tried to control the will of others. John wrote that he "forbade those people who received the brethren" (v.10). He would not allow fellow church members to show hospitality to guests. Finally, Diotrephes was a bully. He made himself the gatekeeper of the church and pushed people out that he did not like (v.10).

Finally, there was Demetrius (v.12). Demetrius was a good role model, who received "a good testimony" (approval) from three witnesses — from everyone, from the truth, and from John. Anyone who had contact with Demetrius vouched for his good name. More important than the approval of others is the approval of the truth itself. Simply put, Demetrius' words and ways were consistent with the life and teaching of Christ. John himself could verify that Demetrius was a godly man with a good name.

## Daily Reflection

After reading this letter, we are faced with a challenging question. Which of these examples are we going to follow? John wrote, "Do not imitate what is evil but what is good" (v.11).

While Christ needs no help making a good name for Himself, our speech and actions can tarnish the testimony of Christianity and hurt its influence in the lives of those who are watching and listening. **Just as nothing aids the Christian message more than a godly life, nothing damages the Christian message more than an unruly one.** We undermine the effectiveness of the Good News when people hear or see our poor example. We propel the effectiveness of the gospel when people hear or see our good example.

Which is it for you? Do you have a good name? Why or why not? Strive to be a Gaius or a Demetrius, not a Diotrephes. **Strive to build a good name in the truth so that you may help and not hinder the cause of Christ.**

# Contend for the Faith

December 4 – Jude 1:1-16

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Day 337 – 28 Days to Go

## Today in Your Reading

We transitioned to the book of *Jude*, who was the brother of Jesus and James (*v.1; Matt. 13:55, 56; Mk. 6:3*). Jude wrote his letter between 65-70 AD, which would've placed it near the time of the letters of Peter and John. **The purpose was to appeal to his readers to "contend for the faith"** (*v.3*). Why? There were dangerous men who had "crept in unnoticed" to distort the gospel (*v.4*). But the gospel was "once for all handed down to the saints" (*v.3*), meaning that it is complete. There is nothing more to be added. Those who tweak the gospel in some way must be rejected as false.

For the remainder of the passage, Jude described these apostates (*v.4-16*). First, he said that they could be identified by their corrupt conduct and doctrine (*v.4*). Second, he likened them to rebellious people in the Old Testament — the unbelieving people of Israel during the exodus (*v.5*), the fallen angels before the flood (*v.6*), and the people of Sodom and Gomorrah (*v.7, 8*). These people were dreamers who lived in a perverted fantasy world (*v.8*). They participated in immoral acts, "defiling the flesh" (*v.8*). They rejected authority and did whatever they wanted. They "reviled angelic majesties," meaning they ridiculed those in the spiritual realm, like angels. Perhaps, that is why Jude referred to Michael in the next verse (*v.9*). Michael's battle with Satan, over Moses' body, is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. Michael was ordered to bury Moses' body, perhaps so that the people would not turn his burial site into a shrine (*Deut. 34:6*).

Third, Jude wrote that these men "reviled things they did not understand" (*Jude 1:10*). Apostates are often academically intellectual yet spiritually ignorant, experts about worldly things but clueless about spiritual matters.

Next, Jude compared these men to three Old Testament rebels (*v.11*). Cain rejected God and tried to save himself by his works (*Gen. 4*).

Balaam distorted the truth for personal gain (*Num. 22-24*); and Korah refused to submit to his God-given spiritual leaders (*Num 16*).

Fifth, Jude used five natural illustrations to describe these worthless apostates (*v.12, 13*). For example, they were like hidden reefs that damage ships. They were like "clouds without water," meaning they appeared to carry the promise of rain (or truth), but they left people parched. They were like "autumn trees without fruit," good for nothing but to be uprooted. They were like "wild waves of the sea," who made a lot of noise but had nothing to show except foam. Finally, they were like wandering stars, unreliable for navigation, leading people astray.

Finally, Jude called these apostates "ungodly" four times (*v.15*), men who will be exposed and judged at the coming of Christ (which was prophesied by Enoch, *v.14*). They were grumblers, complainers who were always finding fault, people who "followed their own lusts," boastful, "flattering people to gain an advantage" (*v.16*).

## Daily Reflection

**Clearly, Jude did not think highly of those who infiltrate and assault the churches of God. Thus, he challenged us to contend for the faith.** But what does that look like? Here are a few ideas.

Be wary of leaders who are greedy for power or control. Know what is being taught in your church, especially in small groups. Keep a lid on those who gossip and slander. Watch out for troublemakers who like to stir the pot and cause dissension or factions. Be careful about who is allowed to speak from the pulpit. Ensure that church leaders are in general agreement regarding central doctrines of the faith; and keep the gospel at the center of all activities.

**We have been placed by God in our churches to contend for the faith because the faith is worth contending for. Be vigilant to do your part.**

# To Keep from Stumbling

December 5 – Jude 1:17-25

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Day 338 – 27 Days to Go

## Today in Your Reading

After Jude addressed apostates in his opening passage (v.1-16), he turned to believers and offered his counsel for protecting the church (v.17-23). We should not be surprised by the rise of apostates and false teachers. The apostles warned us that they would come (v.17, 18). These phony followers cause divisions. They are worldly-minded and unspiritual (v.19). They are not merely Christians who have gone astray, but rather they are unbelievers, “devoid of the Spirit,” who feign belief to distract God’s people and derail the Church (v.19).

The phrase “in the last time” (v.18) does not refer to the end times, but the last era of time — the Church Age — the time from Jesus’ first advent to His second coming. In other words, apostates will be around until Christ’s return. Thus, Jude provides instructions for how we can battle apostates and protect the Church.

First, he said, **build yourselves up in the faith** (v.20). The most effective way to protect ourselves from apostates and false teachers is to fortify our faith, and the best way to do that is to maintain the spiritual disciplines. Of all the disciplines, we must not neglect Scripture intake, for it is by knowing the foundational doctrines of Christianity that we can best identify false doctrines. By knowing the original, we can spot the counterfeits.

Second, **pray in the Holy Spirit** (v.20). Ongoing communication with God is essential to avoid the tempter’s traps. Of course, Scripture intake is vital for informed prayer. Knowing the will of God will help us pray in the will of God. If we earnestly seek to pray, according to His will and by His Spirit (not liturgically, like robots), the Lord will guide us.

Third, **keep yourselves in the love of God** (v.21). As our heavenly Father, God’s love is constant. Nothing can separate us from the love of God, but, like a child, we often hinder our fellowship

with Him by our actions (i.e., unconfessed sin). We must maintain a clear conscience before God, quickly repenting of anything that would disrupt our relationship with Him.

Fourth, **wait anxiously for the mercy of our Lord** (v.21). In a world of spiritual darkness, chaos, and doom, the Lord’s return and rescue of His followers will be an act of great mercy. We must always look forward to that day, remain faithful to Him, and allow that hope to encourage us amid our trials.

Next, Jude gave two practical suggestions for dealing with those who have been affected by apostates and false teachers (v.22, 23). First, we should extend mercy to those who have doubts. Second, for those who have already been duped and derailed, we are to “snatch them from the fire,” by speaking the truth in love and rescuing them from ruin. But Jude warned us to be careful so that we might not also become prey to the predators. He likened their filth to that of a leper (v.23). We must be wary in taking action, lest we too become contaminated by their ungodly ways.

## Daily Reflection

Jude ended his letter with a doxology (v.24, 25). The word *doxology* means praise or glory. Jude praised God for several reasons: He is eternal, **“He keeps us from stumbling,”** “He makes us to stand before Him blameless with great joy,” He is “the only God and Savior,” and to Him belong glory, majesty, dominion, and authority forever.

While it was common to tack on a benediction (prayer of praise) to the end of a letter, in truth our lives are to be a benediction, a doxology, to the Lord. Our sole purpose for existing is to live for His glory. That was the reason God created us. May all that we do, all that we say, and all that we are be to the glory of God, until we see Him one day face to face!

# Lord of the Lamps

December 6 – Revelation 1:1-20

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Day 339 – 26 Days to Go

## Today in Your Reading

We began the last book of the New Testament, as well as the last leg of our year-long journey. The Apostle John wrote the letter of *Revelation* to seven churches in Asia Minor, churches with which he was very familiar, as he had a ministry in that region for some time (v.4). Because of his outspoken defense of Christ and His gospel, John was exiled to the island of Patmos (v.9).

While John was at Patmos (90-97 AD), the Lord gave him a revelation (*apocalypse* in Greek), a vision or prophecy that revealed, or unveiled, His current view of the churches, as well as a look into the end of His redemptive story. Thus, *Revelation* is the culmination and completion of all that God has shared from the beginning, which is why He said, "I am the Alpha and the Omega (first and last letters of the Greek alphabet), who is and who was and who is to come" (v.8). He who began this great work in heaven and earth will now tell us how it ends.

Since *Revelation* is a letter, it has a salutation (1:1-8), a body (1:9-22:5), and a closing (22:6-21). The Lord shared the purpose of this letter (v.19), "Write the things which you have seen, the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things." Today, we read John's salutation and his vision of Christ. The Lord spoke to John on a Sunday and told him, "Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches (v.11). These churches were in seven cities — Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea — located in modern-day Turkey.

On that day, John had a stunning vision of Christ — the Son of Man — standing in the middle of seven lampstands (churches). In His right hand were seven stars (messengers). He was dressed in a white robe with a gold sash. His hair was snow white, his eyes were like flames of fire, and his feet were like burning bronze, glowing as embers. His face shined as bright as the sun, and out of His mouth came a

sharp sword" (v.12-16). These descriptions of Christ match those of the ancient prophets (*Dan. 7:9-13; 10:5, 6; Ezek. 1:24-28; 43:2*).

One would expect a culmination of the Bible to have connections to both the Old and New Testaments. One would also expect for this prophetic book to have a great deal of symbolism regarding numbers, colors, materials, and such. *Revelation* has all of this and more. Already, we've seen the prominence of the number seven. Jewish Christians knew its importance. It is the number of fullness or completion, like the seventh day of creation, when God rested after completing His work.

This vision had to remind John of the day when Jesus was transfigured before His disciples (*Matt. 17:1-7*). John fell before Christ "like a dead man." Perhaps, he passed out, or maybe he even died. We don't know. But we do know the Lord comforted him, saying, "Do not be afraid... for I am the Living One, and I have the keys of death and Hades" (the place of the dead, v.18). These words had to have been a relief to John, as the One he worshiped and served had all authority, even over death. He could rest in the Lord's control over all things.

## Daily Reflection

What's the point of this vision? John saw Jesus. He is alive and well, and He has all authority in heaven and on earth. Christ is also very aware of what is happening in the churches that represent Him. He walks among them. He knows them by name. He holds their leaders in His hands. Next, we will find that He keeps them accountable with sharp words of judgment (v.16; 2:1-3:22).

Because churches represent Christ on earth, we are like lampstands in a dark world. Each church must do its part to shine brightly on His behalf. **Though churches are like lamps, the lamps are not ours. He is the Lord of the lamps.** We are His caretakers, responsible to shine His light.

# Loveless, Fearless, and Godless

December 7 – Revelation 2:1-17

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Day 340 – 25 Days to Go

## Today in Your Reading

We read three of the letters that the Lord wrote to the seven churches (1:11). Each letter has a similar structure, which includes the church's name, a description of Christ, His knowledge and evaluation of the church, a promise, and an exhortation or encouragement. Scholars interpret these letters in three ways — as messages meant for each individual church for that time, as descriptions of issues that every local body of believers faces, and as depictions of distinct eras in Church history. We will consider the first two interpretations — what was said to the churches then, and how are we battling the same issues today?

The first church that the Lord addressed was at **Ephesus** (2:1-7). He commended the Ephesians for their good deeds, their toil (hard work), their discernment (doctrinal purity), their avoidance of the Nicolaitans (moral purity), and their perseverance. They were fighting the good fight, and they had not grown weary. **However, the Lord had one thing against the Ephesians — they had "left their first love"** (v.4). They were doing great things, but they had become lifeless and mechanical. They had lost the fire, that burning passion for Christ that inspires us to action. Churches are often not guilty for what they do, but for why they do it. They go through the motions of ministry, but they have lost the motive for ministry.

Such churches do not honor the Lord. They are an empty shell. They look like a church, and they do the things churches should do, but the heart is missing. What energizes them are the calendar, profit, programs, numbers, the show, or the people's expectations, but it's not a love for Christ or the desire to share His gospel. These churches become candles with no flame and lampstands with no light. The Lord says, "Repent, and do the deeds you did at first" (v.5). He'd rather have a simple, single-minded church, who remembers its first love, than a busy one that caters to other misplaced loves.

The second church the Lord addressed was at **Smyrna** (v.8-11). The Smyrnans were experiencing terrible persecution and poverty at the hands of the Jews, imprisoned and executed for following Christ. **He comforted them, saying, "Do not fear what you are about to suffer"** (v.10). "Though you are poor, you are rich, and though you may die, you will live" (v.9-11). He encouraged them to be faithful to the end.

The third church the Lord addressed was at **Pergamum** (v.12-17). Pergamum was the Roman headquarters in the province of Asia, as well as the Gentile center for idol worship. Thus, Christ called it "Satan's throne" (v.13). However, He commended the people of Pergamum for their faithfulness, even when one of their own, Antipas, was martyred.

But even while the church did not falter in the face of this trial, there were people in the church worshipping idols and committing immoral acts (v.14, 15). **While they did not close their doors in the face of persecution, they opened their doors to false teachers and godless influences.** A church that is not doctrinally or morally pure is not an honor to the Lord, but a shame on His name. God's people must root out ungodly influences or face His judgment (v.16).

## Daily Reflection

"To those who overcome," referring to faithful Christians, "they will eat the tree of life, not be hurt by the second death, partake of the hidden manna, and receive a white stone," all allusions to eternal life in heaven (v.7, 11, 17).

How can you apply these letters to your life or to the condition of your church?

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# Dead or Alive?

December 8 – Revelation 2:18-3:6

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Day 341 – 24 Days to Go

## Today in Your Reading

We continued Christ's letters to the seven churches. Today, He addressed the churches at Thyatira and Sardis. What exactly did He observe, and how can we apply it to our churches today?

To the people at **Thyatira**, the Lord recognized their love, faith, service, perseverance, and good deeds (2:19). However, **they were allowing a prophetess to lead people astray to idol worship and sexual immorality** (2:20). We don't know whether her name was Jezebel or if Christ was comparing her to the ancient Jezebel, but her influence was harmful.

The Lord demanded that the people of Thyatira repent of their sins, or He would deal with Jezebel and her followers severely (2:21-23). There were some, a remnant of people, who were not followers of Jezebel and who had not believed her teaching. The Lord challenged them to hold fast until His return (2:24, 25).

Thyatira proves the point that **it's possible for a church to look good on the outside, but to be rotten on the inside**. Its deeds were considered shallow because it harbored "the deep things of Satan" (2:24). Furthermore, what a church teaches will always be undermined by what it tolerates. What its people perform will be stained by what they practice.

But no one knows it's going on! Everything is a secret! Wrong. "Do not be deceived. God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Gal. 6:7). "God searches the minds and hearts and gives to everyone according to his deeds" (Rev. 2:23). There is no fooling the Lord. We are to "act as free men, but we are not to use our freedom as a covering for evil..." (1 Pet. 2:16). A church's purity, or impurity, reflects on our Savior. May we strive to ensure that our reflection is good and honorable.

To the people of **Sardis**, the Lord said, "You have a name (reputation) which [communicates that you] are alive, but you are dead" (3:1). **Evidently, this church struggled. It was lifeless, sleepy, and dying.** While people had good intentions, they never carried out or completed their good works (3:2). The church was unstable, insecure, and numbed by worldly philosophies, which explains why the Lord said, "Remember what you have received and heard, and keep it" (3:3). **They were being lulled into a deadly slumber without even knowing it.**

However, though the church was dying, there were some bright spots in the congregation, people who had not muddied their garments with worldliness (v.4). The world's wiles and ways are deceitful. It can be difficult to stay untangled from its web. That's why the writer of *Hebrews* wrote, "Encourage one another day after day..., so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:13).

## Daily Reflection

Again, Christ wrote to "those who overcome," speaking of His true followers (2:26; 3:5), they will rule the nations and receive the morning star (Jesus, 22:16; 2 Pet. 1:19). They will be clothed in white, and their names will appear in the book of life (Rev. 3:5). These are references to the afterlife, inheritances related to salvation.

Compare the churches of Thyatira and Sardis to churches across our country. What similarities do you see? How can we wake them up?

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# Neither Cold Nor Hot

December 9 – Revelation 3:7-22

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT  
Day 342 – 23 Days to Go

## Today in Your Reading

We read the last two of Jesus' letters to the seven churches. So far, we have read His letters to Ephesus (lost first love), Smyrna (faithful but fearful), Pergamum (tolerated false teaching), Sardis (alive but dead), and Thyatira (allowed worldly philosophies). Today, we read His letters to Philadelphia and Laodicea.

To the church in **Philadelphia**, the Lord described Himself as having "the key of David" (v.7; *Isa. 22:22*), which symbolizes His authority over all things, including life, death, and salvation (*Matt. 16:19*). **Then, He praised the Philadelphians for their faithfulness to keep His word and not deny His name** (*Rev. 3:8*).

For their faithfulness, the Lord promised three rewards. First, He promised "an open door which no one can shut" (v.8), perhaps speaking of a great opportunity to impact others on His behalf. Second, He promised that those who opposed them (Jewish imposters of "the synagogue of Satan," v.9) would be humbled and know the truth of God's love.

Third, the Lord promised that He would "keep them from the hour of testing, which is about to come upon the whole world..." (v.10). This "hour of testing" may refer to the great tribulation period mentioned later in the letter (*Rev. 6-19; Matt. 24:21*). If so, then this church would be rescued from that hour, which some have interpreted to mean that Christians would be removed to heaven before that event occurs (i.e., by the rapture, *1 Thess. 4:13-17*).

But why would the Christians at Philadelphia be raptured but not the Christians of other churches? It is for this reason that scholars believe the letters to the seven churches represent historic eras of Church history, and this letter depicts a time when the Church would return to faithfulness to God's Word (i.e., during the Reformation, 1382-1776). Thus, this letter (and the rapture) would apply to all Christians.

To the church in **Laodicea**, the Lord reprimanded them for being "neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm" (*Rev. 3:15, 16*). The people were wealthy by the world's standards, which had made them self-sufficient, in need of nothing, including God. It's amazing how prosperity, to which we all aspire, has such negative consequences on our faith. Prosperity dulls our senses and blinds our eyes to our own wretched spiritual condition. We are well-dressed hypocrites, who are truly poor and naked before the Lord. Such a church disgusts Him. It is so distasteful that it makes Him sick (v.16).

**Imagine a church that associated itself with Christ by name but who did not let Him into their fellowship. Rather than opening the door to allow Him to change their lives, they locked Him outside.** Thus, the Lord of the church is not allowed into the church. He stands outside the door and knocks, calling His people to repent and be zealous for Him once more (v.18-20). Instead of accumulating worldly wealth, they should trade it for treasures in heaven. Instead of nice clothes, they should clothe themselves in righteousness; and instead of looking good to be seen by others, they should open their eyes and see themselves, and the world, the way that God does — lost and in need of the gospel.

## Daily Reflection

Again, these letters end with references to our life in heaven. To those who overcome, He will make them pillars in the temple of God, and we will sit with Him on His throne (v.12, 21).

Also, every letter ends with the words, "He who has an ear, let him hear." Simply put, we should pay attention. He is speaking to us, but are we listening? What is the Lord saying to you?

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