

Text: 3 John 1-8

Title: The Example of Gaius

Truth: Like Gaius, we should be faithful helpers to the truth of Christ.

Date/Location: August 11, 2019 at FBC

Introduction

We turn now to John's third epistle. We might think it is his last letter, but actually he writes seven more, contained in the opening chapters of Revelation. This is a document dealing with a specific occasion, but it has some rich and timeless truth in it for us to glean.

The big picture is that the recipient is a prominent member of a local church which has a problem. The problem is a person named Diotrephes. John has written a previous letter to the church (since lost), but it was not received well. Those who were on the apostle's side were removed from the church. Those representatives sent by John were not treated well by Diotrephes. On the other hand, Gaius did help those representatives.

I. Greeting. 1-4

- A. **The author.** The apostle John introduces himself as "the elder" just like he did in 2 John. See the notes there or more details on the identification of John and some historical background about him.
- B. **The recipient.** On the receiving end is Gaius, a man we know nothing else about other than what is said in this book. His name was common (Acts 19:29, 20:4, Rom. 16:23). He was a believer. He was beloved by John, like the lady in the previous letter. John is effusive in his words in verse 1, because he says, "Gaius the beloved, whom I love in truth." The idea of "love" is present twice, and it is one more time in verse 2. Obviously there is a special personal relationship between these two Christian men. John's love is "in truth," indicating more than a mere "I'm telling you the truth." Rather, John is connected to Gaius in the truth of Christ. They share a common life together in Christ (1 John 1:3) and can thus have a true friendship.

C. **The greeting,** v. 2. John's greeting is a report of his prayer for Gaius.

1. John states a fact at the end of the verse: "your soul prospers." That is worthy of pondering for a while. Your body may not be prospering; your finances may not be prospering; your work life may be difficult; some personal relationships may not be prospering. But if you are a Christian walking with Christ, your soul is doing well. This is true success from God's perspective. The prosperity of soul, which is a

given in Gaius' life because of redemption, is of first importance. You have to get this right or else nothing else matters.

2. In the same way that Gaius' soul prospers, John desires that he would prosper in all things and be in health. The prosperity is not linked to a health-wealth gospel view of life. Financial gain or riches is not the idea. Rather, it is simply a wish, as we would say, for example: "I hope that things are well and you are in good health..." John is hoping that "things are going OK." You can prosper and not be rich; you can prosper and not be famous or live anything other than an ordinary day-to-day life. If you are healthy and have food and clothing and shelter and can be content with those things, then you are prospering! John's prayer is that Gaius's personal situation will be as good as his soul's condition—which means "very good"!

D. **The approval**, v. 3. Evidently the situation was like this: Gaius is a generous host to many traveling Christians. Some had been at his home, then left and traveled to somewhere that they could meet with the Apostle John. When they arrived, they reported how wonderful Gaius was to them. Although Gaius may not have been a traveling evangelist or a famous Christian teacher, he was faithful behind the scenes of the Christian work. He had a great testimony, but it was one that was reported by *others*, not himself.

1. When John heard this report, he was so happy that his friend was living for the Lord. Note that the *truth is in Gaius* and *he walks in the truth*. The truth being inside is what brings the prosperity of his soul and leads to his walking in the truth on the outside. Truth within leads to truth without. Gaius has a life that is immersed in truth so much that the truth has saturated his inside and oozes outside. This truth actually comes from inside out, and is due to the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the believer. John 14:17 says the "Spirit of truth" will dwell with and in the believer. 1 John 1:8 and 2:4 also allude to this idea of "truth inside" but from a negative perspective.
2. Note the importance of "walking in the truth." It goes along with walking in truth and love in 2 John 4, 6. Psalm 86:11 says "Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name." The walk and the thinking and the talk have to match the truth.
3. What is truth? (Pilate in John 18:38). 1 Kings 17:24 says of Elijah "The word of the LORD in your mouth is truth." After helping the widow of Zarephath with the oil and meal, and raising her son, she is confident

in Elijah's word since it is evidently from God. John 17:17 echoes "thy word is truth." The Word is that which sanctifies the believer. 1 John 2:27 and 5:6 teach that the Spirit of God is truth.

E. **The joy**, v. 3 and 4. John is overjoyed to hear that his children walk in truth. So is Gaius a biological offspring of John? We are not able to affirm that. I believe that Gaius is a *spiritual* child of John's ministry, an offspring in the faith. Thus John has such a personal connection with him. There is nothing better than your (spiritual) children following the Lord. Correspondingly, there are few griefs worse for the believing parent than to observe their children *not* walking in the truth. See also 2 John 4.

II. Gaius: A Faithful Helper for the Truth, 5-8

A. In verse 5, John begins the body of the letter with a report of how Gaius has been doing ministry. The phrasing in KJV and NKJV is confusing because it could be taken as a command. But there is no command here. The "do" in the verse is not an imperative, but a statement in the present indicative indicating Gaius's ongoing faithful practice of ministry. John is saying "Beloved, you are faithful in whatever ministry work you are doing for the brothers—even strangers!" This is all very positive.

B. Even the "strangers" have testified of Gaius's love before the church where John was (v. 6a). Imagine them ministering in the church where Gaius lived, and then traveling to the church where John was a leader, and giving testimony *there* of what had happened at their previous stop. Among other things, "Gaius was such a great host, and he helped us on our way very generously! He showed real Christian love to us."

C. Maybe they will be traveling back toward Gaius, or come around again to him in the future, so John encourages Gaius to send them on in a manner worthy of God. That includes Christian warmth, as well as finances and other needs that must be met. Application from this is pretty obvious in how we treat our missionaries—new ones and ones we have known for a long time. I am convinced that the church (speaking universally) should support its workers at least as well as corporate America supports its employees. After all, our service is for the King of Kings.

D. Besides the obvious reasons of showing Christian love and excellence in ministry, we should treat God's servants well because they are going out for His name's sake. Literally, John's letter says, "For on account of the Name they went out." This is the name of Jesus, that precious name, the only name providing salvation (Acts 4:12) and the name at which every knee will bow (Phil. 2:10). These men's work for the sake of the Lord is

the reason that Gaius is encouraged to faithfully help them.

It is interesting that “his name’s sake” refers to Christ but the Lord is not mentioned in the epistle by name, i.e. there is no other “antecedent” for this pronoun.

E. Furthermore, they went out, not taking anything from “the Gentiles” for their support. They were not supported by “secular money” so to speak. They went out to minister but relied totally for support on the church.

In this context, “Gentiles” is not opposite of Jews, but rather opposite of believers. So “pagans” or “unbelievers” are good translations. “After all these things the Gentiles [nations] seek” (Matt. 6:32). Unbelieving Jews fit under this heading in this kind of context. In other contexts, “Gentile” is more specific in its reference to non-Jews.

F. John’s instruction is in verse 8: we must receive people like this. The previous letter taught us that for those who bring false doctrine, we refuse hospitality (2 John 10). But to those who truly minister for the sake of the Name, we ought to receive them for the purpose of being a helper of the truth. In 2 John we avoided helping false teachers so as to not lose our reward and not to share in their evil deeds. Here, we help true teachers so that we can partake in their work, advancing the truth of Christ. Help includes hospitality and financial support. This service will accrue to our heavenly reward.

Just imagine: you have the ambition to provide housing for missionaries, and you do. God is pleased with that. King David had similar ambition: he wanted to build God a “house.” God rewarded him by saying, “I’m going to build YOU a house!” Any labor you show toward God’s ministers will be rewarded by God in His own good time and way.

Conclusion

John is showing us how God is pleased with faithful helpers like Gaius, those who walk in the truth (esp. v. 3-6). Is this a preview of what the judgment seat of Christ might be like?

The remainder of the letter is outlined like this:

1. Diotrephes is a man who has ill will toward John and is very damaging to the church. He is a great example of what *not* to do in your life.
2. Demetrius has a wonderful testimony and is a good example for us.
3. Closing of the letter expressing John’s hope to be able to visit.