

“HOSPITALITY, TRUTH, LOVE, AND MISSIONS” Pt. 2
3 JOHN 7-14

Years ago, when then-speaker of the house Sam Rayburn discovered he had terminal cancer, he shocked everyone when he announced that he was going back to his small hometown of Bonham, Texas. He was often asked, “They have the finest facilities in Washington, D.C., why go back to Bonham?” His simple reply has been repeated often: “Because in Bonham, Texas they know if you’re sick and they care when you die.”

All people everywhere need community and fellowship. And of all people, those of us who are believers in Christ should demonstrate fellowship and our love for each other, as one writer has noted:

There are many things which a person can do alone, but being a Christian is not one of them. As the Christian life is, above all things, a state of union with Christ, and of union of his followers with one another, love of the brethren is inseparable from love of God. Resentment toward any human being cannot exist in the same heart with love to God. The personal relationship to Christ can only be realized when one has ‘come to himself’ as a member of His Body, the Christian fellowship.”

[William T. Ham; CQOD, 11/26/02.]

We understand the importance of that in the local church fellowship, but what about broader relationships? With what other churches will we join in “common causes?” Should we join with anyone who has the name “church?” Are there any restrictions? And what about missionaries? Do we support all of them? None of them? Some of them? And what kind of care should we offer?

Those are questions that need answering because there is a tendency to go to one of two extremes: embrace everyone or help no one. Because of those tendencies, Third John is a hidden gem of pastoral counsel to churches for how they are to function and relate to one another, and particularly how they are to relate to those who are part of their broader ministry — the missionaries they send out and the missionaries they receive.

This letter was likely sent by John with Demetrius at the same time he sent 2 John to the unnamed woman and her children and it has similar themes. But while 2 John served as a warning that while church members are to love one another, they are not to be hospitable to known false teachers, this letter is an encouragement to love faithful teachers by continuing to provide tangible care for them. Like 2 John, this letter also has a warning, though here the warning is to not allow pride to keep one from caring for genuine, faithful teachers of the gospel. And as John unfolds his brief instructions, we are left with a letter that really serves as a manual for developing a philosophy of ministry for missions.

Last time we looked at the first two patters for cultivating biblical fellowship in the church body and in our extended ministries; here are the final three patterns for fellowship:

- 1. The Framework of a FAITHFUL Ministry (vv. 1-4)**
- 2. The Commendation of a LOVING Giver (vv. 5-6)**
- 3. The Characteristics of a FAITHFUL Recipient (vv. 7-8)**
 - ✓ They served so Christ's salvation would be KNOWN (v. 7a)
 - ✓ They served without expectation of PROVISION (v. 7b)
 - ✓ They served in PARTNERSHIP with those who gave (v. 8)
- 4. The Chastisement of a SELF-SERVING Leader (vv. 9-10)**
 - ✓ He "served" so he could be PREEMINENT (v. 9)
 - ✓ He spread untrue GOSSIP (v. 10a)
 - ✓ He denied fellowship for TRUE servants (v. 10b)
 - ✓ He excommunicated FAITHFUL givers (v. 10c)
- 5. The Conclusion for a GOOD Minister and Ministry (vv. 11-14)**
 - ✓ They desire to do GOOD (v. 11)
 - ✓ They have a good REPUTATION (v. 12)
 - ✓ They are FRIENDS (vv. 13-14)

Remember that the theme of the brief letters of 2nd and 3rd John is to know real, biblical fellowship:

BE HOSPITABLY LOVING TO MISSIONARIES WHO ARE FAITHFUL TO THE TRUTH.

Transition: Here are three final patterns for cultivating biblical fellowship in the church body and in our extended ministries:

1. The Framework of a FAITHFUL Ministry (vv. 1-4)

- Church members who LOVE each other (v. 1)
- Church members who PRAY for each other (v. 2)
- Church members who are JOYFUL for each other (vv. 3-4)

2. The Commendation of a LOVING Giver (vv. 5-6)

- His giving was an outgrowth of his FAITH (v. 5a)
- His giving was GENUINE and affirmed (vv. 5b-6a)
- His giving was not FINISHED (v. 6b)
- His giving was to be characteristic of GOD’S giving (v. 6c)
- Gaius was commended because of his love for the people in the church. We sometimes forget the priority of love and care for others. The goal of all our learning about Scripture is to make us more effective lovers of God and others (1 Tim. 1:5; cf. Mk. 12:30-31).

“This is foundational to the entire Christian life: We are not our own (1 Cor. 6: 19). We did not create ourselves, and we did not redeem ourselves. We doubly belong to God. And God has not made us merely to seek our own good. He created us for something far greater: to seek the good of others, and of society, and his kingdom. The true Christian lives for these ends, not his own comfort and welfare.”

[Perman, What’s Best Next, 87]

3. The Characteristics of a FAITHFUL Recipient (vv. 7-8)

- While Gaius gave liberally and freely, he was also discerning about whom he gave his gifts to. What kinds of qualities should the recipients of the gifts exhibit? What should they be like?

- They served so Christ's salvation would be KNOWN (v. 7a)
 - ✓ Those who were faithful servants had one objective — the exaltation of Christ's name (*the name* refers to Jesus, who is the name above all names, Phil. 2:9-10; Eph. 1:21).
 - ✓ When John says they went out for *the sake of the name*, it means that their one purpose in going out to teach and preach was so that the name of Jesus Christ was honored and revealed (cf. 1 Pt. 2:12; 3:16).

Col. 3:17 "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."

- ✓ This is always the task of ministry — not to draw attention to ourselves, but point people to the only One who is the Savior and is able to address their needs for redemption. This was the very thing the teachers who were supported by the woman in 2 John did not do (v. 7); but it was what the missionaries sent by John did do.
 - ✓ As we look to identify with other ministries and missionaries, one question we ask is, "do they get the gospel and Christ right? Is Christ first and pre-eminent?" Far too often the answer is "no." A friend asked me, "why does 'ministry A' associate with 'ministry B' since they disagree on method of Bible interpretation, etc.?" Because they both get the gospel right.
 - ✓ John's missionaries were faithful because they served to clarify Christ's salvation & gospel.
- They served without expectation of PROVISION (v. 7b)
 - ✓ Itinerant teachers were not unusual even in secular circles in the ancient world. But what was different between secular teachers and John's missionaries was their desire for remuneration.
 - ✓ The false teachers of 2-3 John, however, were very willing to accept remuneration from *Gentiles* — unbelievers.
 - The problem is not receiving some gifts from unbelievers who are sympathetic to a church (even Jesus accepted the gift of a glass of water from the sinful Samaritan woman).
 - The problem was that these men were "selling their ministry" and seeking and pursuing their support from non-believers. Contrast that with Paul's ministry (2 Cor. 2:17; 1 Thess. 2:5ff).
 - ✓ This was a great demonstration of trust and faith on their part and revealed their motives — are they in the ministry for the sake of money or for the sake of Christ's name? There have always been charlatans who were in the church for the financial gain that can be had from it (and they still are "prospering" in the prosperity gospel movement). So another clear test of faithfulness is whether the teachers are working and laboring for money to get rich (Titus 1:11).

- They served in PARTNERSHIP with those who gave (v. 8)
 - ✓ Because of the fact that these teachers and missionaries did not have outside sources of income, John makes the conclusion, *therefore, we ought to support such men*.
 - Notice that John includes himself in this obligation — *we*. This is the responsibility of all believers, from the apostles to every member of the church body.
 - The *support* John is talking about is the support of hospitality — transportation, food, lodging, and all other essential needs.
 - This is not new with John's letter; this was and is the standing obligation of all believers — to care for those who preach and teach the gospel faithfully (e.g., Epaphroditus, who had worked hard and almost died for the Philippians, Phil. 2:29-30).
 - ✓ And then John states the blessing of supporting those missionaries — it makes the givers and the receivers *fellow workers*.
 - The sense is that when a missionary is supported physically it is as though the giver is present with the missionary as the missionary carries out his ministry.
 - This suggests the different roles that different members in the church body have with their differing gifts (1 Cor. 12:12ff); when we all exercise our gifts, we will do so in different places and in different ways, but we all are working together to serve Christ (**1 Cor. 15:58**).
 - The giver and the receiver then are fully partners in ministry — “one of the greatest joys of Christian dedication is Christian teamwork.” Neither the giver nor the receiver is pre-eminent; Christ is pre-eminent.
- These are the qualities of a faithful receiver (of gifts) and a faithful servant/missionary — he teaches so Christ's name is revealed, he serves without expectation of financial gain, and he is a partner with those who gave. This is the third pattern for cultivating cooperation and fellowship in the church body. The fourth pattern we see is —

4. The Chastisement of a SELF-SERVING Leader (vv. 9-10)

- Gaius gave graciously (vv. 1-6); but not all those who should have given honored the Lord. That was the example of Diotrephes (vv. 9-10).
 - ✓ There is much conjecture about Diotrephes, based primarily on the meaning of his name and some supposed implications of what his background might have been.
 - ✓ Since this is the only reference to him in the NT, we just don't know. But it might also be added, since this is his only mention in the NT, what a tragic legacy he left.
 - ✓ In Diotrephes, pride, selfishness, greed, and anger are all comingled into one tragic picture.

- He “served” so he could be PREEMINENT (v. 9)
 - ✓ ***He loves to be first...*** Lit., “the one who loves to be first among you — Diotrephes...” He was prideful, ambitious, and self-serving — and John emphasized that fact, by mentioning his lack of character and morality even before he mentioned his name.
 - ✓ To capture the sense of this term, one writer has said Diotrephes was an “ambitious, self-seeking, power-hungry individual who aggressively sought to be at the head of things.”
 - ✓ The problem with pride and a desire for pre-eminence is that it denies the first place to the only One who has a right to be first — Jesus Christ (**Col. 1:18; Rom. 8:29**). Because Diotrephes wanted to be first, it meant Christ would not be; his actions were opposite of the faithful teachers who ***went out for the sake of the name*** (v. 7). Diotrephes always went out for the sake of himself. And no one else.
 - ✓ Because Diotrephes wanted to be first, he also did ***not accept what we say***. There was some kind of hierarchy between John and the other elders and Diotrephes and he should have submitted to their position, and he rejected it, operating as a rebellious “Lone Ranger.” He was not a servant leader and he was not repentant, since the term ***does not accept*** indicates that John and others had attempted to get him to change. He was entrenched in his pride.
 - ✓ Through his sinful actions, Diotrephes revealed that he was sinning both in doctrine and deed: he violated the truth of the gospel and he withheld love. There was nothing commendable about him or anything about his ministry in the church.
- He spread untrue GOSSIP (v. 10a)
 - ✓ Because Diotrephes was so rebellious, John (the “apostle of love”) indicated he was going to come to the church and address the situation. The word ***if*** doesn’t mean “maybe I’ll come and maybe I won’t,” but suggests the idea, “I’m not certain *when*, but I’m coming...” And John was unafraid to address all the issues of Diotrephes’ sin — ***I will call attention*** (“bring to remembrance”) to what he has done. John identifies three particular sins related to his pride, because the unity of the body and the ongoing effectiveness of the ministry was at stake.
 - ✓ In pride, Diotrephes was ***unjustly accusing us with wicked words***. He was “talking nonsense” and bringing unjustified, inane, ridiculous charges against John and the other elders. It was foolish chatter and gossip except it was also untrue and malicious. Diotrephes was attempting to destroy reputations with his words.
 - ✓ Notice that John says that all that kind of talk is wicked. John uses the word ***wicked*** in his first letter several times, and he generally uses it in relation to Satan (2:13-14; 3:12; 5:18-19). So we might say Diotrephes’ words were “devilish.” That’s the way it is with gossip and character assassination — it’s from the devil and it does his destructive work. And it is the result of pride.
 - ✓ But even that slanderous talk wasn’t enough — Diotrephes ***wasn’t satisfied*** with that...

- He denied fellowship for TRUE servants (v. 10b)
 - ✓ Diotrephes had no intention of helping the faithful teachers, but he was even more malicious in that ***he does not receive the brethren*** — He refused to offer assistance to the missionaries. And even more, ***he forbids those who desire to do so***: that is, there were some in the church body who wanted to care for these faithful teachers and Diotrephes refused to let them be hospitable.
 - ✓ In 2 John the woman was hospitable when she shouldn't have been; here the people in the church body were trying to be hospitable when they should have been and Diotrephes refused to allow them to practice hospitality and care. We don't know exactly how he refused them, except that perhaps it was with the threats of what he eventually did...
- He excommunicated FAITHFUL givers (v. 10c)
 - ✓ He ***put them out of the church***. So he must have had some kind of authority (was he an elder?). And he used that authority illegitimately. In a church that was largely faithful, doing the work of the ministry rightly and faithfully, this immoral man gained prominence and used all his position for ungodly ends.
 - ✓ Here is the ugly end of pride and selfishness — it destroys relationships and true fellowship.
- All of these sinful actions were the result of Diotrephes' pride. It is often said that pride is the root of all sin. In pride we assume we have a right to do what God has prohibited or not do what He has commanded because our pleasures are more important than our submission to Him. And here we have a picture of just how ugly prideful yearnings and actions can become:

“Destroying unity, flaunting authority, making up his own rules to safeguard his position, spreading lies about those whom he had designated his enemies, cutting off other Christians on suspicion of guilt by association — the catalogue is appalling. This is what happens when someone who loves to be first decides to use the church to satisfy his inner longing for a position of pre-eminence, for his own personal aggrandizement.” [Jackman, 198.]

- Fortunately, we are not left with this as the final statement about ministry and the church. There is one more positive pattern for the church to follow in its relationships within the local church and in the context of the broader, universal church.

5. The Conclusion for a GOOD Minister and Ministry (vv. 11-14)

- They desire to do GOOD (v. 11)
 - ✓ John again addresses Gaius directly, by calling him ***beloved*** — they are unified in love!

- ✓ His summary reminder after warning Gaius about Diotrephes was *do not imitate what is evil*, and John clearly has Diotrephes in mind here. Gaius is not to mimic (the root word for *imitate*) Diotrephes' evil actions. John's words have the sense, "don't be doing it."
- ✓ Instead of doing evil, John says that Gaius is to imitate *what is good*. Here he is anticipating the deeds of Demetrius, who was likely one of the faithful teachers and probably the one who brought 2 & 3 John to their recipients.
- ✓ The one who does good, John says, *is of God* — a phrase that he repeatedly uses to mean "is regenerated" or "born again." John doesn't mean that he becomes regenerate through doing good, but that his good and righteous actions indicate that he has been regenerated and given new life to be able to do those things. In contrast to that, those who do evil give evidence that they *have not seen God*. That is, they are not believers and have not been given new hearts (cf. **Jn. 14:9**; Mt. 5:8).
- ✓ John likely brings up the principle of imitation because everyone imitates someone. And that is appropriate, but we must choose the model we follow carefully (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2:14; 2 Thess. 3:7, 9; Heb. 6:12; 13:7; and especially Eph. 5:1).
- ✓ In summary, what does a good minister and ministry look like? They do good. And...
- They have a good REPUTATION (v. 12)
 - ✓ In contrast to Diotrephes, Demetrius had a good reputation — lit., *witness*. There were many who could testify to the good standard of Demetrius (we think that Demetrius was one of the missionary/teachers because he is obviously given as a contrast to Diotrephes and his ungodly example; we know nothing else definitively about Demetrius, though there is much conjecture about who he might have been).
 - ✓ The character of Demetrius was attested to be several groups or individuals —
 - *from everyone* — probably not literally, but in the sense that everyone who knew of him would be ready to affirm the integrity of his life and character (it's like the reputation of elders, 1 Tim 3:7).
 - *from the truth* — That is, Demetrius' life is consistent with *the Truth* — the gospel. The gospel was manifested in his life so that it was obvious he was like Christ, his Savior.
 - *we add our testimony* — that is, John and the other elders also affirm the character of Demetrius — and John and the others are well-known for their *truthfulness*.
 - ✓ Here is a good question about someone's ministry — what is his reputation in the church body and outside the church? Do others see them as living like Christ and conformed to Christ, or do they have a different reputation?
 - ✓ There is one final component that John suggests about evaluating ministers and ministries —

- They are FRIENDS (vv. 13-14)
 - ✓ John again (like 2 John) cuts short his letter (v. 13) and then gives final greetings (v. 14).
 - ✓ He mentions that he wants to see Gaius *face to face* (desires a verbal conversation about the remaining issues) and then mentions the exchange of *greetings* between *friends*.
 - ✓ While it was not unusual for the Epistles to end with the exchange of greetings, this is the only time any of the writers of the epistles use the word *friends*. It may be that John is going back to a passage like John 15:13-15 and reinforcing the idea that there is a unique community and fellowship between John, Gaius and the others because of their fellowship with Christ.
 - ✓ When people are joined together in a church fellowship, we are brothers and sisters, but we are also *friends*. By this John infers that we enjoy one another and we love to love each other.
 - ✓ When you see this in a minister and a ministry, it is an indication that it is a faithful ministry.
 - ✓ I commend you again on your desire to care for and love each other. It is obvious you enjoy being with one another — you really are friends. And that is the very way it should be.
 - ✓ Keep on loving one another.

CONCLUSION:

The early church was certainly not without its problems. Nor is its twentieth-century equivalent. They are problems of our sinful human nature, which will be with us until Christ comes again — and yet every one of them could be met by God's superabundant grace. As we have looked at these three very different, and yet representative, church members around whom the letter revolves, we cannot fail to be challenged concerning our own discipleship. The ultimate proof of the truth we profess to believe and the love we profess to exercise will be seen neither in words nor in feelings but in the progressive transformation of our character, and therefore of our lifestyle, into the image of Christ.

The challenge to us now is how much we are we really prepared to let Jesus Christ change us. Is it to be my will or his? On this will depend the ultimate verdict, whether we proved to be frauds or followers. Who is at the centre of our lives? Is it 'self' with its longing to be first, to be number one? Or is it Christ, enabling us to keep faithful and to continue walking in the truth? There is still no issue with greater or more far-reaching implications for the church or for the Christian. [Jackman, 202]

BENEDICTION: (2 Thess. 3:5, 16)

“May the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ...Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance. The Lord be with you all!” Amen.