

The Third Epistle of John

Part 1

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[00:00:00] I wish greatly when the brethren came and testified of the truth, that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in the truth, walk in truth. Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren and to strangers, which have borne witness of thy charity before the church, whom, if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well, because that for his name's sake they went forth taking nothing of the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellow helpers to the truth. I wrote unto the church, but diatrophies, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, when I come, I will remember his deeds, which he doeth, traiting against us with malicious words, and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church. [00:01:04] Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God, but he that doeth evil hath not seen God. Demetrius hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself. Yea, and we also bear record, and ye know that our record is true. I have many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee, but I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be to thee, our friends salute thee, greet the friends by name.

We were singing in the close of our hymn, that the desire that the Lord's name might be to us a grateful odor.

And we have a name mentioned in this chapter, in the seventh verse, that for his name's sake, or for the name.

[00:02:01] I understand that the early Christians were called the people of the name.

And we remember that when the scribes and Pharisees, the leaders of the Jews, tried to stop the preaching of the gospel, they said, we command you not to speak any more in this name.

And apparently among the Christians, they became known as the people of the name.

But of course we know that it was the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And here it mentions those who had gone forth for his name. Now I just have it on my heart to say a few things about this short epistle. It's this with the second epistle, the two shortest writings of John, the Apostle John, because his gospel and his first epistle and revelation are much longer. And these are two personal epistles, although some think that the second epistle may have been written to an assembly. [00:03:03] It's written to the elect lady, and it's not quite sure whether he's using that as to, in that way of addressing

an assembly, or whether it is to a sister. And this one is very definitely, of course, written to a brother, Gaius. And one thing we notice here is how we have many times the word truth. Whom I love in truth, as it should be, I understand.

Not just in the truth, but love in truth. And then we get the truth in verse 3 twice, and walking in truth in verse 4, and down in verse 12 I get Demetrius has a good report of the truth itself.

And I believe the truth in John's epistle, here in this epistle, isn't just referring to speaking truth, but it's referring to the whole body of revealed truth, [00:04:04] the revealed truth of God.

But of course it's connected, the result of God's truth is that it causes us to act in the truth.

And we wouldn't, our lives would be according to truth, and not according to falsehood, that's true, the two are connected. But when we speak of the truth, it's the Lord's revelation to his people.

A somewhat similar thought to when Paul says, Paul exhorts them to contend earnestly for the faith, which was once delivered to the saints. When we think of the faith, there, we think of God's revelation of himself to his people, that's embodied in the word faith, that's where the word creed comes from. But of course man has made creeds which are just statements of certain great truths. But when we speak of the faith or the truth, it's the whole revealed will of God. And of course we learn it as we read the scriptures. [00:05:02] And this brings to us the importance of regularly reading the scriptures, feeding on the word of God, and using the helps that we can get that will help us to understand it. Because no Christian is going to make any progress apart from learning the truth of God from the word itself.

Now we have a rather remarkable statement in verse 2, he says, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prosper.

You know the usual thought is that you desire that people might prosper spiritually as they're prospering physically.

People are prospering in health and in other ways, and you fear that possibly they're not prospering in their soul as they should because of being taken up with these things.

But here, this here was a brother who was spiritually prosperous, [00:06:04] but apparently he was not very materially prosperous or physically prosperous, that is, he was not prospering in his business perhaps, in his material things, he wasn't keeping very good health.

And so the apostle says, well brother, my desire for you is that you might prosper and be in health even as your soul prospers. It's, I think, about the only place where we get in the New Testament where we have a desire for prosperity in material things.

Because the New Testament gives us spiritual prosperity as that which the Lord desires. God's blessing in the Old Testament was material prosperity, health and long life, and that their cattle would, and their crops and everything would be prosperous. And in the New Testament, we find that we're blessed with spiritual blessings. There's a lovely thought here. [00:07:02] Here was a man who was spiritually prosperous, and would that this could be said of us, beloved, that there may be a desire to see us prospering in other ways because we are prospering spiritually.

And after all, it lets us see that spiritual prosperity is the important thing. After all, what is material prosperity?

Someone said, I remember an old brother saying when I was a boy and it always stuck to me, he says, no matter how much we've got, we never wear more than one suit of clothes at a time, we never, a lady doesn't wear more than one dress at a time, she might have 20 in her closet, but she only wears one at a time. We only put on one pair of shoes at a time, even though we might have half a dozen. And so, and if we've got a lot of money in the bank, well, we can only use what we need for our needs, and then if we have anything over, we may, the Lord might enable us to use it for Him. But if we just set our heart on those things for the sake of having them, [00:08:01] we've got our heart on the wrong object. And so we have here the great importance of spiritual prosperity coming first. We live in a day when mankind in general is taken up with material prosperity. And when people spend fabulous sums even on their health, on their physical health, and to the neglect of their souls, that's the world generally.

And we Christians should see that we're attending to our spiritual prosperity. That is the most important thing, as it was true of Gaius.

Now, in connection with this man and his attitude, we find that he was helping on the Lord's work.

And it tells us here that there were those, in verse 7, who had gone forth that for His name, well, we'll read verse 6, verse 5, [00:09:01] Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren and to strangers, which have borne witness of thy love before the assembly, whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well. Because that for His name's sake, or that for the name, for Christ's name, they went forth taking nothing of the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such that we might be fellow helpers to the truth, or fellow workers with the truth.

So this lets us see that walking in the truth conveys with it the thought of fellowship.

It isn't taking up so much the thought of assembly fellowship here, but what we might say is an outgrowth of that.

Here are those who've gone forth for the name, for the Lord's name, taking nothing of the Gentiles.

That is, apparently they were preachers who were going around making known the gospel. And Gaius was specially interested in helping them on their journey. [00:10:05] And we know, of course, that this is one of the scriptures that we take, those of us who gather to the Lord's name, as our warrant for not asking for money and for not receiving salaries and so on. These men took nothing of the Gentiles. God does not need the money of the unsaved or the help of the unsaved to do His work. And that's the very sad thing that we see in Christendom, that so many appeals are made for money. I was talking the other day to a sister. She isn't in fellowship with us, but she is with a group of Christians. And she had been apparently listening to some of these radio programs and their appeals for money, and had been sending some money in to some of these people who were appealing for money. And then she found out that some of them weren't making a very good use of what she'd sent in. And I think this is something that the Lord's people need to be reminded of.

[00:11:06] I find that even some in the assembly sometimes, they get carried away with some of these appeals. People make great appeals for money, and you find out afterwards that they're not making a

good use of it. And it may appear that many of these things are due to these people who are doing good work. Perhaps some of them are. I believe there are some people who make appeals for money that make a right use of it, some of these programs.

But then there are others that don't, and we don't know. And I personally feel that we shouldn't allow ourselves to get carried away by those things, but that we should be exercised to help the Lord's work where we know it's being done in accordance with His precious word, and where we have full confidence that it's being done in the right way and according to Scripture. Well, that's what these were doing. They'd gone forth for His name, taking nothing of the Gentiles. [00:12:03] They weren't receiving help from the world. They were looking to the Lord to supply their needs. And Gaius was exercised, as it says here, to bring them forward on their journey after a godly sort, or worthy of God. So here was fellowship, fellowship in the work of the Lord, which is a very precious privilege for the Lord's people. And we see that this was something that the Apostle is commending Him for. And he's able, Gaius is able to do it because he knows that what they're doing is something that is fully in keeping with the Lord's mind. They went forth for His name. I'd like to read a verse in Leviticus 22 that bears out the principle here.

In Leviticus 22, we have a verse, a verse or two, about offering to the Lord.

It says in verse 21, [00:13:01] Whosoever offereth a sacrifice of peace offerings unto the Lord to accomplish His vow, or a freewill offering in the beeves or sheep, it shall be perfect to be accepted. There shall be no blemish therein. Blind, or broken, or maimed, or having a win, or scurvy, or scabbed, ye shall not offer these unto the Lord, nor make an offering by fire of them upon the altar of the Lord. Either a bullock or a lamb that hath anything superfluous or lacking in his parts, that mayest thou offer for a freewill offering, but for a vow it shall not be accepted. Ye shall not offer unto the Lord that which is crushed, bruised, or crushed, or broken, or cut. Neither shall ye make any offering thereof in your land. Now this 25th verse especially, I think, fits in with what we have in our epistle. Neither from a stranger's hand shall ye offer the bread of your God of any of these, because their corruption is in them, and blemishes be in them. They shall not be accepted for you.

[00:14:02] The Lord doesn't want that which comes from a stranger's hand. And it says their corruption is in them. Because if the unsaved are offering to the Lord, they're doing it with the thought that God will accept them from their offering. That is the idea, is really Cain's offering.

But if a Christian offers to the Lord, what is his thought? He's not thinking that he's offering something to the Lord, that he's giving something to the Lord so that the Lord will accept him. He's doing it because he's already been accepted. And that this, what he's giving, he's giving to the Lord as an offering of gratitude, a freewill offering of gratitude to the Lord. I believe that our collection that we take up on the Lord's Day morning, that that's the thought. It's a part of our worship. We come here to give the Lord our thanks and our praise and our worship. And we not only do it with the expression of our lips and our hearts, but in giving to him also of our substance as he's prospered us.

[00:15:03] It's a part of our worship. I remember someone remarking once that they didn't like the idea of passing round the box immediately after the emblems. They said, well, why should we be occupied with such a sordid thing as money when we've come together to worship the Lord? Well, I said, dear brother, I think you have the wrong viewpoint. That's a part of our worship. That is not just something sordid.

It's true that money becomes a very sordid thing. Scripture calls what has been gained dishonestly or earned dishonestly, Scripture calls filthy lucre. But what we're giving to the Lord isn't filthy lucre. We're giving to the Lord that with which he's been pleased to bless us. And we're giving it to him as a part of the worship of our hearts. And so here I believe it was the same with Gaius. He was helping these brethren on their journey after a godly sort. No doubt he took them in and lodged them and showed hospitality to them. And when they went on their way, he gave them something to help them on their journey. [00:16:03] This was fellowship. But the Lord accepted it as that which was given to him. What a precious privilege it was.

And he says in verse 8, We therefore ought to receive such that we might be fellow helpers to the truth.

And so sometimes this epistle has been called the epistle that shows us that our fellowship should be inclusive. You know, the second epistle shows us that our fellowship should be exclusive. That we should exclude what is evil. Because that's what we have in the second epistle. We're told there that if we receive those that bring wrong doctrine or those associated with it, we're dishonoring the Lord.

And even those who bid such a person Godspeed in verse 11 is partaker of his evil deeds.

So we can contrast what we have here with that in verse 8. [00:17:02] We therefore ought to receive such that we might be fellow helpers to the truth. The second epistle tells us whom we shouldn't receive. The third epistle tells us whom we should receive. We should receive these.

These were those, no doubt, that as they went around, the apostle is commending Gaius because he received these brethren into his home.

Of course, we use reception in connection with receiving into the assembly, that's true. I don't think that's exactly what is taken up here. It's the question of receiving them into their homes and showing fellowship within a practical way in the Lord's work. But there is no doubt a very real contrast between those two things. And the same thing would apply to assembly fellowship. There are reasons why a person cannot be received and again the reasons why a person should be received. And receiving, as he received these brethren and helped them, [00:18:02] he was a fellow helper with the truth.

And so if we have God's truth, we want to be fellow helpers in it, to help it on. And we live in days, beloved, when the truth is being set aside more and more. And those of us who have the truth, and I think we can say humbly and without boasting, that we can thank God that those of us who gather to the Lord's name, that the Lord has shown us in a very large measure his precious truth. Well, then that puts on us a greater responsibility, to stand for the truth and to make known the truth.

There are many precious souls, no doubt, who are looking for something more than they're getting and they don't know where to find it.

And if the Lord brings us in contact with those souls, perhaps we can help them. Maybe we meet many that don't want to be helped. Well, we've got to sow the seed. It's the same as making known the gospel. There are many souls who need the gospel but when you present it to them they don't want it. [00:19:01] Our responsibility is to make known the gospel.

Then these souls that have heard it, they're responsible before the Lord. There will be those who will

accept it. There will be others who will refuse it. It's the same with Christians. If there's a Christian who has an exercise as to learning the way of God more perfectly, we can make it known.

Maybe they think the price is too high to pay and they're not willing to go any further. Well, that's not our responsibility.

But there will be some others who will accept it and they'll say, yes, this is what I've been looking for and they'll be glad to. So we have a responsibility because more and more around us we find the truth being given up on every hand. So here we find a man who's being encouraged.

It seems that this Gaius was not a brother that could be called, one who took a prominent path perhaps even in the ministry of the Word. We're not given that thought.

He was a man perhaps with no special outstanding gift. [00:20:04] But he was prospering in his soul and he was interested in the Lord's work and he was interested in helping on the Lord's work. And he was interested in seeing the truth, in standing for the truth himself and seeing the truth spread. And so he's encouraged.

And so the Lord would encourage us, beloved brethren. We never want to say, well, there's nothing I can do. There's always something, a place that we can fill for the Lord in our homes, in our businesses, in our individual lives and of course in the assembly also. God has given us each a place. And so this man Gaius, he had his service to do for the Lord.

Then we have in verses 9 and 12, we have a contrast brought out between two men.

John, the Apostle John says, I wrote to the assembly, but diatrophies who love us to have the preeminence among them receive of us not. [00:21:02] He not only didn't receive these that Gaius was receiving, apparently wouldn't even receive the Apostle John.

That was a very sad state of affairs. But he was a faithful servant. I take it that when this was written, John was a very old man.

It seems that John was possibly one of the younger ones of the twelve apostles and he lived longer than they did.

That's what tradition tells us anyhow and possibly it was right in that particular thing because John's writings come along many years after the others.

I think from around, from about 65, I think Paul wrote his last epistle 65 or 66.

The year 65 or 66.

And John doesn't write his gospel, his epistles or the revelation until after the year 90.

So there we have for about 25 years [00:22:03] there was no inspiration.

It seemed that inspiration had ceased. It seems that the Lord was not going to give any more inspired writings as if the New Testament was finished. And then John is inspired of God to write the book of

Revelation and his three letters that we have here and his gospel. And we know that of course John's gospel, one of the reasons the Lord gave it was to present the truth of the Son of God which was being denied by that time. And also we find that John here and there corrects some wrong impressions. For instance, since Peter's restoration, when the Lord said to Peter, when Peter asked the question about John and the Lord said, If I will it he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? People have taken that up to mean that John wasn't going to die. So John corrects that.

He says the Lord didn't say that I wasn't going to die. He said that if I should tarry till he came, [00:23:02] that was nothing to Peter. Of course John does tarry till the Lord comes in the sense that his ministry takes us on to and beyond the Lord's coming, especially in the book of Revelation. So I think that there was perhaps a little bit of a meaning in it.

We might say hidden meaning in what the Lord said to Peter. That John, it didn't mean that John was going to stay here physically, but that in John's ministry, he would tarry till the Lord comes and he would take us on to the coming of the Lord.

But the scriptures were completed through the ministry of the Apostle John. And so we find that in the meantime, in this very assembly where Gaius says we're not told the setting, there has come in the spirit of clericy, the very thing that developed later in the church. One man taking the lead.

And even if the Apostle John wanted to come along, [00:24:03] he wouldn't receive it.

And so the Apostle has to point out the wrong of this.

He receives us not.

Now notice what he says in verse 12.

Demetrius hath a good report of all, and of the truth itself.

Yea, and we also bear record, and ye know that our record is true.

Now referring to Diotrephes in verse 11, the Apostle says follow not that which is evil, but that which is good.

He that doeth good is of God, but he that doeth evil hath not seen God. So there we have the excitation for us to follow that which is good.

To follow the truth of God. If Diotrephes is going to take that place, and you know his name has come down to the present day, and Diotrephes is one who loves to have the free eminence, and pushes others out to push himself forward. And that is the spirit that you see so much in the world. [00:25:04] In fact those who have anything to do with the business world know that that's exactly the spirit of the world. A man seeks to push others out of the way, so often to push himself forward.

But it's a very sad thing, beloved, if a spirit like that comes in among Christians. That's a completely wrong spirit to come in among the Lord's people. But we see it with Diotrephes. It's the spirit that has led to the clerical system, and it's something that we've always got to be on guard against, because even we brethren, even though we say well we don't believe in the clerical system, but a spirit like

this could creep in among us.

And sad to say at times these things have crept in among the Lord's people. So the Lord has given us these warnings that we might learn the lessons through the failures of others.

The Apostle John was not going to forget what these Diotrophes have done, nor would the Lord.

[00:26:01] Whether Diotrophes was a truly converted man or not, we don't know. If he was, he got a long, long way away from the Lord. And the Lord himself would have to deal with him. But Demetrius, another brother apparently who was not very prominent, whether he's the silversmith that we read about in the Acts or not, we don't know. It could have been that that man was converted. But it was a man of the same name. But he said he had the good report of all, and of the truth itself.

The Lord could say, woe unto you when all men speak well of you. And one that has a good report of all, it could convey the thought that he is not being faithful. But I think the thought here is that seeing that this man had a good report of the truth itself, was that he was being faithful, and the all here would be those who were spiritual. He had a good report of all those who were spiritual people. He may not have been at all a prominent person, [00:27:04] but he was faithful.

Probably he opposed Diotrophes, and perhaps had to suffer for it.

It lets us see that the Lord records all that is done. He takes note of it. It's all recorded up there. We may do many things, beloved, for the Lord, that are misunderstood down here, that others don't even see. The Lord records it all, and he takes note of it.

We may do things for the eyes of others, and we may even get the praise of others for what we do. And that's all the praise we'll get.

You know, when it tells us in the 6th of Matthew that we're not to make long prayers like the Pharisees, and we're not to do our alms like the Pharisees, it says three times, it says, they have their reward.

That means they have it, and that's all they're going to get. They looked for praise down here, they received it, and that's all the praise they'll ever get. [00:28:03] Now, that's just the opposite to what we see with the Lord himself. It says of the Lord, he came not to be ministered unto but to minister. Now, that didn't mean to say the Lord wasn't ministered unto, but he didn't come for that. If we come to be ministered unto, perhaps we will be. But that's all we'll ever get out of that.

If we don't come to be ministered unto but to minister, others might minister unto us. We might even get some thanks for what we've done. But the Lord himself is the one that will give the final appraisal of all that's done, and if it's something pleasing to him, we'll hear his well done.

So this should encourage us to go on. He is a man who is taking a prominent place in this assembly, and no doubt many people thought he was very wonderful, this Diotrophes, but he was just running things his own way. The apostle took notice of it, [00:29:01] the Lord was taking notice of it. Here it's recorded in scripture. I'm sure Diotrophes never thought that his name was going to go down in the Bible and be read wherever the gospel goes, that he would be referred to as one who took a place that God didn't intend him to take. Demetrius, in his faithfulness to the Lord, didn't know that he was

going to get his name in scripture. Nor did Mary of Bethany, when she anointed the Lord with the ointment, and the Lord says, wherever the gospel is preached, this also shall be told of a memorial of her.

No, because they were doing it for the Lord. So it shows that what we do, for good or for ill, the Lord has the record.

Let us see that we do it for him. Demetrius had a good report. And then the apostle John had many other things to write, but he says, I hope to go and visit you. I'm not going to write with paper and ink. He hoped to see this dear brother personally.

[00:30:03] And no doubt, as they spoke face to face, they would have very precious fellowship. This lets us see one more thing in scripture, and that is that God does not tell us everything that passed in those days.

We don't get a complete record of the life of the Lord.

John says that if all that the Lord said and did were recorded, that the world itself could contain the books. The Lord has given us, beloved, all we need to know. All we need to know. Isn't it sad that some people spend a lot of time worrying about what the Lord hasn't told us, and very little time in reading what he has told us. Let us see that we spend our time in learning to know the Lord better through his precious word, and meditating on what he has told us.

And the things he hasn't told us, well, we don't need to know them. We'll find out when we get up there. [00:31:01] People say, well, do you think that Mars is inhabited? I don't know whether Mars is or not. I'm sure when I get to Gloria I'll know that. God hasn't told me that, so I don't need to worry my head about that. He's told me many things in his precious word that I should know, that I should be putting into practice and seeking to serve him.

And that's what we should do. Read the word of God, take it home to our hearts, and seek to serve the Lord faithfully in the little time it pleases him to leave us here.

So this is a very practical epistle in connection with the Christian's daily walk and his contact with others, and in seeking to further the Lord's interests.

The Lord has his interests that need to be attended to, and we are those who are responsible. May the Lord enable us to faithfully serve him, each one according to our measure.