

Love for Truth Demonstrated

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Date: 18 September 2013

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[0:00] Last week we did an overview of 2 John, and tonight we're going to cover 3 John, the Apostle John's other short letter in the New Testament.

! We're covering both of them back to back because the two letters have some similarity. And for those of you who weren't here last week, we'll go ahead and start with a quick review of 2 John. Because in 2 John 1 and 2, we saw that truth is grounded in love. So 2 John 1 and 2 say, The elder, to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all those who have known the truth, because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever.

So notice that John says, He and others love the recipients because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever. And then if we look further down into 2 John, we'll see that 2 John 5 reminded us of the commandment to love one another, and then 2 John 6 gave us the definition of love.

So let's read 2 John 5 and 6. They say, And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning, that we love one another.

[1:27] This is love, that we walk according to his commandments. This is the commandment, that as you've heard from the beginning, you should walk in it. And then in 2 John 7 through 11, John warned us about the false teachers.

And he cautioned that we should avoid being hospitable to those false teachers. And so those verses say, For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh.

This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves that we do not lose those things we work for, but that we may receive a full reward. Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God.

He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house, nor greet him. For he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.

We talked last week about how these verses sound harsh at first, but refusing to aid false teachers is one of the most loving things that we can do, because God may use our actions both to open the eyes of the false teachers and to also prevent those false teachers from misleading even more people.

[2:39] So that brings us to 3 John, and 3 John really is the sequel to what we studied last week, because 2 John told us to whom we should refuse hospitality. 3 John, on the other hand, tells us to whom we should be hospitable.

So that's how they fit together. So let's start our look at 3 John by reading the letter in its entirety first. Starting in verse 1, it says, The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth, Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.

For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on a journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well, because they went forth for his namesake, taking nothing from the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such that we may become fellow workers for the truth. I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us.

[3:49] Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds, which he does, is prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church.

Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God. Demetrius has a good testimony from all and from the truth itself, and we also bear witness, and you know that our testimony is true.

I have many things to write, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and ink, but I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak face to face. Peace to you. Our friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.

So as with 1st and 2nd John, the author of this letter is generally accepted to be the Apostle John. You've heard me refer to him as the author several times tonight.

And the reason why everybody believes that the Apostle John wrote this letter is because of the similarities between those other letters that we talked about. Some people have actually said there were two Johns, the Apostle and maybe another elder, but the consensus still remains that it really is the same person that wrote all three, 1st John, 2nd John, 3rd John, as well as the Gospel that bears his name too.

[5:09] We don't know exactly when he wrote the letter, but because the structure and style are similar to 2nd John, most people think that John composed the letter at about the same time he wrote 2nd John, which would be around AD 90 to 95.

And you'll see as we go through the letter that it's very consistent with 1st and 2nd John, and most people think that this letter was also composed when he was at Ephesus during the latter part of his life.

So 3rd John is probably the most personal of John's three letters that are in the New Testament. 1st John was a general letter that was written to congregations scattered throughout Asia Minor.

2nd John was written to a lady and her family. And then in 3rd John, John names the single recipient. So you can see how each letter that's in the Bible kind of narrows down the focus.

It goes from the church at large to a lady and her family to a single recipient. And the theme of 3rd John then is the commendation of the proper standards of Christian hospitality.

[6:11] So that's what fits in your first blank there, the commendation of the proper standards of Christian hospitality. And then the second piece of that theme is the condemnation for failure to follow those standards.

So the second blank is the condemnation for failure to follow those standards. And we'll see that theme clearly in the five sections of the letter because we'll look at the salutation, the commendation, the condemnation, the exhortation, and then the conclusion.

So let's look at the salutation first. That comes in verses 1 through 4. So let's go ahead and read those verses again. John says, And nothing is really known about Gaius beyond the mention of his name here in the greeting.

The name was one of 18 common names that the people had for their children. So there were a lot of Gaiuses around in that time. And the name Gaius is mentioned three other times in the Bible. Acts 24 talks about a Gaius of Derbe. Acts 19, 29 talks about Gaius of Macedonia. And then 1 Corinthians 1, 14 and Romans 16, 23 talk about Gaius of Corinth.

[8:03] And there's really no way to know whether the Gaius mentioned here is one of those three or he was someone else. But we can safely assume that he was a member of a church somewhere in Asia Minor that John had significant influence over.

And so similar to how he opened 2 John, notice how John says that he loved Gaius in the truth. And because Christians have a common knowledge of the truth, they have a common source of love as well.

And we saw that in 2 John 1 that we read during the review. And John's usage of this phrase elsewhere in his letter suggests that he intended that this kind of love be consistent with the fundamental truths of the faith.

So look at what John says again in verse 2. He says, Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health just as your soul prospers. So it's pretty common back in John's day to wish the recipient to have good health.

But John prays for more than just Gaius' health because he also talks about how much he cares for his soul. And you know, spiritual growth can come through sickness and affliction.

[9:13] But it's still right to pray for good health because as we saw through Jesus' earthly ministry, Jesus was concerned about people's health as well. And if you think about it, it's quite a compliment to Gaius to say that John hopes that he's as physically healthy as he is spiritually healthy.

For most of us, it may be the other way around. But Gaius was setting the example for people. And he knew, John did, that Gaius had a healthy soul because some of the people who had met Gaius had brought John glowing reports about how Gaius had cared for people and the way he acted. So nothing gave John greater joy than to hear that his converts were walking in the truth. And when John talks about truth, he's referring to the body of knowledge given to the church through the apostles and the prophets.

So that's what goes in your blank there. Truth is what refers to the body of truth given to the church through the apostles and the prophets. And that's just another way of saying the scripture.

So the scripture then equates to that truth. And we know that Gaius walks according to the word of God rather than the ways of the world. So that brings us then to the commendation of Gaius.

[10:30] And this commendation gives us a specific example of how Gaius walks in the truth. So let's look at 5 through 8 again. Starting in verse 5 it says, So we've already seen John praise the general conduct of Gaius and now he moves into a matter that really concerns him.

Because he says that those who go forth and preach the truth need the support of Christians in the places where they travel. So John wished to assure Gaius that this was the proper course of action. So notice that that's different from what we read in 2 John 10 and 11. 2 John 10 and 11 focused on not giving hospitality to false teachers. Where here we see John saying that it's right to give hospitality to people who teach the truth.

So 2 John told us what not to do. 3 John is telling us what to do. It's another way to look at that. And verse 5 says that Gaius practiced hospitality for the brethren and for strangers.

So he not only practiced hospitality to people he knew, but he also did it to those he didn't know as well. And the brethren reference concerns especially itinerant gospel preachers that Gaius helped on their journeys.

[12:09] But notice his hospitality didn't stop there. He also aided strangers and probably those were Christians who happened to be in the vicinity too. So Gaius was already living what the writer of Hebrews tells us in Hebrews 13, 1 and 2.

Hebrews 13, 1 and 2 say, Let brotherly love continue. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by doing so, some have unwittingly entertained angels. So verse 6 then shows us that the report of Gaius' hospitality had reached the church where John now was.

And John followed up his encouragement with an exhortation. He said, You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. So you will do well are really kind of idiomatic.

And they really are equal to please in our language. It's just another saying, Please do this. So the phrase has the connotation of treating people just as God can treat them.

And that becomes the manner in which hospitality should be practiced then among Christians.

Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 10, 40. Matthew 10, 40 and then on through 42 say this.

[13:22] They say, He who receives you receives me. And he who receives me receives him who sent me. He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.

And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of the disciple.

Assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward. And then Jesus was an advocate of hospitality in other places as well.

Because in Matthew 25, 31 through 46, Jesus reminded us that he will remember our hospitality to other Christians. So I want to just look at a few verses from that section.

So let's look at Matthew 25, 31 through 40. They say, Then the righteous will answer him saying, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you or thirsty and give you drink?

When did we see you as stranger and take you in or naked and clothe you? Or when did we see you sick or in prison and come to you? And the king will answer and say to them, Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.

[15:21] And then those who fail to show hospitality to the brethren will not fare so well. Because if you stay in that same section in Matthew 25 and just skip down to verses 45 and 46, it says this, it says, So you can see how much importance Jesus places then on being hospitable to the brethren.

Let's go back to 3 John now and look at verse 6 again. Because John does more than just tell us to extend that hospitality. He tells us how we should do it too.

When he talks about send on their journeys, that carries the context and the sense of sending with the necessary material support. So the word here is also found in Romans 15, 24, 1 Corinthians 16, 6, verse 11, and several other places in the New Testament.

Because those laboring at large for the gospel work are doing it not for themselves, but for the one who sends them. And of course, the one who sends them is God himself.

And Jesus certainly made that clear in the gospel of Matthew in the verses that we just read. So then if you look at 3 John 7 and 8, we see another reason why we should support traveling Christians, especially those who are teaching the gospel to others.

[16:56] Because these verses say that we should support them. And it says, Because they went forth for his namesake, taking nothing from the Gentiles, we therefore ought to receive such that we may become fellow workers for the truth.

And of course, when we see name here, it's that name of Jesus who is exalted above every name. And to go out in the name of Jesus was a supreme honor. And naturally, it was inappropriate for those going out in the name to seek support from those who did not believe in Jesus or honor that name.

So, the Lord's servants then went out, taking no help from the unsaved. And you know, if you think about it, even today, we sense something unseemly about a preacher of the gospel soliciting funds from people to whom he tries to offer God's gift of salvation.

You know, it just doesn't ring true to us when we see somebody trying to make a living off the people that he's trying to help. And that's the same concept they had back then as well.

And so, the fact that faithful Christian preachers sought no help from the unsaved then means that Christians were under a special obligation to support them, just like we are today.

[18:09] And so, by extending the needed help, Christians such as Gaius could work together for the truth. And that gives us a key truth there, that those who show hospitality participate in the ministries of those to whom hospitality is shown.

So, in a sense, we know that Don is away from us right now, but those of us who participated in sending him are there with him because we have helped send him there as well.

And then verse 8 gives us the same reason to demonstrate hospitality to genuine teachers as 2 John 10 did in forbidding hospitality toward false teachers because those who extend hospitality share in the deeds, whether good or bad, of those receiving the hospitality.

So, if you extend hospitality to somebody who's doing bad things, it's like you're participating in doing those bad things yourself. And if you extend hospitality to somebody doing good things in the name of Christ, you're participating in that as well, just like what we just talked about.

So, then we see that Gaius was so faithful about extending hospitality to others, we may wonder why John felt the need to remind Gaius to do that.

[19:25] And verses 9 and 10 tell us why John sent the reminder, and that's where we see the condemnation come in, because another member of the church was trying to prevent the hospitality.

So, let's look at the condemnation that this other member receives. Here are verses 9 and 10. It says, I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us.

Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds, which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church.

So, the reference here to the church suggests strongly, then, that this was the church to which Gaius belonged. It sounds as if Gaius may not have known about John's letter to the church that John mentions here.

So, speculation is that Diotrephes may have suppressed it and kept it from the church's attention. So, what motivated Diotrephes' actions? It says he was motivated by a love for preeminence in the church.

[20:37] So, that's what goes into your next point, that Diotrephes was motivated by a love of preeminence. And obviously, he's not the last church leader to be so motivated, because the temptation to use a role in the Christian assembly as a means of self-gratification is still a real one that all servants of God have to resist, even today.

And the word preeminence here has the idea of desiring to be first. So, it conveys the idea of somebody who is selfish or self-centered and self-seeking.

And the language then suggests a self-promoting person who served no one but wanted all people to serve him instead. So, Diotrephes' actions directly contradict what we saw from Jesus and also the New Testament's teaching, then, outside of what Jesus said, on the servant leadership in the church.

So, let's look at just one example of the type of leadership that Jesus expected. And we'll go back to Matthew for that. This time we'll be in Matthew 20, verses 25 through 28.

So, if you look at Matthew 20, verses 25 through 28, you'll see this. It said, But Jesus called them to himself and said, You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them.

[22:04] Yet it shall not be so among you, but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant, and whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave. Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.

But Diotrephes did even more wrong than wishing to be preeminent. So, let's look at 3 John 10 again, because John says this. He says, Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words, and not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church.

So, Diotrephes then was guilty of several things. Let's see if we can identify what they are. First off, John uses the phrase, prating against us with malicious words.

And that word prating is a word that we don't hear very often anymore. Prating comes from a word meaning to bubble up. And so, prating is what goes into your blank there.

It comes from a word meaning to bubble up, and it has the idea of useless, empty jabber, or talking nonsense. So, if you want to confuse somebody tomorrow, you can just tell them to stop prating at you, and get an idea of whether they have any idea what you're talking about.

[23:24] So, not only then were Diotrephes' charges false, they were also evil, because Diotrephes slandered John, and he deliberately defied other believers. And so, the original language indicates, and we can see it in our translations too, that Diotrephes' habit was to excommunicate those who resisted his authority.

So, it sounds like he was one of the original my way or the highway kind of people, except one thing wrong with that was his way was not the right way. In our translation, verse 10 usually starts with, if I come.

Some translations do say, whenever. And the word if is not intended to cast out here, because the original word means whenever. So, John is really saying, when he comes, he will bring up Diotrephes' actions and address those.

So, this brings us then to the next section of the letter, and that's the exhortation section. In verses 11 and 12, we see that exhortation. So, let's read those verses again.

It says, Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God. Demetrius has a good testimony from all, and from the truth itself.

[24:44] And we also bear witness, and you know that our testimony is true. So, verse 11 starts with the command that's really like a proverb. It says, Don't imitate what is evil, but what is good.

But the implication is really more specific here, because John is saying, Diotrephes is a bad model of Christian behavior. And John is applying what he's already taught, both in 1 and 2 John.

Because in 1 John 5, 2 and 3, John said, By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not burdensome.

And then last week, and just earlier tonight, in our review, we looked at 2 John 6, where John said the same thing. And 2 John 6 is where John wrote, This is love, that we walk according to His commandments.

This is the commandment, that you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it. So you can see how he ties walking in God's commandments to love. And opinions really differ here on whether John was questioning Diotrephes' salvation.

[25:56] Some people think he was, and some people don't. But regardless, John was affirming that Diotrephes' current conduct manifested a real blindness toward God, and Gaius was to be careful to shun such a person like this and such an experience like this.

So John's words are instructive for us as well, because we already know that Gaius exhibited the type of behavior that John wanted. And Gaius' obvious dedication to hospitality then suggests that he was a man of some means, and he probably was in a good position then to resist what Diotrephes was doing.

So why do you think John felt the need to encourage Gaius to keep doing what he was doing? I think it's a good lesson for us that even people who are doing the right thing and know the right thing to do still need encouragement sometimes to keep doing it, because sometimes if you're doing the right thing you may feel like you're the only one out there that's doing the right thing. And it's nice to have a reminder from somebody that yes, you're doing exactly what you're supposed to do. And of course, put yourself in Gaius' position. Not many people got a letter from an apostle, and that apostle was commending him on how well he was doing things. It probably made him much more willing to keep doing what he'd been doing. And then verse 12 changes the tone a little bit, because in verse 12 John lists Demetrius as an example of good Christian behavior.

[27 : 25] And most commentators think that Demetrius was probably the person delivering this letter to Gaius. And if that's the case, Demetrius would have needed hospitality from someone in the church himself, because once he got there with the letter, he would need a place to stay.

And notice that John put a three-fold testimony to the character of Demetrius. And remember, the Jewish system required at least two witnesses to confirm something.

John gives three witnesses here. He says first that Demetrius is well-spoken by everyone who knew him. And then the second one is that he also vouched, or the truth also vouched for him.

And so by saying that the truth vouched for Demetrius, John really means that Demetrius' character and doctrine were in such conformity with the truth that the truth virtually spoke on Demetrius' behalf, because he was a living example of that truth.

And then the third thing that vouched for Demetrius' character was when John said, we also bear witness, and you know that our testimony is true. So I think it's pretty likely that if Demetrius was the person delivering the letter, he probably did get some hospitality from Gaius that night.

[28 : 43] So we've seen the commendation, the condemnation, and the exhortation. Now let's look at the conclusion. Here are verses 13 and 14. And depending on your translation, your Bible might actually show the last line of verse 15.

Some translations call that last line verse 15 as well. And they say, I have many things to write, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and ink, but I hope to see you shortly and we shall speak face to face.

Peace to you, our friends greet you, greet the friends by name. So these verses are very similar to the closing of 2 John, but they do show us something that's unique about Christianity.

John's words also serve as a reminder of the letter's main themes because he uses the term friends twice in these closing statements. And so it's perhaps one final reminder to Gaius then that Christians in every place should be a network of friends who are ready to help one another whenever a need arises.

And think about it this way, a Christian can meet people whom he's never seen before in places far from home and still discover through a shared faith that he has an immediate bond of friendship with them.

[29 : 53] And that's something that is pretty unique to Christianity. So this letter then written several centuries ago still is applicable to us today.

So let's look at that application just a little bit. First off, Christians should support those who devote their lives to serving God. So once again, Christians should support those who devote their lives to serving God.

and the second application is that by supporting missionaries and pastors we share in their work. Think about it.

How often do we get a chance to share in the work but we do have a way to share by supporting pastors and missionaries. Third, we should avoid seeking prominence for ourselves.

It was very clear throughout the letter how John felt about somebody who was trying to seek prominence for himself. And fourth, our actions provide evidence of whether we are children of God.

[30 : 59] James stated the same concept a little more bluntly in James 2, 15 and 16. It says, If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food and one of you says to them depart in peace be warmed and filled but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body why does it

profit?

So that's why we can say that our actions then provide evidence of whether we're children of God because if I see somebody who needs something and say, Well, I really feel sorry for you. I hope you get that but I don't help that person themselves.

How much of a Christian love am I demonstrating to that person? And finally, we'll see that Jesus will reward those who demonstrate love to fellow believers.

Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 25, 40. He said, And the king will answer and say to them, Assuredly I say to you, Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of my brethren, you did it to me. And of course, what better reward can we have then to have Jesus say that when we treated our brethren well, it was the same thing as treating them well.