

Route Sixty-Six

Part Sixty-Four

3 John

For His Name's Sake

(John 5:39; 3 John 5-7)

With Study Questions

*Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope Church
2370 W. Carson Street, #100
Torrance, CA 90501
212-6999
pastorpaul@branchofhope.org
www.branchofhope.org
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You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me (John 5:39).

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 their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well, ⁷ because they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles (3 John 5-7).

Introduction

Having been in the ministry for so many years in the same community, a request will occasionally come my way to help other local churches through thorny issues. Many a meeting I've sat in, trying to size up the problem. From time to time it is just a matter of having an outside set of eyes looking objectively at, perhaps, an obvious solution. But often times it becomes apparent that the difficult lies in the personalities of the leadership.

A variety of vulnerabilities surface, making churches a less than enjoyable, and sometimes less than redemptive, in their function. These vulnerabilities might be leadership too concerned with pleasing everyone at the expense of biblical truth. Other times the leadership is very committed to biblical truth while almost ignoring a trail of broken bodies strewn across the pews. Another common blow to effective church ministry is when there is dissension in the leadership. The Scriptures, the congregation and Christ Himself fades into obscurity while the under shepherds sheer and slaughter each other.

In 3 John we read of these types of things hindering the ministry-hamshackling, as it were, the effectiveness of going forth for His name's

sake. Similar to 2 John, we will approach this, and more, questions with a verse-by-verse study of this brief epistle.

Survey of 3 John

**The Elder, To the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth:
2 Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers (3 John 1, 2).**

As we discussed in 2 John, “**The Elder**” may be John’s referring to his office in the church or his age. Either way, let us not lose the lesson in the Scriptures that the church is to be governed by a plurality of elders. “**Gaius**” is a common name. We do not know if this is the same Gaius mentioned elsewhere (Acts 19:29; 20:4; Romans 16:23; 1 Corinthians 1:14). When the Scriptures do not tell us something it can contain its own value. That Gaius is not an apostle, elder, deacon, etc., allows a more universal application in terms of these types of words of encouragement.

It has been suggested that Gaius’ health issues may have been related to his unrelenting service. As poor as his physical health might have been, his soul was in excellent health. John’s prayer is that Gaius’ physical health would match that of his soul’s health.

Gaius’ soul was prospering. I would hope it would go without saying that this prosperity *euodousthai* has nothing to do with financial riches. To be sure, the fruit of faithful, hard-working Christians may include financial benefits (and many other benefits). But it may, depending upon the climate of the culture, include persecution, oppression and imprisonment. A quick Google search reveals a predominance of “ministries” promoting the divine right of financial riches. These types of “**god is their belly**” ministries (Philippians 3:19) have long wandered from the path of truth.

For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. 4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth (3 John 3, 4).

This passage adds a bit to the argument that John’s signing of this letter as “**The Elder**” may be a reference to his age. It is a source of grief to

watch how easily a younger generation can be swayed by lies and winsome quasi-intellectual fashions. To hear and see young people know there is a truth and grasp and walk in it is of sublime pleasure. For John to convey that he has **“no greater joy”** is a very strong statement.

I always marvel when God, by His Spirit, chooses to include the names or, at least, references, as with Gaius, otherwise inconsequential people (e.g. the woman who poured expensive ointment on Jesus’ burial-Matthew 26:13) in the Holy Scriptures. Truly, a **“good name is better than precious ointment”** (Ecclesiastes 7:1).

Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers,⁶ who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well,⁷ because they went forth for His name’s sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles.⁸ We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth (3 John 5-8).

Clearly Gaius was a highly respected man. Both the brethren and strangers spoke well of him. Christians are called to be cautious in terms of being too wrapped up in, and in love with, the world (James 4:4). At the same time, we are called to have **“a good testimony among those who are outside”** (1 Timothy 3:7).

There are many angles to this. Whatever hatred the world might have for us, it should not be based upon anything legitimate. Let us also recognize that though we are to be faithful regardless of our current difficulty or station in life, it is important to be actively encouraging faithfulness in others when we see it. It is difficult to imagine that Gaius was not enormously encouraged by this letter.

Even in our worship we are to play a role in the edification of each other. Do not the Scriptures teach that being filled with the Spirit yields **“speaking to one another in psalms, and hymns and spiritual songs”** (Ephesians 5:10)? I recall one young man taking offense that one of our elders, or I, would say “good morning” to the congregation as if it was a violation of the regulative form of worship. The entire event of worship and communion is with God and one another.

Gaius was a man who walked in the truth and was devoted to God. The fact of this was evinced his charity, his love for the brethren, his

hospitality both to those he knew and those who were strangers. The bottom line for Gaius was his willingness to do all things for **“His name’s sake”**, that is, the sake of Christ and the ministry proceeding from His Spirit.

The commission was that he would send these workers for Christ on **“their journey in a manner worthy of God.”** There are times and places where the advancement of the kingdom is done with meager contributions in terms of resources. If such be the case, so be it. We move forward and trust that God will produce what He is capable of producing

Some *trust* in chariots, and some in horses; But we will remember the name of the Lord our God (Psalm 20:7).

But if you have a chariot and the youth group needs a ride to camp, there is nothing truly pious about not offering it because God will get them there somehow! There is a sad and pathetic irony in our current evangelical culture where Kenneth Copeland, with his aberrant teachings, boasts an income of over half a billion dollars. Yet good pastors I know find it difficult to provide for their family. It’s the sad of humor I once heard where the congregation prays regarding their pastors, “You keep him humble Lord, we’ll keep him hungry.”

These saints who **“went forth for His Name’s sake,”** similar to Paul at Corinth (1 Corinthians 9:12), took **“nothing from the Gentiles.”** Interestingly that Paul makes an argument from the law that the recipients of his ministry ought to support the ministry. At the same time, he did not use this right. How could Paul allow this church to neglect the law in this manner? He concluded that it would **“hinder the gospel of Christ” (1 Corinthians 9:12).**

This opens an interesting conversation, suffice it to say for now that those who are more mature in the faith will often carry the financial weight for those less mature. I know, for me, I do a great deal of ministry outside of our church. And it is not something for which I require a fee. I can do this because this church provides. My ability to spend the amount of time I do going forth for His name’s sake is due, in part, to the support which happens from those mature in the faith. John now changes gears.

I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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 (3 John 9-11).

Another character is now interjected into the letter. Diotrephes is just the opposite of Gaius. Not only is this man ineffective and sinful in his ministerial efforts, he is making sure others cannot minister either. Pride is a killer. Diotrephes loved to have “**preeminence**” *philoproteuon*. He loved to put himself first.

It is such an ugly thing to see in the church. Those groping for prestige who “**loved the praise of men more than the praise of God**” (John 12:43). If we’re seeking to imitate Christ in terms of His supreme example of what it means to lead, to be the Head of the church, it is perhaps best found in the simple statement:

...just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28).

This man’s contemptible disposition is found in his rejection of apostolic authority. When John writes that he “**does not receive us,**” we can take with that the wholesale rejection of the word of God. Like liberal ministers today who either reject God’s word or twist it beyond recognition. It is difficult not to think of the immensely popular Rob Bell who, in an interview with Oprah Winfrey, made the statement,

...the church will continue to be even more irrelevant when it quotes letters from 2,000 years ago as their best defense, ...

Diotrephes also engaged in malicious words against John, ever going on the attack (“Prating” means wicked nonsense). Be careful of those who are just too comfortable and incessant in their criticisms of others. It may just be a not-so-subtle way of deflecting the negative attention away from themselves. Diotrephes was also aggressively forbidding true ministry from taking place. Heaven forbid someone else receive the encouragement.

Diotrephes must have been grinding his teeth at the nice words extended to Gaius, and now Demetrius.

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. ¹³I had many things to write, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and ink; ¹⁴but 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 (3 John 12-14).

Demetrius is another person we know nothing about. But his good name will live on. Similar to his previous letter, John looks forward to speaking face to face. There is something irreplaceable about that. I recall after five years of undergraduate and ed classes sitting in an interview for a teaching position. The interviewer took about ten minutes to skim five years of grinding academic labor. She then looked at me and said, "Tell me about yourself." I got the feeling that the next eight minutes was going to matter more to her than my previous ten semesters.

In conclusion, let us not lose the main thrust of this epistle. The overarching theme, similar to all of Scripture, is to advance the name of Christ. Let all things be done for His name's sake.

Questions for Study

1. Have you ever noticed difficulties in the leadership and managing of the church? Why do these types of things happen (page 2)?
2. How can it be helpful in our Bible study when we don't know that much about who a person is (page 3)?
3. What was John's prayer for Gaius' health? What does it mean to prosper? What does it not mean (page 3)?
4. What are the attributes of Gaius that are brought to our attention? How can we be to others what John was to Gaius (page 4)?
5. Discuss what it means to do things "for His name's sake" (pages 4, 5).
6. How do we help others in ministry "in a manner worthy of God" (page 5)?
7. Diotrephes, unlike Gaius, was someone to avoid imitating. What are some red flags when it comes to the weaknesses and sins of Diotrephes (pages 5, 6)?
8. What does true leadership look like (page 6)?