

### 3 John

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3 John 1:9-12

Vss. 9-10

- Here we come to the real reason the letter is written and why John hopes to soon be visiting the church and here we meet the first of the other two characters in the story.
- John says that he had previously written something to the church which appears to be what we know as 2 John. That letter was mostly addressing the issue of how the church should deal with those whose teachings are not compatible with the gospel of the Apostles and whether the church should show any kind of hospitality to such teachers.
- Here we deal with the other side of the question, how the church *should* receive good teachers and why that is important. And we meet the protagonist in the story, Diotrephes.
- By this time, some 50-60 years after the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, things had changed a great deal. By 70 AD Israel had been in open rebellion against Rome for years and the rebellion was ultimately put down that year. The Roman general Titus laid siege to Jerusalem and sacked it and utterly destroyed it, leaving only a small portion of the western wall (today's Wailing Wall) of the great Temple standing, fulfilling the prophecy of Christ. The Jews Titus didn't kill were driven out of Palestine and scattered all around the Roman Empire. What this meant for the early church was that the Jerusalem church, the central authority of the early church, was gone. Authority then shifted to the remaining original disciples of Jesus, including Paul. But as they were put to death one by one, authority shifted to the leadership of the local churches. By the time 3 John was written only John was left of all the original Apostles and he was very old and seemed to be suffering some of what all old men suffer: like a pride of lions, younger lions had taken control and dismissed the authority of the old lions, even John.
- And here then is why 3 John remains pertinent to our contemporary world, for at the end of the day, this is not really a question over hospitality, but over power and control.

- Who exactly is Diotrephes? He does not appear to be a bishop or be someone who holds any official office within the church, otherwise he would be compelled to submit to John's authority. Rather he seems to be someone who has a strong, dominant personality. He may be the wealthiest man in the church, maybe the wealthiest in town. He may hold public office in some capacity in town. He may even be the mayor. He is that Alpha dog who is always going to rule the pack and everyone finds it easier to submit to him rather than to oppose him. Imagine if you will, if Mr. Potter from "It's A Wonderful Life" were to be a member of your church. He wouldn't need to be a deacon or be chair of any committee to make sure that he controlled events and that everything went just the way he wanted.
  
- Today we would never suggest that Diotrephes was "wicked". We would likely say that that he was a just a big fish in a small pond, that 99% of the time the local church was left alone with no outside contact or interference, and that he saw himself as the protector of HIS church for he had heard about the terrible trouble caused by traveling preachers and decided that HIS church would just not host any since it was so hard to tell the good ones from the bad ones. But in truth, Diotrephes is guilty of gross Pride. HIS church! HIS way or the highway! So his Pride crushed his charity and blinded him to his basic responsibilities as a Christian and a Christian leader as well. Diotrephes was not wrong to want to protect his church, but his Pride was robbing him of the foremost Christian quality: love. Christ taught John that His agape kind of love was the supreme Christian characteristic and that every other good quality sprang from there. The Christian hospitality and charity that was in question, Christian giving, Christian humility and submission all were born out of Christian love and John had made it clear in 1 John that the one who does not love his brother (like a brother who is a traveling teacher) cannot claim to love God and as such cannot claim to be truly a Christian, a true follower of Jesus Christ (1 John 4:8, 20). Never mind the disrespect Diotrephes had shown John by dismissing what John has to say and accusing John with "wicked words".

Vss. 11-12

- When Tim Tebow first went into the NFL, he said a lot about the importance of being a role model as an NFL player. Another player on another team told the press that he was only a football player, not a role model, to which Tebow replied, "We (the NFL players) are all role models, some just aren't very good ones." Here we have two good role models Tim would like. First there was Gaius, to whom the letter was written, and now here is Demetrius.

- It is likely that Demetrius is both the one who brought the two letters we know as 2 John and 3 John. It is also likely that Demetrius is the leader of the band of itinerate preachers who have come to Gaius' church. Like Gaius, Demetrius was not an uncommon name in that time and place. There are two other men with that name in the New Testament. There was the Demetrius in Acts 19 who was a silversmith in Ephesus and opposed Paul strongly. There was also a Demas who had been a co-laborer with Paul, Demas being a shortened version of Demetrius, like Robert to Bob. Demas can be found in Col. 4:14; Philemon, vs. 24; 2 Tim. 4:10 where Paul says that Demas, "having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica". It seems unlikely that either of these is the same Demetrius, but it may be possible that either the silversmith got saved or that Paul's friend repented and connected with John years later.
- It seems that John may have sent Demetrius to the church as a positive counterweight to the negativity of Diotrephes. So, John implores the "beloved" Gaius to not imitate what is evil (the practices of Diotrephes) but to imitate what is good (found in the actions and teaching of Demetrius). Similar to 1 John 4:7-8, John tells Gaius that the one who DOES good is of God and that the one who does evil is not of God. The love of Christ is an ACTIVE love. We were created for the good works "which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Eph. 4:10). As we saw in 1 John and 2 John, the aged disciple sees the world in Black and White: You either is or You ain't! You either have Christ and His love shines through you, or if nothing is shining through then there is no Christ in you, no matter what you may say.
- Gaius can trust the example of Demetrius because he has a "good testimony from everyone" and as John sees it, Demetrius' life and teachings line up perfectly with the life and teachings of Jesus. To all of that, John adds his own endorsement which Gaius knows he can trust.
- Demetrius must have been quite a fellow. Surely he knew the hornet's nest he was walking into.
  - His mere presence was a direct challenge to Diotrephes and he was challenging Diotrephes on the man's home turf. The full armor of God, a boat load of grace, and a double portion of the love of Christ would be required to this journey!