

3 John – Addressing Drama in the Fellowship

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Third John. This is a short and personal letter, actually from the Apostle John to a man named Gaius, who was a believer. Obviously a godly man, someone that John felt that he could trust with this personal letter. The letter begins again in the traditional fashion, with the name of the writer, the author, and once again, John identifies himself simply as “the elder”. Same way he introduced himself in 2 John, and then to the recipient,

¹“*To the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth*”(ESV). And then here comes the greeting.

He says, ²“*Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul*”.

In other words, as your soul prospers, may your physical body prosper right along with that. He begins this letter again, very short one, verse three, by saying,

³“*For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth.* ⁴*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth*”.

And this is something we talked about from 2 John. Really, it's a very similar sort of message. It's not enough just to know the truth. But we need to go on and walk it out in our lives. John says, it is a wonderful joy to me as a leader. But he goes on to say in verse five,

⁵“*Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers, as they are,* ⁶*who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God.* ⁷*For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles.* ⁸*Therefore, we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth*”.

Now, as in 2 John, this issue of hospitality comes up because in the first century, you know, this was an extremely big issue. The churches that were just getting started would receive men like the apostles. The Apostle Paul would go from place to place.

There were other men who traveled between the towns, went to these churches from city to city, teaching and encouraging the people. And these travels were made possible by the very gracious efforts of the people in those cities who were believers and who would receive them into their homes, literally.

And support them, feed them, take care of them while they were there, and then give them provisions so that they would be supplied for, as they carried on to the next city. And this was a big deal. This is why hospitality was so big. You'll remember that of the deacons and elders and so forth, one of the qualifications is like they need to be good at hospitality.

Well, it doesn't mean having somebody over for TV dinners and watching a movie. We're talking about having people in your home. We're talking about putting them up. It was an expense. It was a sacrifice. But it was necessary. Now, this is the other reason why in 2 John, John said, be careful not to do this for false teachers.

That's not what we want to be doing, because to offer someone hospitality is to join in their ministry. Now he's praising Gaius for joining in the ministry of supporting these individuals, showing his love for the Lord by doing so, and supporting those who are traveling into the area and through the area to share the truth of the gospel. And this was a good thing.

Now, as we move on in this very short letter, we're going to get an insight into some of the drama that was happening in the early church. I think sometimes people think, gee, we got such drama today, in the body of Christ. Good thing they didn't have that in the first century. Oh, yes, they did.

There was drama and it's surrounded, in this case, a man by the name of Diotrephes. Notice verse nine, John says,

"I've written something to the church, (in other words, a letter to the whole body), but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority".

So here's what's going on. It seems to tell us that John, as I said, had written a letter to the whole church, but this man Diotrephes wouldn't let it be read. He

wouldn't read it in front of the church. Apparently, Diotrephes had some kind of position of leadership in the church, but he withheld John's letter because he believed, or I should say, maybe he questioned John's authority as an apostle to write a letter to the church.

And he probably, well, “Who's this John Guy, and why should we let him say anything in the body of Christ here? I don't recognize his authority”. So he refused to have that letter read. And that wasn't all that he was doing. Look at verse 10, he says,

“So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us”.

Notice the word "us", plural, so Diotrephes is apparently having issues about the authority of the other apostles. Maybe he just, maybe he denied the original apostles the authority to do what they were doing, traveling around and so forth. John said the man was talking wicked nonsense. That means he was speaking not only foolishly, but maliciously – maliciously, against John and others, apparently. And you'll notice that he goes on to say in verse 10,

“And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church”.

Now this is crazy. So the very thing that John praised Gaius for, which was showing hospitality to the saints as they traveled through, this Diotrephes guy refuses to offer that same hospitality to the genuine men who are coming to share in the church. And if anybody in the church wants to give them support in hospitality, Diotrephes will kick them out. Kind of makes you wonder if he'd kicked Gaius out of the church. What's apparent? And here's the drama that's going on:

You got a guy named Diotrephes who wants to be the sole leader of the church. And he wasn't willing to allow anyone else to lead in any way. Well, and you probably noticed way back in verse nine that John diagnosed this the main issue with Diotrephes. Look at verse nine. He speaks of *“Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first”*. That's his problem right there.

He likes being in the limelight. In fact, he needs the spotlight. He's got to have the spotlight. He's got to have the microphone. He is completely unwilling to take a backseat to anybody else who might upstage him in any way. And of course, simply put, the problem with Diotrephes was pride, which is really a very serious issue for a leader in the body of Christ.

Spiritual pride, I believe, is truly a dangerous thing. And it leads, as we see here in the example of Diotrephes, to being divisive, causing literal division, within the body of Christ. Because I'm not going to let these guys speak in my church. You're not going to speak in my church.

You remember what the Apostle Paul said about people who create divisions? Let me show you on the screen. Romans chapter 16,

Romans 16:17-18 (ESV)

“I appeal to you brothers to watch out for those who cause division and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. ¹⁸For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites (that means their own desires), and by smooth talk and flattery, they deceive the hearts of the naive”.

Isn't that interesting? Notice he talks about smooth talk and flattery. I have no doubt that this Diotrephes guy, probably convinced a good number of the people in the body of Christ that the reason he wasn't reading letters from the other people or letting these people in, is because, “I'm just trying to protect you. It's a dangerous world out there and I need to protect you. I'm the shepherd of this fellowship, and it's my job to protect you. And if I don't protect you, who will? So I'm not letting these people, I don't know who these people are, I don't know what message they've come to bring. And listen, whatever you need to hear, you'll hear from me”.

And it sounds awfully like somebody, somebody who's naive enough is going to hear that and go, “Thank you for taking such good care of us”, completely denying the fact that it is the Holy Spirit's job to protect, that God is the shepherd of His people. We as leaders, we're under shepherds. We're like flunkies. I mean spiritual flunkies, and we're to do what the Lord tells us to do, not what we think is right.

And so, this goes against so much so John exhorted Gaius to take note of the actions of this guy. Notice in verse 11, he says,

“Beloved, do not imitate evil (I want you to take notice how he's acting, do not imitate what he is doing rather, he says), imitate good. Because whoever does good is from God. Whoever does evil has not seen God”.

And John's making a very simple statement here, but he is condemning Diotrephes for his failure to live by the simple command to truly love the

people. He's giving Gaius a way to understand and to know that Diotrephes was not abiding in the truth of God's word. And John is basically saying that those who refuse to live alongside others, those who refuse to recognize the gifts and the calling of other people and their contribution to the body of Christ are showing by their actions, they don't really know God.

Because, what we learn in the Bible is that the different parts of the body can't say to other parts of the body, "I don't need you". Because we're a body. And Paul even went into great detail of how a body works and all the parts of the body are necessary for it to work properly. And I can't say to you, you can't say to me, "I don't need you". We need each other in the body of Christ.

Well, Diotrephes missed that whole idea. And he was trying to be everything to everyone, and it just doesn't work. And he proves by that, that he really doesn't know the Lord and what the Lord has for the body of Christ.

Now as you look at verse 12, you find out that on the other hand, there is someone else in the body there, who needed to be recognized and commended for what he was doing. Now this is not Diotrephes, this is Demetrius, a different man. He says,

"Demetrius has received good testimony from everyone and from the truth itself. We also add our testimony and you know that our testimony is true".

Now, Demetrius is most likely the man who carried John's letter to Gaius. And so, he's speaking of how Gaius had, or excuse me, Demetrius had spent time with him, received the letter that John had written and then took it to Gaius. And he's now saying, "You know what? This man, Demetrius, he's a good guy and he's received a really good word from the body of Christ". The believers in the body are saying this is a good guy, and they recognize his gifts, his calling, his contribution to the body of Christ.

He's a faithful servant, serves the Lord with his whole heart, and John wants to make sure that is known. Verse 13,

"I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink". (just like he wrote in John 2, or I should say 2 John), ¹⁴*"I hope to see you soon and we will talk face to face"*. (Very similar wording to the last letter.) ¹⁵*"Peace be to you. The friends greet you, greet the friends each by name"*.

And amen. And there we finished third John.

So interesting, isn't it? When we read these short letters, personal letters in the early part of probably what was at the end of the first century, we see that the church was fraught with issues already.

False doctrines swirling around, people going against the truth, drama within the body of Christ, things that they had to address. Issues with people.

People get heavy handed in the body of Christ, telling people what to do, who to listen to, who not to listen to, and so forth. And there were all kinds of things that had to be dealt with.

And the church today remains quite dysfunctional, I would have to say. I had a girl write to me this week and she wanted to know. She talked about how she had been hurt in the church and she wanted to know how to go about healing to the point where she could get back in fellowship.

And I said, "Sweetie", (I can say that now because I'm a grandpa), "you need to understand that we attend church not because it feels good, or things are going well. There's a point where we walk in obedience to God".

Hebrews 10:25 says, "*We are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, which is the habit of some*".

And that means that when I go to church and when I hang out with other people who are just as flawed as I am, we will step on one another's toes. We will offend one another. We will hurt one another. But I'm never given a pass to withdraw. I'm never given a free pass to withdraw from the body of Christ because of hurt and offense. I'm just not.

The drama's been going on since the first century, you guys, and it's going to go on until Jesus comes for us. There's going to be drama because the church is not just filled with believers, there's unbelievers in the body of Christ.

No, there are unbelievers in the church, not in the body of Christ, let me clarify that. In the body of Christ, there's true believers. In the church there are people who don't yet know the Lord. There are some people who know that they don't know the Lord, and there are some people who think they know the Lord and they don't. They've not yet bowed their knees.

And then there's other people who are just, they're just here to find out if there's anything worth listening to. But the point is, there's a lot of churches who embrace people as soon as they walk through the door. And so people come in,

they're like, I'm just kind of wondering, if there's anything here that's worth listening to.

And they've seen people walk through the door and they figure they're fresh meat! So they invite them to start teaching Sunday school and then doing this and doing that. Pretty soon they're on some board or another, and they're not even saved yet. And then we wonder why there's drama, you know. And there's differences of opinion and all the other things that go along with it.

By the way, that's one of the reasons why when you come to Calvary Chapel, we make you sit for six months before we let you do anything. We want to make sure that you know us, we know you, and you know Jesus. That's pretty important, especially if you're going to start teaching His word to people.

We'd like you to have a saving knowledge of what Jesus did on the cross. It's kind of important. But, you know, that it helps to cut down on drama, but we're never going to eliminate it all together. So if we're going to, if you're going to try to look for a drama-free church, you know you're never going to find one.

Calvary Chapel Ontario is not a drama free church. But we are the body of Christ. And we are who we are, and this is whom God has birthed us into. When you were born again, you were born into a family. A dysfunctional family, filled with fallible sinners who need as much forgiveness and grace as you do.

And coming to church is a great exercise in learning to extend grace and forgiveness. And we're here because we're going to be obedient to Jesus. He said through the writer of Hebrews, don't forsake this thing. Okay? We're not going to forsake it. We're going to gather. Sometimes it's going to be painful, but we're going to gather.

And when somebody hurts my feelings, I'm going to go to that person and say, "Ouch. We need to get this right". And that's hard. I know it's easier just to stay home. I can watch online. How fun is that? Have church in my jammies and nobody sees me spilling all over myself. Well, you see me spilling all over myself, but I looked in the mirror. I'm glad I'm sitting down because I spilled soup on my pants and they didn't realize it tonight. And so anyway, anyway, drama. There we go. So let's close in prayer.

Thank you Father, for loving us, even though we don't deserve your love. And thank you Lord for the body of Christ, the redeemed of the Lord.

Father, we're all in process. And we see in these these last two letters of John that there were issues and problems and bad doctrine and things swirling around that were dangerous. And there were people that were taking control and being jerks and being divisive. And Lord, it's the same old story.

But Lord, we see here also that John was dealing with these things we have to deal with. Help us Lord to do that. Help us to stay connected because we are walking in obedience to your word. Help us to learn. Help us to grow. Help us to learn to show grace and forgiveness, to be longsuffering toward others, just the way we want them to treat us. And help us to be more Christ-like as we walk out the truth.

Lord, you've shown us the truth. Now help us walk it out. We ask all these things in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior, who gave His life on the cross to save us from our sin. It is in that name that we pray. Amen. Amen. God bless you.