

# 3<sup>rd</sup> John – for the sake of the Name

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Please open your Bible to the book of 3<sup>rd</sup> John, or turn to page \_\_\_\_ in the Bible under the chair in front of you.

We're looking at the little book of 3<sup>rd</sup> John this morning. It's the shortest book in the New Testament. But shorter letters don't necessarily mean shorter sermons. 😊

This letter, though brief, carries a weighty message for the church in every age. Written by the Apostle John, likely in the late first century, this is a personal letter to a man named Gaius, a faithful believer, and it addresses timeless principles for life as followers of Christ. There is something here for each one of us today.

That's why we've called this series, "Big lessons from Small Letters." There are some big, helpful truths that God wants each of us to know. This book is for you.

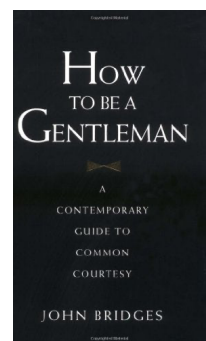
**Read 3<sup>rd</sup> John 1-15**

## Intro

Growing up, it was really important to my mom that my two brothers and I conducted ourselves as gentleman. Any other moms have that desire for your sons?

I think it's a good thing, and a great goal to have. My mom even bought a book for us to read. It's called *How to be a Gentleman*. (show picture)  
It has all sorts of little advice and tips for behaving like a gentleman. Things like:

- A gentleman keeps his commitments and arrives on time
- A gentleman does not pick his nose in public
- A gentleman always thanks the host or hostess when leaving a party
- A gentleman offers to help someone in need but does so without drawing attention to himself.



And they're all aimed helping a man know what a gentleman does. And what is a gentleman? What is the goal?

Someone who helps others feel at ease

A gentleman is willing to take offenses or be put out or bear embarrassment if it means that the other people will not have to. They help everyone feel welcome and comfortable, even if it costs them something.

You know, the Bible also speaks about this kind of living, about preferring others above yourself. And the Scriptures use another word to talk about the idea of welcoming others, particularly strangers. It's the word "hospitality." A gentleman shows hospitality.

The word 'Hospitality' has within it the idea of the love of the stranger. Today, we often think of hospitality in terms of hotels or resorts, the hospitality industry. Or we think "Martha Stewart" and trying to host people in your home in such a way that everything is perfect and 'just so.'

But that's pretty far from what the biblical authors had in mind when they talk about welcoming others and showing hospitality. Biblical hospitality has much more to do with serving and meeting needs and showing love. It's not just because you know the other person or they're attractive or have a lot to offer, but because the love of Christ compels us to move out and invite others in.

One scholar writing about the biblical background in that day writes, "Hospitality 'might be defined as the process by means of which an outsider's status is changed from stranger to guest'."<sup>1</sup> (Mailina)

### ***Hospitality = transforming strangers into friends or family***

To show hospitality is to welcome strangers as though they are friends or family.

In some ways, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> John are all about hospitality. The messages of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> John could be summarized as...

- Don't welcome the wrong folks
- Do welcome the right ones

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<sup>1</sup> Colin G. Kruse, The Letters of John, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans Pub.; Apollos, 2000), 215.

God wants us to know that we ought to support those who are fellow workers for the truth. And we ought to take care, lest we become like those who stir up division and refuse to welcome our brothers and sisters.

God values this teaching so much that this letter was inspired by the Spirit for the building up of God's people throughout all time. The early church recognized that this brief letter was used being used by God for encouragement in the faith. This letter is unusual for its inclusion in the Scriptures, not just because it's so brief, but also because it doesn't explicitly mention the name Jesus. And yet, it's an application of truth as it plays out with real people in a local church context. And so God wants us to know and apply its message in our lives today.

John begins in a similar way to the greeting we saw last week in 2<sup>nd</sup> John. He says...

### **3 John 1**

The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.

So John is addressing this to a man named Gaius. We don't know much about this guy in particular. Gaius was a common name at the time. There are references for at least three different guys with that name in the New Testament.

And John wants Gaius to know he is beloved and loved in truth – not just truly loved but loved in truth. And so he once again pairs love and truth together. They must be held together for John – we love others with the truth. And we speak the truth in love.

As we said last week, for John, the truth is a shorthand way of talking about the gospel of Jesus Christ. The truth is the message of salvation from our sins through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Son of God come in the flesh. John is saying, "You're my brother in the truth. You're my brother in the gospel."

And then he gives this prayer in verse 2...

### **3 John 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.

John says, I love you man. And I've been praying that it would go well with you. I'm

praying that you would be in good health in both your body and your soul. Your soul is doing well, and I am praying for your body to be healthy as well. This is just another example of the biblical writers underlining the fact that we are embodied souls or ensouled bodies. We aren't just a soul and we aren't just a body. We are each both at once. And it is good and right to pray for our bodies and souls to be healthy and flourish.

Finally, in this greeting, he expresses his joy to hear that Gaius is walking in the truth. Indeed, he has no greater joy than to hear his children are walking in the truth.

Apparently, some brothers from John's church in Ephesus have gone to visit Gaius and the church there. And they have reported back to John what they saw. And these brothers told John that Gaius is walking in the truth. And John is so thrilled to hear that. There's nothing that makes him happier than to hear that those who have come to Christ continue to persevere in the faith and live it out in their lives. That's something worth celebrating.

After these initial greetings, John moves to the body of the letter in verses 5-12. It's really just seven verses that are the occasion for this letter. He has something that he wants to tell Gaius and the church around him. So John gives us a single main point with two ideas. It's found in verse 11...

### **3 John 11**

Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God.

Here's his point: Do not imitate evil. Instead, imitate good. You should follow those who are doing good. You should not follow those who are doing evil.

Sounds simple, right? But of course, there's more to it than that. God wants us to see this real-life example of what it means for a local church to imitate good and not evil. What does it mean to imitate good? Where do we draw that line? How do we show hospitality in a way that aligns with both truth and love? That's what John wants to show us.

So let's look at the body of this letter. First, I want us to see the command that we are not to imitate evil.

## **Do not imitate evil**

So let's jump to verse 9, and we'll get back to verses 5-8 in a moment. So John says in verse 9...

### **3 John 9**

I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority.

So John has a message that he'd like to present to the church, but this guy Diotrephes won't acknowledge his authority. That's significant because during His time on earth, Jesus had established and sent out the twelve apostles, including John, to build up the foundation of the church. After the sending of the Spirit at Pentecost, the apostles had begun preaching and teaching and planting churches, first in Jerusalem, then Judea and Samaria, and then to the ends of the earth.

The apostles, then, had authority to discern the true gospel message in those early years when it may have been easily corrupted. And that's what is apparently happening here.

Notice what this guy Diotrephes does. First, he likes to put himself first. He wants to be 'pre-eminent.' He likes the spotlight and the attention and the power and influence. He wants the top position. He wants to be first.

The comedian Brian Regan talks about the dreaded "me monster" whom you may occasionally meet at a party. Every conversation was about me, myself, my ideas, my accomplishments, my story that's better than your story. Beware the me monster.

One of my favorite professors in seminary was Dr. Michael Haykin. He's a church historian who has written numerous books, and he's recognized in scholarly circles as a trusted voice because he's done the hard work of research and writing. We were in conversation one time with my pastor at the time, and he confided in us that many times he'll find himself talking with seminary students, guys who are training for ministry. And he'll just remain quiet. And let those guys talk and talk and talk. They're not really talking with him; they're just talking at him. And many times, he said, they can just go on and on, never asking a question, never showing curiosity or interest in him.

How ironic for students to just want to assert themselves before their teacher, for guys hoping to serve and shepherd people to be so bad at listening!

You know, the root of a lack of hospitality is pride. We want to be first, so we don't welcome others in.

Next, he doesn't acknowledge authority over him. Diotrephes resists the authority John has as an apostle. John had been taught and commissioned by Jesus Himself, and yet Diotrephes doesn't want to have to submit. He doesn't want to be accountable to anyone but himself.

So often, people who want to be first are resistant to following others. Again, it's ironic that one of the characteristics of the best leaders is that they are good followers. A good leader is teachable and willing to put themselves under the rightful authority of others.

Beware of those who claim to be leaders or want to have a voice of influence in your life when they are unwilling to follow anyone else.

Especially in spiritual areas, you should be cautious about following people who are not a part of a local church. They are acting apart from the authority that God has set up for our good and our protection. If they are unwilling to be accountable to church leadership or to the congregation, that's a red flag. Beware of those who claim to be above criticism or past the need for accountability.

Look then at verse 10...

### **3 John 10**

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

Notice also that Diotrephes "spreads wicked nonsense." In other words, he's making claims that are outrageous and untrue. He's stirring up division, setting those in the church against one another and inciting distrust and disunity. He's begun a whisper campaign to discredit John and the brothers who have come to proclaim the truth of the gospel.

And John calls it out for what it is – wicked nonsense. It's evil, and it's irrational. It's against God, and it's stupid. And when I get there, I'll bring this up with him.

Finally, he refuses to welcome the brothers and stops those who want to, and he puts those who are trying to welcome the brothers out of the church.

So now, Diotrephes is not just talking foolishness and spreading rumors, he's refusing to welcome these brothers in the truth. He won't show them hospitality – probably because they threaten his pride and his desire to be first. So he won't welcome them, and he's stopping others from trying to welcome them and show hospitality.

Now he's working to control and manipulate so that he stays in his position of power. He's trying to run the church as though he's king with the authority to remove those who don't agree with him.

Where do we see people like Diotrephes today?

We see it with televangelists, power-hungry pastors, and disgruntled church members.

There has been this growing trend in recent years for self-appointed 'watch dogs' to set themselves up as those who need to call out people with whom they disagree, especially public figures. So you may find articles immediately after someone like John MacArthur passes away or documentaries made when a pastor like J.D. Greear or David Platt are involved in controversy at their church. They're often exaggerated and only tell one side of the story. And I'm not saying that there isn't a time and place for criticism like that, even sharp criticism. And I'm not saying that I agree with those guys on everything or that they did everything right.

I am saying that we should take great care that we are not becoming like Diotrephes when we decide to participate in media that could be called wicked nonsense or which bears false witness. Do not be quick to stir up division among brothers in the truth.

Years ago, around the turn of 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was a Greek Scholar named A.T. Robinson at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. And he wrote an article about this Diotrephes from 3<sup>rd</sup> John in a denominational newsletter. He called him the 'church boss.'

And over the next several weeks, the editor of that newsletter received twenty-five different letters of complaints from deacons who all thought that the article was about them.<sup>2</sup> Can you imagine that? If you throw a rock into a pack of dogs, the one who yelps is the one who got hit.

And there's a little Diotrephes in all of us. This isn't just a problem for some people 'out there' – it's an issue we all have to wrestle with.

-how often do we fail to listen because we want to be first? We're just thinking about what we want to say rather than hearing what is being said? (especially when in an argument)

-we jump on the opportunity to run someone down behind their back?

-we spread or re-post something that we haven't verified to be true because we 'want it to be true' so bad?

-we are quick to believe the worst so that we don't have to help or serve or meet needs? They're just going to misuse the money anyway...

So John is saying, "This guy Diotrephes is a problem. Don't be like him."

Brothers and sisters, don't be a Diotrephes. Don't put yourself first. Don't reject all authorities over you. Don't participate in the spread of wicked nonsense. Don't refuse to welcome those who are walking in the truth or try to put them out of the church. Don't imitate evil.

## **Imitate Good**

Don't imitate evil. Instead, imitate good. Follow good examples of faithfulness and truth and love. There are a few examples of good, faithful people here that we can imitate.

First, notice those whom John calls "the brothers." He mentioned them in verse three when he said that the brothers gave a good report. So these are fellow workers in the gospel. They are walking with you in the truth. They'd be like what we today call missionaries or perhaps traveling evangelists or teachers.

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Dever, The Message of 3<sup>rd</sup> John, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GGMV22tI8GY>



And what are they doing? Why are they traveling around? Look at verse 7...

### **3 John 7**

For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles.

These brothers have gone out for the sake of the name. What name? The name of Jesus. This phrase is also used in the book of Acts when the apostles rejoice because they'd been persecuted for the sake of the name. They so believe in the gospel of God and the message of salvation in Christ that they have left their homes in order to share it with others. What a great heading for a life well-lived – I lived for the sake of the name.

And then John says, these brothers are not doing their ministry in order to get rich or profit personally from it. They are dependent on the generosity and hospitality of others for their support – for their food and clothing and shelter.

And they're not charging the Gentiles to whom they minister. The word for Gentiles here is an uncommon one in the New Testament. It's not *ethnos*, and it doesn't just mean the nations. It has in mind the unbelievers in the culture, those who reject Jesus and the gospel. He's saying, they're not relying on the unbelieving world to pay for their ministry.

Here is one place where we see a principle for church finances. The church should support the work of the gospel. The ministry of the gospel should be funded by those in the church.

I don't think that means we can't do a yard sale at the church or get donations from local businesses for a silent auction. But I do think it means that we as the church are responsible for funding the spread of the gospel and the meeting of needs in our community. That's one way that we imitate good.

Like Captain Winters advises Buck in *Band of Brothers* – we don't want to be in a position in which we are taking from our community. We want to be givers, not takers.

And look at the end of the letter. We see some other brothers mentioned.

### **3 John 15**

Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends, each by name.

Here John calls them the friends. This is probably a reference to those in the church in Ephesus who know Gaius, or perhaps some of the other missionaries or ministry workers who know him. John wants Gaius to know that his friends send their greetings. They're thinking about you, brother. You are beloved. You are missed.

And I want you to greet the friends, each by name. He is encouraging Gaius to be personal and intentional as he greets the friends for John. Use their names. I want them to know that I care about them.

Greetings are important. There is an awkward command repeated several times in the New Testament – greet one another with a holy kiss. Paul says it in a few places. Now, you may have noticed that we don't really do that around here in a literal way. I think that's ok, by the way. Kissing was a cultural expression in that time for a warm greeting. We're not disobeying Scripture if we aren't expressing our greetings in the same way today.

But lest we empty those words of all meaning, I think there is an application that God wants us to see and apply. Are we greeting one another? Is there a warmth, a welcoming hello, a handshake or fist bump or some other way to show – Hey, I'm glad to see you!

Years ago, many churches had a time of passing the peace, or welcoming those who are around you in the church service. Though we don't do that today as a part of our service, it would a good habit for you to intentionally get to know those who sit around you each week. We want to worship alongside those we've greeted as friends and family, not just as strangers who happen to be sitting near one another.

So greeting one another warmly, getting to know one another's names, welcoming each other – those are good things. And we should imitate good.

Secondly, we see an example of a faithful brother worth imitating in this man named Demetrius. Look at verse 12...

### **3<sup>rd</sup> John 12**

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

Notice that Demetrius has a good reputation. His testimony is solid – people know that he doesn't just talk the talk, he walks the walk. He lives in line with the truth. He's proven himself in his community. And we've seen it ourselves, John says, and you know you can trust us.

For the Christian, there is wisdom in working to cultivate a good reputation.

**Proverbs 22:1**

A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches,  
and favor is better than silver or gold.

**Proverbs 10:7**

The memory of the righteous is a blessing,  
but the name of the wicked will rot

Maureen Blackburn lived with righteousness and love. And so now, our memories of her are a blessing. She was a wonderful cook and baker. And she would occasionally drop off sweets for the church staff in our office. What a blessing to be remembered for your kindness and generosity! Maureen had a good name, a good reputation. That's like Demetrius did here.

So John says, don't be like Diotrefes and reject the brothers. Rather, receive them, show love and hospitality, knowing that this man has a good testimony and has lived it out.

So for us today, we should notice that there is value in your reputation. Let your conduct before outsiders be honorable. As you work in the community or in school, work to ensure that you're known as honest and trustworthy and diligent. That you're reliable and willing to serve. Be a gentleman. Welcome those who are partners in the truth of the gospel.

Third, we see what is perhaps the primary example of faithfulness in this letter, who is Gaius himself. We should be like Gaius. Yes, John is writing to Gaius, but as we read his letter today, we can see that Gaius is a role-model whom we should follow.

Notice what John writes about him,

### 3 John 5-8

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.

John draws attention to the fact that the behavior of Gaius is a faithful thing. What is this faithful thing? Gaius is making great efforts for these traveling ministry partners, even though they're strangers. He's been showing hospitality and welcoming them as family. And John says, "they've told me about your love before the church."

This is a good thing that you've been doing, Gaius. Your love has shown up in real actions. Your value of the truth of the gospel has been seen in the efforts you've made to welcome these brothers.

And further, John says, I want you to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. I want you to make sure that their needs have been met. That you've cared for them well. And do so in a way, worthy of God.

What does it mean to care for these traveling missionaries in a way worthy of God? In that day, when a person was sent out by someone, how you treated that person revealed how you felt about the person who sent them. If you cared for their messenger, it showed that you really cared for them. And so John is saying, "Make sure that you care for them as you would if it was Jesus Himself who came to you."

The clear and obvious application for us as a church today is to generously care for our missionaries and ministry partners. We want to make sure that we're loving them and meeting their needs as if we were caring for the Lord Jesus Himself.

If we think of it in these terms, it would be hard, probably impossible, to be too generous with our missionaries. We want to care well for them and make sure that we are welcoming them as family, and not as strangers.

So how do we show hospitality? Let me give you a list of ways that we can imitate good.

## **Personally**

1. Ask others into your life (your house, the park, errands, events, etc.)
2. Invite others into your 'spiritual home' (your group, your relationships, your network of friends) – don't be stingy like hiding a good restaurant
3. Eat with others; share meals together
4. Host a group

## **Corporately**

1. Greet one another - Warmly welcome each other (with a holy kiss)
2. Seek to use names
3. Help those in need – do the work to find out what the needs are and then seek to meet them (flip side: let others know your needs and invite them to help)
4. Serve on the welcome / greeter team – we want our church to help strangers become family

These things are hard. They're expensive. They cost time and money and inconvenience. They're messy. You will need to open yourself up, and you may get hurt.

How can we do those things?

John says in verse 11...

### **3 John 11**

Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God.

There is a connection between doing good and knowing God. Showing love and walking in the truth, welcoming and supporting and showing hospitality are all evidence that a person really has come to know God.

Why is that?

It's because those who have been welcomed by God, those who have received His hospitality, they have been transformed from strangers to family.

The church is not like the world because the church is full of people who have recognized that we don't deserve to be here. We weren't loved by God because we were so attractive and had so much to offer. We haven't been welcomed in because we earned our place by our efforts and moral goodness.

The world judges by appearance and performance. But God welcomes those who are unattractive and unlovely because of His great love and mercy. And that fundamentally changes how we relate to God and one another. It means that He gets the glory, not us. He gets first place, not us. He is the Lord, not us.

The apostle Paul writes in the letter to the church in Rome about how they should bear with one another and love each other, despite their differences and different opinions. And he says,

**Romans 15:7**

Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

We should welcome one another – show hospitality – extend love and grace and turn strangers into family. Why? Because Christ has done that for you. When your sin had cut you off from God and each other, while you were an exile from the presence of God because of your rebellion against Him, God loved you anyway. And in sending His Son Jesus to die for your sins, He has invited you in. When you come to Jesus in faith, the gospel changes us.

The gospel transforms us from being strangers to being family. Paul writes in

**Ephesians 2:19**

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

We are now members of God's family. We have been welcomed in. And that's how we ought to welcome one another.

So brothers and sisters, fellow family members. This is a good word for us individually and as a church. How are we doing in this area of hospitality?

Are we being gentlemen / gentlewomen? Are we helping others feel and know the love that God has shown to us? Is our profession of the truth showing up in real ways in our lives? Are we imitating good?

Or are we imitating evil? Prone to put ourselves first and reject authorities over us? Are we participating in wicked nonsense and divisive talk, working against the unity of the church? Have we let pride hinder our hospitality?

Let us be a church who greets one another warmly, treats the stranger as family, and loves one another in the truth.

Let us welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

Let's pray...

### **Final Applications**

As the band comes, let me ask you some final questions...

Are you imitating evil?

Are you imitating good?

What step would the Lord have you take in response to His Word today?