

Do Not Imitate Evil, but Good

A Sermon on 3 John

by

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I. INTRODUCTION

II. John Loves Gaius in the Truth (V. 1)

1. This verse is fairly straightforward so I'm not going to spend a ton of time here, but what I want to draw your attention to is the idea of John's love for Gaius.
 - a. It's a positional love bound up in the fact that they share this common bond of biblical truth that defines their relationship and binds them together as brothers in Christ.
 - b. It's much like that affection you develop when you get to talking with a stranger and one thing leads to another, and very quickly you find out that they are a solid Christian.

III. Gaius's Well-Being and Character (V. 2-8)

1. He notes that his soul is already prospering, so John is conveying a general sense of hope that in all things, both body and soul, he prospers. The idea expressed is that John prays that whatever Gaius puts his hands to, the Lord will bless.
 - a. He speaks specifically with reference to Gaius's faithfulness to the truth and love for the brethren.
2. Gaius is not a character who John needs to rebuke for anything – in fact, his character is vouched for by others, and John simply recognizes this here and gives praise where it is due.
 - a. He's consistent in his theology and his practice.
 - b. He's living a life defined by sound doctrine.

3. What is of special significance here in verse 4 is that John states he has no greater joy than to hear that his children are walking in the truth.
 - a. We have a wonderful metaphor right from the text that likens this to a father's affection for his children.
 - b. The idea very simply being that John is well-pleased with Gaius's conduct and offers his praise to the man.
 - c. Think of this with respect to your own elders here.
 - d. This joy they would have is also the mark of a faithful shepherd.

4. Everything Gaius is doing for the brethren, he is doing faithfully (V. 5).
 - a. This is precisely what John has in mind as he is praying toward Gaius's success and good health – that he may continue in this good work.
 - b. Notice that John says this is especially true of Gaius when it comes to supporting people he's never met before.
 - i. He took care of them. He took them in. He gave food and lodging and whatever they needed.
 - ii. But Gaius did more than this. Gaius would have served as one who guaranteed these men to the Christian community.
 - c. Hospitality was not simply be a means of welcoming people into his home. It served to vouch for and established the character of these strangers before the entire Christian community.
 - i. If you had a good reputation, when you brought in a stranger, simply by showing them hospitality, you vouched for them. In this context, each person at the church is the watchman at the door.
 - ii. You are responsible for guarding your brothers and sisters from those who wish to do them harm, yet on the flip side of that, basic Christian love and faithfulness dictates that you will show genuine care for your brother and sister.

5. In verse 6, John is exhorting Gaius to continue in this work and he gives him a simple reason why: they went out for the sake of the name, receiving nothing from the Gentiles.
 - a. What does “send them on their way in a manner worthy of God” mean?
 - i. What he means by that is for Gaius to continue to provide for them even after they leave.
 - ii. The phrase “worthy of God” is used several times in Scripture, most often referring to how you and I must live in a manner worthy of our calling.
 1. Very simply, John is saying that Gaius ought to provide them in whatever matter they may need because they are genuine workers for the gospel, and they are God’s children called for this purpose.
 2. Why? Verse 7: for they went for the sake of the Name, meaning Jesus, receiving nothing from the Gentiles.
6. First thing to observe here is simply that they are those who have gone out for the sake of preaching the gospel.
 - a. Simply by virtue of their calling and faithfulness to that calling, they are to earn the support of a man like Gaius.
 - b. Look at why though: they are receiving nothing from the Gentiles; notice the present tense.
 - i. It’s ongoing. There’s no reference to a point where they *will* receive anything from the Gentiles, and frankly, why would they?
 - ii. Think about this in relation to you. In this church, there’s virtually an unending supply of missionary work we can support.
 - iii. If you aren’t giving to these things – who else is going to do that work?
7. Because an unbelieving world won’t bother to pour resources into men who preach the gospel, people like us ought to support them (V. 8).

- a. Why? In order that we may be fellow workers with the truth, or probably better translated, in the truth.
- b. This is right at the heart of why we give to those who have gone out for the sake of the gospel. We share in their labor.
 - i. When he uses the words “so we may be” the verb actually gives more of the idea of being made into that thing.
 - ii. It’s contingent – and here it’s contingent upon supporting these men.
 - iii. By giving to these things, God has made you a co-laborer in a work that might actually bring people to grips with their sin before a holy God.
 - iv. John Piper has put it so masterfully in saying that there are three types of people: there are goers, senders, and the disobedient. That’s it. You don’t fall into another category.

IV. Diotrophes Loves to be First Among the Brethren (V. 9-10)

- 1. Diotrophes is the guy whose sole focus is himself.
 - a. He considers himself to be wiser than the ones Christ was pleased to build the foundation of the church upon, so much so that he rejects a previous writing of the apostle out of hand.
 - i. What John wrote to the church is most likely the same thing he has been telling Gaius: support these workers who have gone out for the sake of the Name.
 - ii. But Diotrophes, who just knows better than John, does not accept the authority of the apostle.
 - iii. Think of that in light of the practice of hospitality. Diotrophes, by virtue of his rejection of the apostle’s authority, is saying to the covenant community he is not to be trusted.
- 2. Diotrophes somehow managed to get himself into a position of authority and not only rejects the apostles, but commits slander against them.

- a. The words used here to describe the wicked words would be better translated as “wicked nonsense”, meaning that what comes out of his mouth is not only completely unfounded and evil – but literally makes no sense.
- b. Secondly, he is not content to stop here. Diotrophes refuses to welcome them brother laboring for the gospel.
 - i. Remember – this is much more severe in this time period.
 - ii. These men wouldn’t have another place to go.
 - iii. John would indict this as a characteristic of one whose father is Satan.
- c. Diotrophes actually prevents those who want to support missionaries and then casts them out of the church if they are found to be disobedient to his own desires.
 - i. Diotrophes is so successful in preventing people that he’s excommunicating those who have the simple *intent* to do this.
 - ii. Notice how far his ambition to be seen as the top guy in the church drove him. He steamrolled his way to the top, and even here he was not content.
 - iii. But John’s coming, and he is not pleased with Diotrophes, and he’s going to put an end to it.

V. Beloved, Do Not Imitate Evil, but Good (V. 11)

1. This is where John has been driving his letter the whole time. He’s been setting up these two characters with an eye toward this command.
 - a. Now, this has a specific reference; John isn’t appealing to a vague notion of evil and good.
 - b. John says to Gaius here, like you would your own child when they’re taking stock in the words of a fool, “Don’t be like him.”
 - i. Why? Because the one doing good is from God, literally meaning they are genuine children of God.
2. This is precisely where I look to you and reiterate the words of the apostle: Beloved, do not imitate evil, but good.

- a. Some of you have people you look up to that you ought to flee from. Their lives aren't marked out by faithfulness to the gospel, or a love of the brethren – but instead, they seek to bite and devour anyone in their path.
- b. In your sphere of leadership, and we all have some capacity wherein we lead, are you exercising that authority in a godly manner? Or, are you steamrolling people to get your way?
- c. Here's where you all have to take a look around you and see who is worthy of being imitated.
 - i. For you young people, this is very, very important. Look at who you place stock into. Are they really worthy of your attention?
 - ii. Do you even know what characteristics are worthy of imitating when it comes to godliness?

VI. John Vouches for Demetrius (V. 12)

- 1. Demetrius is likely the letter-bearer, who is bringing the epistle to Gaius, but he also may very well be one of these men whom John has sent out for the sake of the Name.
 - a. Notice again that Demetrius has a good testimony from everyone, and even the truth itself testifies of him.
 - i. That's an interesting little phrase, but what he likely means by that is simply that the nature of truth itself verifies men.
 - ii. Truth is the standard by which Demetrius is measured against and aligned to.
 - b. The apostles also bear witness to the character of Demetrius – and Gaius is more than aware of their valid testimony.
 - i. Think about this with respect to everything I've said thus far in regard to hospitality.
 - ii. Hospitality is the vehicle that Demetrius will be taken care of and sent on his way in a manner that meets his needs. Why? Because he is a faithful brother in Christ. It truthfully is as simple as that.

VI. John's Final Words in Closing (V. 13-14)

1. In the final words of the epistle, John simply closes in saying that he will save the remainder of what he wishes to say to Gaius until he sees him face to face.
2. John gives a traditional blessing at the end of his letter.
 - a. Just like he made sure to say he prays for Gaius's well-being in verse 2, he does the same here at the end.
 - b. This is similar to the idea of Shalom, as it bears a specific reference to God, especially with reference to salvation in Christ.
3. What I don't want you to lose sight of is that the content of these letters was knowledge to those in these circles.
 - a. The people John is with as he writes this letter are aware of the situation with Diotrophes.
 - b. Be sure to note, that just as Gaius's reputation exceeded him, so too did the reputation of Diotrophes.

VII. CONCLUSION

Small Group Questions

1. Who do you find you tend to imitate and why? Are they worthy of your imitation?
2. If we are honest, there are areas in our lives we may be on a trajectory like Gaius, and others, like Diotrophes. What prevents you from changing this and earnestly putting forth greater effort to love the brethren?
3. Have you ever personally encountered a Diotrophes? Don't use this as a time to bash them, but instead focus on the how it has brought you to choose the opposite path.