

# **The Third Epistle Of John**



**Sermon Outlines**

**MARK A. COPELAND**

# The Third Epistle Of John

## Table Of Contents

<b>The Three Men Of Third John (1-14)</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Spiritual And Material Prosperity (2-4)</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Supporting Ministers Of The Gospel (5-8)</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>The Spirit Of Diotrephes (9-10)</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Imitating The Good (11-12)</b>	<b>17</b>

This material is from **ExecutableOutlines.com**, a web site containing sermon outlines and Bible studies by Mark A. Copeland. Visit the web site to browse or download additional material for church or personal use.

The outlines were developed in the course of my ministry as a preacher of the gospel. Feel free to use them as they are, or adapt them to suit your own personal style. To God be the glory!

**Executable Outlines, Copyright © Mark A. Copeland, 2002**  
**MarkCopeland@aol.com**

# The Three Men Of Third John

## 3 John 1-13

### INTRODUCTION

1. It is not unusual for people to wonder...
  - a. What was the early church like?
  - b. We know a lot about its early leaders, such as apostles Paul and Peter; but what about the average Christians themselves?
  - c. Were they more spiritual than Christians today? Did they experience the kind of problems seen so often in churches today?
2. Several books of the New Testament reflect the life of the early church, and this is especially true of the Third Epistle of John...
  - a. It is a **private letter**, between the apostle John and a Christian named Gaius
  - b. It provides **portraits of three different men**, and in so doing gives us a glimpse of 1st century life in a local church
3. When one examines the portraits found in this letter, we learn that there is not much difference between people back then, and in the church today
4. Therefore this epistle is very relevant, though we may live 1900 years later. In this lesson, we shall...
  - a. Consider some background material concerning the epistle
  - b. Notice the difference between the three men described in the letter
  - c. Summarize with some lessons that can be gleaned from this book

[Let's begin with some...]

### I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

#### **A. THE AUTHOR - "THE ELDER"...**

1. As with 2 John, the "elder" is believed by most conservative scholars to be the apostle John
2. The **internal** evidence...
  - a. The three epistles of John utilize much the same language and ideas
  - b. All bear similarity to concepts and language to the Gospel of John
  - c. The term "elder" would be a fitting description of John as the author, writing in his old age
3. The **external** evidence is slight, but Dionysius of Alexandria, living in the third century A.D., credits John with being the author

#### **B. RECIPIENT - "THE BELOVED GAIUS"...**

1. Gaius was a common Roman name, and appears five times in the New Testament - **Ac 19:29; 20:4; Ro 16:23; 1 Co 1:14; 3 Jn 1**

2. Whether he is one of those mentioned by Luke or Paul cannot be determined
3. He is evidently a dear friend of John, and known for his hospitality (more below)

### C. PLACE AND DATE OF WRITING...

1. **Ephesus** is usually suggested as the location from which John wrote this epistle, as he was known to live there in the later years of his life
2. Estimation of the date of writing varies widely, some placing it before the destruction of Jerusalem (70 A.D.), most however placing it around **90-95 A.D.**

### D. PURPOSE OF THE EPISTLE...

1. To confirm that Gaius did right in supporting those teachers who came his way, encouraging him to continue this hospitality - **3 Jn 5-8**
2. To express his condemnation of Diotrephes for rejecting John and others whom he should have received - **3 Jn 9-10**
3. To encourage Gaius to imitate what is good, commending Demetrius as a good example - **3 Jn 11-12**

### E. BRIEF OUTLINE...

1. Greetings, with an expression of great joy (**1-4**)
2. The confirmation of Gaius (**5-8**)
3. The condemnation of Diotrephes (**9-10**)
4. The commendation of Demetrius (**11-12**)
4. Concluding remarks (**13-14**)

### F. A COMPARISON BETWEEN SECOND AND THIRD JOHN...

1. Both letters focus on the words “love” and “truth” - cf. **2 Jn 1; 3 Jn 1**
2. But notice this difference:
  - a. In 2nd John, **love is enjoined, but there is a warning** against tolerating those who denied the truth
  - b. In 3rd John, **love is praised, and there is commendation** for supporting those who proclaimed the truth
3. Another comparison:
  - a. 2nd John **condemns the departure from the truth** which is known as “**heresy**”
  - b. 3rd John **condemns the lack of love among Christians** which results in “**schism**”-- (These comparisons are from Charles R. Erdman’s commentary)

[With this brief background to the epistle, let’s take a closer look at...]

## II. THE THREE MEN OF THIRD JOHN

### A. GAIUS -- A MAN WHOM JOHN WOULD HAVE PROSPER... (1-8)

1. A dear friend of John, whom he prayed would prosper physically as well as he did spiritually - **3 Jn 1-2**
2. John so loved and prayed for Gaius, because he was a man who...
  - a. Had a good reputation - **3 Jn 3a**
  - b. Walked in the truth - **3 Jn 3b**

- c. Gave John great joy when hearing of his faithfulness - **3 Jn 4**
- d. Was hospitable toward all - **3 Jn 5-6a**
- e. Was encouraged to continue supporting gospel preachers - **3 Jn 6b-8**

#### **B. DIOTREPHESES -- A MAN WHO WOULD BE PREEMINENT... (9-11)**

1. A description of Diotrephes' character...
  - a. Self-promoter -- he strove to be first - **3 Jn 9a**
  - b. Insubordinate -- he would not receive the [authority of] apostles - **3 Jn 9b**
  - c. Slandering -- He spoke nonsense, and slandered - **3 Jn 10a**
  - d. Vindictive -- He would not receive certain brethren, and cast out other brethren - **3 Jn 10b**
2. Diotrephes' character serves as a warning: "he who does evil has not seen God" - **3 Jn 11b**

#### **C. DEMETRIUS -- A MAN WHO WOULD BE A PATTERN... (11-12)**

1. John encourages Gaius to imitate what is good, for he who does good is of God - **3 Jn 11**
2. Demetrius appears to be offered as a pattern for Gaius, for Demetrius had a good report... - **3 Jn 12**
  - a. From all the brethren
  - b. From the truth itself ("Demetrius lived according to the mandates of God's Word so that his life showed clear evidence of the truth" - **Kistemaker**)
  - c. From John and the apostles

[Thus we have these pen portraits of three men preserved in this letter, giving us some insight into the life of the early church. There were some good men (Gaius, Demetrius), but sadly there some bad as well (Diotrephes). Not much different today, is it? That being the case, then perhaps we should remember these...]

### **III. LESSONS FROM THIRD JOHN**

#### **A. CHRISTIANS ARE NOT ALWAYS WHAT THEY SHOULD BE...**

1. We may have to serve in the face of opposition from other brethren
2. Will we allow this to effect our service?
3. Will we allow this to effect our salvation?

#### **B. CHRISTIANS OFTEN IMITATE OTHER CHRISTIANS...**

1. John says to imitate what is good for two reasons:
  - a. Those who do good are of God
  - b. Those who do evil do not know God
2. What example are we setting in the local church? Who are we imitating?
3. Gaius had the example of Diotrephes and Demetrius. Who do you suppose he would seek to imitate?

#### **C. CHRISTIANS OFTEN ALLOW THE "SPIRIT OF DIOTREPHESES" TO REIGN...**

1. Diotrephes was successful because some of the members...
  - a. Allowed Diotrephes to dominate

- b. Would not take a stand for the truth
- c. Would not support those who took a stand for the truth
- 2. Diotrephes was successful because there was a certain climate of complacency and cowardice within the local church
- 3. **Note:** That Diotrephes was able to get away with his domination strongly suggests to me that Gaius and Diotrephes were not members of the same congregation, but in different congregations

## CONCLUSION

- 1. We will consider some more truths that can be gleaned from this epistle in the next couple of lessons
- 2. But I hope that this introduction to this epistle and a brief look at **“The Three Men Of Third John”** will stimulate our thinking..
  - a. What kind of example are we setting?
  - b. If John had written a letter in which your name was mentioned, what would he have said about you?
    - 1) Would he have prayed for your prosperity?
    - 2) Would he have condemned your desire for prominence?
    - 3) Or would he have set you up as a pattern for others to follow?
  - c. If we will but “walk in the truth” like Gaius, we will have a good “testimony” from all like Demetrius!

**Note:** A special thanks to **Chris Reeves** (Chreeves@aol.com) and his Expandable Outlines #37 (Three Men Of Third John), from which I borrowed heavily in preparing this outline.

# Spiritual And Material Prosperity

## 3 John 2-4

### INTRODUCTION

1. We saw in our previous study that Third John is an epistle addressed to Gaius, a man whom John would have prosper:

*“Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers” - 3 Jn 2*

2. In this verse, John alludes to two kinds of prosperity:
  - a. There is **spiritual prosperity** (“just as your soul prospers”)
  - b. And there is **material prosperity** (“that you may prosper in all things and be in health”)
3. The manner in which John mentions and compares these two kinds of prosperity is interesting, and raises several questions worth considering:
  - a. What are the signs of spiritual prosperity?
  - b. What is the propriety of praying for material prosperity?
  - c. Would we want John to pray such a prayer for us?

[These questions we shall attempt to answer in this lesson. Beginning with the first question, we need go no further than the context of Third John...]

### I. THE SIGNS OF SPIRITUAL PROSPERITY

#### **A. THE TRUTH IS ABIDING IN YOU...**

1. John rejoiced greatly when he heard from others of how the “truth” was in Gaius - **3 Jn 3a**
2. That the “truth” was in Gaius was one indication that his soul was prosperous
3. What does it mean to have the “truth” in you? Two possibilities:
  - a. It could refer to the abiding of Jesus in one’s soul, as He is the truth - cf. **Jn 14:6**
  - b. It could refer to the incorporation into our very heart and soul the teachings and principles of the gospel of Jesus-- It pretty much means the same thing, for the latter brings about the former - cf. **Jn 14:21-23; 1 Jn 3:24**
4. A prosperous soul, then, is one in which...
  - a. One’s heart and mind has opened itself up to receive all that Jesus taught
  - b. One is feeding daily upon the Word of God, whereby spiritual growth is possible - **1 Pe 2:2**

#### **B. YOU ARE WALKING IN THE TRUTH...**

1. John could also joyfully write of Gaius “walking in the truth” - **3 Jn 3b-4**
2. In a sense, there is a mixing of metaphors here
  - a. The truth abides in Gaius

- b. Gaius walks in the truth
- Perhaps that simply illustrates the limitation of human language to describe spiritual realities
3. The point to be made, however, is this: for there to be prosperity, there must be progress
  - a. It is not enough to simply sit and say “I have the truth in my soul”
  - b. One must be acting upon it, living according to it, as illustrated by Jesus in His sermon on the mount - cf. **Mt 7:24-27**
  - c. True blessedness comes in being a “doer” and not just a “hearer” - **Ja 1:22-25; Jn 13:17**

[Spiritual prosperity occurs as one feeds upon the truth of God found only in His Son Jesus Christ, and lives his or her life in harmony with that truth. So Gaius prospered in his soul, and so can we! Gaius’ need was not spiritual prosperity, it evidently was material prosperity. This brings up the question of...]

## **II. THE PROPRIETY OF PRAYING FOR MATERIAL PROSPERITY**

### **A. JOHN’S PRAYER FOR GAIUS...**

1. John thought it proper to pray for things other than spiritual needs - **3 Jn 2**
  - a. “that you may prosper in all good things”
  - b. “and be in good health”
2. Whether it be family, business, or personal health, it is proper to pray that God might bless us in these areas

### **B. JOHN WAS FOLLOWING THE EXAMPLE SET BY OTHERS...**

1. The example of the Psalmist - cf. **Ps 144:12-15**
2. The example of our Lord - **Mt 6:11** (“Give us this day our daily bread”)

### **C. THE CHALLENGE IS KEEPING IT IN PROPER PERSPECTIVE...**

1. If our desire for material prosperity is for personal gain, then we should not expect God to answer favorably - cf. **Ja 4:2-4**
2. But there can be altruistic reasons for praying for material prosperity:
  - a. We can pray for health, that one might live longer to serve the Lord in this life
  - b. We can pray for success in business, that we might have the means to help others
  - c. We can pray for peace, that we might further the spread of the gospel
3. Of course, it is much easier to pray with prosper perspective when it is others we are praying for, and not ourselves (as is the case in our text!)

[That brings us to a few final observations I would like to make concerning...]

## **III. MATERIAL PROSPERITY IN RELATION TO SPIRITUAL PROSPERITY**

### **A. “JUST AS YOUR SOUL PROSPERS...”**

1. John prays that Gaius prosper materially just as he does spiritually
2. In view of Gaius’ spiritual prosperity (the truth abides in him, he walks in the truth), this prayer if answered would be a blessing to Gaius
3. Would we want God to answer such a prayer in our behalf? To the degree that our souls



prosper...

- a. Would we want Him to bless our physical bodies?
- b. Would we want Him to bless our families, our homes, our jobs, our nation?
4. I dare say that in light of the spiritual condition of some Christians, such a prayer answered in their behalf would be a curse, not a blessing!

**B. MATERIAL PROSPERITY IS GOOD, BUT SPIRITUAL PROSPERITY IS ETERNAL...**

1. As Paul writes, godliness has “promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come”  
- **1 Ti 4:7-8; 6:6-7**
2. We can’t take material prosperity with us, and it takes spiritual prosperity on our part (i.e., wisdom from God) to properly use the material blessings we have - **1 Ti 6:8-10,17-19**

**CONCLUSION**

1. So while we may certainly pray for our material prosperity, may we never lose sight of the fact that our greatest need is spiritual prosperity which lasts forever
2. Concentrate your efforts on prospering spiritually, and may the Lord in His Divine wisdom and grace bless you in all other ways accordingly!

Are you walking in the truth? Is the truth abiding in you? Heed the call of the gospel today if you have not already... - cf. **Mk 16:15-16; Ac 2:36-38**

# Supporting Ministers Of The Gospel

## 3 John 5-8

### INTRODUCTION

1. In writing to Gaius, John has referred to his joy of hearing that Gaius is “walking in the truth” - **3 Jn 3-4**
2. An area of Gaius’ life in which this was especially true was in showing hospitality to traveling ministers - **3 Jn 5-8**
3. In **Second John**, we saw the “danger” of receiving and supporting those teachers who do not proclaim the doctrine of Christ - cf. **2 Jn 9-11**
4. But here in **Third John**, we learn of the “good” that can be done when we receive and support those involved in the spreading of the gospel
5. In this study, we shall consider...
  - a. The scriptural authority for supporting ministers of the gospel
  - b. The reasons given by John for why we should be willing to do so

[Going outside of our text to other portions of Scripture, consider what we learn about...]

### I. THE SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY FOR SUPPORTING MINISTERS

#### **A. AS TAUGHT BY JESUS...**

1. Jesus Himself was dependent upon others for support as He went about preaching - **Lk 8:1-3**
2. In sending out the twelve disciples, He taught that “a worker is worthy of his food” - cf. **Mt 10:5-10**
3. In sending out the seventy, He said “the laborer is worthy of his wages” - cf. **Lk 10:1-8**

#### **B. AS TAUGHT BY PAUL...**

1. Though for personal reasons he generally chose not to accept it, Paul defended the right of supporting ministers - **1 Co 9:3-14**
  - a. Just as soldiers are not expected to support themselves - **1 Co 9:7a**
  - b. Just as farmers and shepherds enjoy the fruits of their labors - **1 Co 9:b**
  - c. Just as the Law illustrated with the command not to muzzle the ox that treads out the grain - **1 Co 9:8-10**
  - d. From the principle of reasonableness: if one sows spiritual things, is it a great matter to reap material things? - **1 Co 9:11**
  - e. From the example of those serving in the temple who could partake of the offerings on the altar - **1 Co 9:13**
  - f. Even the Lord commanded: “Those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel”

(perhaps a reference to **Mt 10:10** and **Lk 10:7**) - **1 Co 9:14**

- g. **Note:** Paul chose not to receive such support under normal circumstances for the following reasons...
- 1) It was one of the few areas in which he could boast - **1 Co 9:15**
  - 2) He could not boast in preaching the gospel, for he had been divinely commissioned - **1 Co 9:16-17**
    - a) He must do it as a steward of Christ
    - b) He had no choice if he were to be saved
    - c) Such is not the case of those who preach today; unless the Lord appeared to us and commanded us to preach (as He did with Paul), it is something we do willingly and thereby have a reason to boast
  - 3) But, that Paul might have a reason to boast, a reward, he freely gave up his right (authority) to receive support in most cases - **1 Co 9:18** (however cf. **2 Co 11:7-9; Ph 4:10-16**)
2. Another passage by Paul suggesting the scripturalness of supporting teachers - **Ga 6:6**

[With the approval of Jesus and His apostle Paul, there should be no question about the scripturalness of supporting ministers of the gospel. As we return to our text (**3 Jn 5-8**), we find that John gives us six reasons that ought to motivate us to do so...]

## **II. SCRIPTURAL MOTIVATION FOR SUPPORTING MINISTERS**

### **A. IT IS A TESTIMONY TO OUR FAITHFULNESS...**

1. John wrote of Gaius: “Beloved, you do faithfully...” - **3 Jn 5**
2. When we show hospitality to brethren (and ministers), it demonstrates our faithfulness to the teachings of Christ and His apostles

### **B. IT IS A TESTIMONY TO OUR LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER...**

1. John said of those who had received Gaius’ hospitality that they “...had borne witness of your love...” - **3 Jn 6a**
2. We demonstrate that we are keeping that “new” commandment first given to us by the Lord Himself - cf. **Jn 13:34-35**
3. In light of the value of such love (“by this all will know...”), we ought to be grateful for opportunities to bear witness of our love for the brethren

### **C. IT HONORS GOD...**

1. John makes reference to sending such ministers on their journey “in a manner worthy of God” - **3 Jn 6**
2. “worthy of God” means “as befits God”
3. Thus the way in which we support ministers of God can be a reflection upon God Himself
  - a. If we do not consider His faithful ministers worthy of support, what do we think of God?
  - b. If we honor and support those servants who faithfully proclaim His Word, it is because we honor and respect the One they serve!

### **D. IT IS A TESTIMONY TO THE LOST...**

1. The ones Gaius was encouraged to support were those who were “taking nothing from the Gentiles” - **3 Jn 7**
  - a. This likely means they would not solicit support from the unsaved
  - b. Depending instead upon their brethren
2. When ministers of the gospel solicit help from those lost souls they are trying to save, it sends a bad message
  - a. Perhaps the ministers are in it just for the money...
  - b. If what they taught was worth anything, why don't their own followers support it?
3. When the gospel is offered free of cost, being supported wholeheartedly by those who know it best, it can be a powerful testimony of the value **we** place on it!

#### **E. IT OBEYS GOD...**

1. John, by inspiration of the Spirit of God, tells us “We therefore ought to receive such” - **3 Jn 8a**
2. Thus, supporting ministers of the gospel is not only an opportunity, but an obligation!
  - a. Exhorted by Paul in **Ga 6:6**
  - b. Exchange of material things for spiritual things considered reasonable by Paul in **1 Co 9:11**; cf. also **Ro 15:26-27**

#### **F. IT MAKES ONE A FELLOW WORKER FOR THE TRUTH...**

1. As John concludes in **verse 8**: “that we may become fellow workers for the truth”
2. When we support a teacher, we become coworkers in what they do
  - a. If we support teachers of error, we share in their evil deeds - **2 Jn 10-11**
  - b. But when we support teachers of the gospel, we have fellowship in their work - **Ph 1: 3-5**; cf. **4:15-16**
3. As coworkers, we will one day enjoy the same rewards - cf. **Mt 10:40-42**

### **CONCLUSION**

1. So we not only have scriptural authority for supporting ministers of the gospel, but many reasons to do so!
2. The rapid spread of the gospel and growth of the early church was facilitated by such people as Gaius, along with...
  - a. Aquila and Priscilla, who allowed churches to meet in their homes - **Ro 15:3-5a**; **1 Co 16:19**
  - b. Philemon, who let the church meet in his house, and could be called upon without hesitation to provide lodging for the apostle Paul - **Phile 1-2,22**
3. Today, as walls tumble down that once stood preventing the free course of the gospel, there is still a need to support those who preach the gospel

May the spirit and liberality of Gaius fill the hearts of those Christians and churches who would be fellow workers for the truth!

# The Spirit Of Diotrophes

## 3 John 9-10

### INTRODUCTION

1. In our study of Third John, we have noticed the commendable spirit found in Gaius...
  - a. The truth was in him - **3 Jn 3**
  - b. He walked in the truth - **3 Jn 3-4**
  - c. He demonstrated love and hospitality towards the brethren and for strangers - **3 Jn 5-6**
2. Unfortunately, another man mentioned in this letter did not possess the spirit of Gaius...
  - a. His name was **Diotrophes**
  - b. And John felt it necessary to relate what Diotrophes had done, and what he (John) would have to do in response - **3 Jn 9-10**
3. While there are many people today who possess the spirit of Gaius, and bless the Lord's church accordingly, it is not uncommon for "**The Spirit Of Diotrophes**"...
  - a. To be found in some churches
  - b. To tear apart the love and unity that ought to prevail in every congregation
4. That we might be on guard against "**The Spirit Of Diotrophes**", in this lesson we shall...
  - a. Identify exactly what characterized the spirit of Diotrophes
  - b. Consider how it was so contrary to the principles taught by our Lord and His apostles

[We begin, then, by noticing that "**The Spirit Of Diotrophes**" was one of...]

### I. DESIRING PREEMINENCE (9a)

#### **A. IN THE CASE OF DIOTROPHES...**

1. John wrote that he "loves to have the preeminence"
2. The word "preeminence" in the Greek is **philoproteuo** {fil-op-rote-yoo'-o}
  - a. It means to be fond of being first
  - b. I.e., ambitious of distinction; love to have the preeminence
3. It was his love of being first (a sin in itself) that led to other sins that he committed
4. Unfortunately, Diotrophes failed to consider that **sin** is spelled with a capital "**T**"

#### **B. THE TEACHING OF THE SCRIPTURES...**

1. When the mother of James and John expressed a desire for her sons to be given preeminence, Jesus taught the principle of humility and service - **Mt 20:20-28**
2. He did so again as he spoke out against the scribes and Pharisees - **Mt 23:6-12**
3. Paul taught that in matters of honor we should give preference to one another - **Ro 12:10**
4. Indeed, we must not have the sort of selfish ambition found in Diotrophes, but the humble servitude found in the mind of Christ - cf. **Ph 2:2-8**
5. Whereas sin is spelled with a capital "T", the **cross** is an "**T**" that has been crossed out!

### C. HOW ABOUT TODAY...?

1. We live in the “me generation” where the spirit of Diotrephes reigns supreme
2. It should not surprise us, when the church is so often influenced by the world, to hear people say:
  - a. “But I want...”
  - b. “But I think...”
3. But there is no room in the kingdom for the “me first” mentality; where it exists, more sins and problems are bound to follow

[We see that to be the case as we notice that “**The Spirit Of Diotrephes**” was also one of...]

## II. REJECTING APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY (9b)

### A. IN THE CASE OF DIOTREPHESES...

1. John writes simply: “[he] does not receive us”
2. It may seem incredible that one would refuse to accept and submit to...
  - a. The disciple whom Jesus loved!
  - b. An apostle of our Lord Jesus Christ!
3. But because of his love to be first, there was no room in Diotrephes’ heart for someone over him in matters of authority

### B. THE TEACHING OF THE SCRIPTURES...

1. It is important that we appreciate the proper chain of authority in the kingdom...
  - a. As Creator, God inherently has all authority
  - b. However, the Father has delegated all authority to His Son - **Mt 28:18; Ep 1:20-22**
  - c. Jesus in turn has delegated authority to His apostles - **Jn 13:20**
    - 1) He sent the Holy Spirit to assist them, and guide them into all the truth - **Jn 14:26; 16:12-13**
    - 2) Thus they could speak and write with the authority of God behind them - cf. **1 Co 14:37; 1 Th 2:13**
2. This is why we find that the early church “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine...” - **Ac 2:42**

### C. HOW ABOUT TODAY...?

1. The spirit of Diotrephes appears to reign unchecked in those churches that reject...
  - a. The authority of the apostles in preference for the authority of their own councils, synods, or conferences
  - b. The clear teachings of the apostles concerning such issues as homosexuality, women preachers, etc.
  - c. Apostolic precedent (whether by command or example) to authorize any church practice that suits their fancy
2. And the spirit of Diotrephes reigns supreme in the lives of those professing Christians who reject the apostles’ call for holy and sanctified living...
  - a. So they can choose their own sexual preference and lifestyle
  - b. So they can put their own personal interests first, before the kingdom of God

[Yes, living in a narcissistic society such as ours, it is not uncommon to find the spirit of Diotrephes present in so many peoples' lives. When it is found in the lives of Christians, things can get ugly rather quickly. As we see in our text, "**The Spirit Of Diotrephes**" can manifest itself in Christians by...]

### **III. SPEAKING EVIL OF BRETHREN (10a)**

#### **A. IN THE CASE OF DIOTREPHESES...**

1. John relates that Diotrephes was guilty of "prating against us with malicious words"
2. The word "prating" in the Greek is **phluareo** {floo-ar-eh'-o}...
  - a. It means to be a babbler or trifler
  - b. By implication it means to berate idly or mischievously
3. The word "malicious" is **poneros** {pon-ay-ros'} and means "hurtful, evil"
4. Diotrephes gave little concern, then, about how he spoke with evil and hurtful words concerning his brethren

#### **B. THE TEACHING OF THE SCRIPTURES...**

1. We will be judged for the idle words that we use - **Mt 12:36-37**
2. We are commanded not to speak evil of one another - **Ja 4:11-12**
  - a. To do so is to speak evil of the law of God!
  - b. To do so is to set ourselves up as judges
3. While it may be necessary at times to "rebuke" our brethren (cf. **2 Ti 4:2**)...
  - a. We are given the proper tools (i.e., the Scriptures themselves) - **2 Ti 3:16**
  - b. We are instructed how to approach those in error - **2 Ti 2:24-26; Ga 6:1**

#### **C. HOW ABOUT TODAY...?**

1. Does not the spirit of Diotrephes manifest itself when Christians engage in malicious gossip?
2. Does not the spirit of Diotrephes reign when overzealous and self-appointed "guardians of the faith" lambaste their brethren with whom they differ?
3. Indeed, it is often the desire for preeminence that prompts Christians to reject apostolic teachings concerning brotherly relations and to engage in malicious prating

[The use of malicious words are not the only weapons used by those possessed by the spirit of Diotrephes, however. If in their love for preeminence they have actually gained positions of influence, it is not unusual to see the spirit of Diotrephes manifested in...]

### **IV. ABUSING CHURCH DISCIPLINE (10b)**

#### **A. IN THE CASE OF DIOTREPHESES...**

1. Not content with using prating with malicious words, Diotrephes is described as one who...
  - a. "does not receive the brethren"
  - b. "forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church"
2. In two ways, then, he was abusing church discipline...
  - a. Refusing to associate with those worthy of association
  - b. Using it as a weapon to manipulate others to do what he wanted

## **B. THE TEACHING OF THE SCRIPTURES...**

1. Jesus taught there might be times when church discipline is necessary - **Mt 18:15-17**
2. Paul described such a time on two occasions, and gave instructions for carrying it out
  - a. When a man was living with his father's wife - **1 Co 5:1-13**
  - b. When Christians refused to work - **2 Th 3:6-15**
3. So there are times when we must "put away from yourselves that wicked person"
4. But there is also the possibility of abusing this method of church discipline, as in the case of Diotrephes

## **C. HOW ABOUT TODAY...?**

1. That church discipline could be abused back then, means that it can be abused today
2. This is not to be an excuse to never exercise church discipline, but to do so carefully
3. Just because another church has carried it out against someone does not mean they did so properly...
  - a. It may have been prompted as part of a power play by a "Diotrephes"
  - b. The ones being withdrawn from may be innocent  
...thus the need to exercise discretion and to know the facts before accepting the disciplinary action of another church

## **CONCLUSION**

1. "**The Spirit Of Diotrephes**" can be summarized as one of...
  - a. Desiring preeminence
  - b. Rejecting apostolic authority
  - c. Speaking evil of brethren
  - d. Abusing church discipline
2. One must not have all four of these to be guilty of sin...
  - a. Any one is an abomination before God!
  - b. Any one can destroy brotherly relations!

May John's description of "**The Spirit Of Diotrephes**" serve as a warning for us!



# Imitating The Good

## 3 John 11-12

### INTRODUCTION

1. After describing “the spirit of Diotrephes” in **verses 9-10**, John encourages his beloved Gaius to be careful about what he imitates:

*“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. 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.” - 3 Jn 11-12*

2. Following upon the condemnation of Diotrephes, and followed by the commendation of Demetrius, it is easy to infer...
  - a. That John was warning **Gaius** not to be like **Diotrephes**
  - b. And encouraging him instead to be like **Demetrius**
3. But why does John feel the need to exhort Gaius in this way?
  - a. Haven't we seen that Gaius was a man whose soul was prosperous?
  - b. Haven't we observed that he was walking in the truth?
  - c. Haven't we noticed that he was commended for his hospitality?
  - Wouldn't this make Gaius himself a man worthy of imitation?
4. Yes, and perhaps this should tell us something...
  - a. About ourselves as imitators
  - b. About the need for everyone to have good role models that we can imitate

[In this lesson, “**Imitating The Good**”, I would like for us to reflect on the idea of being imitators. Let's begin by observing that...]

### I. WE ARE NATURALLY IMITATORS

#### **A. CHILDREN IMITATE THEIR PARENTS...**

1. Especially in their early years, children seem to delight in imitating their parents
2. They quickly pick up their parent's mannerisms: the way they talk, walk, etc.
3. It is as though there was some innate reason for them to imitate mom and dad

#### **B. TEENAGERS IMITATE THEIR PEERS AND POPULAR IDOLS...**

1. As children get older, they may not seek to imitate their parents, but they are still active imitators
2. For better or worse (usually worse), they seek to emulate those in their peer group, or those whom they hold in high regard (athletes, musicians, etc.)
3. Despite frequent claims to want to “be themselves”, you can usually tell by their behavior

who they have been watching or listening to

### **C. CHRISTIANS IMITATE THOSE THEY HOLD IN HIGH REGARD...**

1. I have observed that many brethren often reflect the attitudes, dispositions, and conduct of those preachers or elders for whom they have much respect
2. This can be good, but in some cases it is not...
  - a. I have known some Christians (including preachers) whose behavior greatly disturbed me, wondering how they could justify their conduct
  - b. But when I saw their peers, or those brethren whom they held in high regard acting in the same way, I began to understand

[For whatever reasons, then, we seem to be natural born imitators. Once we are aware of that fact, we are in a position to appreciate John's exhortation to Gaius in **verse 11**. That leads to our next point...]

## **II. WE SHOULD IMITATE ONLY THE GOOD**

### **A. IN OUR TEXT, JOHN EXPLAINS WHY...**

1. "He who does good is of God"
  - a. The one who does good, truly and naturally, bears evidence that they have been born of God - cf. **1 Jn 5:18**
  - b. Such was the case of Demetrius, whose life bore testimony from all who knew him - **3 Jn 12**
2. "He who does evil has not seen God"
  - a. The one who consistently engages in evil demonstrates that he or she is has not seen God, and is in fact a child of the devil! - cf. **1 Jn 3:6b,10**
  - b. The implication seems to be that Diotrefes was demonstrating that he had not seen God
3. Who is a better role model for us?
  - a. One whose life bears witness that they have come to know God, and are led by Him?
  - b. Or one whose life demonstrates that despite their claims to the contrary they have yet to come to know God?

### **B. THERE IS ANOTHER GOOD REASON TO IMITATE ONLY THE GOOD...**

1. We become like those we imitate!
2. Children become like their parents, teenagers like their peers and idols, Christians like those they hold in high regard
3. If we imitate the good, we become good; if we imitate the evil, then it is evil we become!

[So if by nature we must be imitators, then let us be selective in who we follow. Fortunately...]

## **III. WE HAVE MANY GOOD EXAMPLES TO IMITATE**

### **A. WE CAN IMITATE DEITY...**

1. As Christ encouraged us to do, in showing kindness to our enemies - **Mt 6:43-48**
2. As Paul instructed the Ephesians to walk in love - **Ep 5:1-2**
3. What better example do we have, than that of God and Jesus Christ?

4. Indeed, some of the very titles we wear imply such imitation:
  - a. Children of God
  - b. Disciples of Jesus Christ
5. Do you seek to learn as much about God and Jesus as you do other role models?

#### **B. WE CAN IMITATE NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLES...**

1. To the degree they imitate Christ, as Paul wrote the Corinthians - **1 Co 11:1**
2. The New Testament is filled with good examples for Christians today...
  - a. For married couples, there is the example of Aquila and Priscilla - **Ro 16:3-5**
  - b. For those blessed with things of this life, there is the example of Philemon and Gaius - **Phile 1-7; 3 Jn 5-8**
  - c. For women, there is the example of Dorcas - **Ac 9:36,39**
  - d. For young men there is the example of Timothy - **Ph 2:19-22**
3. This does not mean to preclude many fine Old Testament examples as well: Joseph, Daniel, Barzillai the Gileadite (an old man who helped David in his affliction - **2 Sam 17:27-29; 19:31-39**) and many others
4. Indeed, the Scriptures are filled with many wonderful examples worthy of our emulation!

#### **C. WE CAN IMITATE MANY OF OUR FELLOW CHRISTIANS TODAY...**

1. As Paul encouraged his fellow Christians to imitate those who provided a similar pattern as he - **Ph 3:17**
2. Yet we should be careful, for not all who profess to be Christians behave as they should - cf. **Ph 3:18-19**
3. It is important, therefore, that we know the Scriptures well enough to know when someone is worthy of our emulation

### **CONCLUSION**

1. Since it appears that we are creatures who will imitate something, let us make the choice to imitate the good!
  - a. Only then do we have the hope of being “of God”
  - b. Only then can we have a testimony like that of Demetrius, to which all bore witness -- The only alternative is to imitate the evil, which prevents us from ever “seeing God”
2. We close by adding these words of the writer to the Hebrews:

*“And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end,”*

*“that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”*

*- He 6:11-12*