



3 John: God of Goodness

Memory Verse: 3 John 1:11 "Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God."

Background

Third John is the 64th book of the Bible and the 25th book in the New Testament. Identifying himself only as "the elder" (1:1), the apostle John is the accepted author of this book. This letter was probably written near the same time as the letters of 1 and 2 John, around 90 AD, from either Ephesus or the island of Patmos. Third John is a private letter addressed to an individual named Gaius. While there are a few different men named Gaius mentioned in the New Testament, it is unknown exactly which Gaius this letter was written to. However, this Gaius was a leader of one or more churches in Asia Minor and a "dear friend" of John's (1:1, 2, 5, & 11). John had received a report of some difficulties caused by a man named Diotrephes, apparently a leader of a different congregation in Asia Minor. John wrote to Gaius to commend him on his exemplary walk in truth and love and to reinforce for him the proper way to deal with troubles, such as those caused by Diotrephes.

The Short Story

Christian hospitality should flow from a life lived in God's truth and love.

What's the Big Idea?

John begins his letter with a warm greeting to Gaius. He addresses Gaius as his "dear friend" whom he loves "in the truth" (1:1), the genuine spirit of Christian love in accord with God's truth. John commends Gaius for his example and for the testimony he has heard from others regarding Gaius' "faithfulness to the truth" (1:3). John expresses his joy at Gaius' Christian witness, exclaiming, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth" (1:4). Gaius was a great example of making the truth of the gospel a reality in how he treated others. He demonstrated Christian hospitality by supporting and giving assistance to Christian teachers and ministers "even though they are strangers" who were traveling "for the sake of the Name" (1:5-7). These missionaries had spoken well of Gaius' love for the church. John commends and encourages Gaius to continue in this manner. "We ought therefore to show hospitality to such people so that we may work together for the truth" (1:8). John then goes on to call attention to the actions of Diotrephes, a man whose deeds were in direct contrast to those of Gaius. Diotrephes did not walk in the truth and love of the gospel. Instead, he was filled with selfish ambition. He "who loves to be first" refused to welcome believers or other missionaries, even excommunicating those who would welcome them. Additionally, Diotrephes defied the elder's authority and spread "malicious nonsense" about John (1:9-10). John warned Gaius not to be influenced by Diotrephes' example and assures Gaius that he will deal personally with Diotrephes when he visits. John concludes with warm greetings and a word of recommendation for Demetrius who was likely the deliverer of this letter and a traveling missionary or teacher (1:12-14).

So What? Why is this book so important? What was God's purpose for the book?

The three letters of John are largely concerned with the issues of love, truth, and fellowship. First John focused on a believer's fellowship with God. Second John warned of fellowship with enemies of the gospel. Here in Third John, believers are taught how to relate with those who proclaim the truth of God. Gaius was not just an example for Christians of his own time, he is also an example for believers today. Out of his committed and obedient life to God, he walked in truth and love, making Christ known in his hospitable treatment of others. As Christians, we have a responsibility to care for and support those who serve God's people and proclaim His Word, sending "them on their way in a manner that honors God" (1:6). In this way, we proclaim Christ with our actions sharing his love "so that we may work together for the truth" (1:8), just like our "dear friend" Gaius.

**Material taken from various sources.*

Teaching Text

3 John 1:11 “Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God.”

Sermon-Based Discussion Questions

- How do we know what is good? What is the test?
- How does 1 Cor 11:1 inform our desire and ability to “do what is good”?
- Proverbs 22:24-25 challenges us to consider what with respect to influences in our lives?
- What counsel does Psalm 139:23-24 have for us in this endeavor? How can you apply it?
- Consider 1 Timothy 3:7. Why is it important to have a good reputation? What is the devil’s trap?

Practical Application

- What influences in your life are pulling you toward a good and godly life? Toward evil?
- Who is someone in your life that you seek to imitate?
- Which people are most likely to be influenced by you?
- Where do you feel your life example is most worthy of imitation? Where do you feel led to “tune” your life to be more worthy of imitation?

Hitting the Highpoints

- 3 John 2 “Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.”
- 3 John 4 “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.”
- 3 John 8 “We ought therefore to show hospitality to such people so that we may work together for the truth “

Bonus Features

“Both the heart and mouth must be watched. The temper and spirit of Diotrephes was full of pride and ambition. It is bad not to do good ourselves; but it is worse to hinder those who would do good. Those cautions and counsels are most likely to be accepted, which are seasoned with love. Follow that which is good, for he that doeth good, as delighting therein, is born of God. Evil-workers vainly pretend or boast acquaintance with God. Let us not follow that which is proud, selfish, and of bad design, though the example may be given by persons of rank and power; but let us be followers of God, and walk in love, after the example of our Lord.” *Excerpted from Matthew*

Personal Takeaways and Notes