



3 John

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Tape #8238
By Chuck Smith

Let's turn now to 3 John. John wrote five books in the New Testament; the Gospel of John, the book of Revelation, and these three letters. It is believed that this 3 John is the last of John's writing, that this was written after he wrote the book of Revelation. We know that the book of Revelation was written while John was in exile on the island of Patmos. According to the early traditions, John was released from Patmos and ended his life in Ephesus, ministering there in Ephesus. Polycarp was John's sort of understudy there in Ephesus and took over the church in Ephesus after the death of John.

Now, he writes this third letter to a man by the name of Gaius, but there are many men in the New Testament by the name of Gaius. There was a Gaius from Macedonia who accompanied Paul and was with Paul in Ephesus. He was the one that when the silver smith created the riot and the people gathered in the great amphitheater there, Gaius was one of those who was brought into the amphitheater. And so he is called Gaius of Macedonia. There was a Gaius of Derbe that is mentioned in the book of Acts. And then there was a Gaius in Corinth. This is one that Paul greets in his letter to the Romans. And when Paul wrote his letter to the Corinthians, he said, "I thank God I didn't baptize any of you but Crispus and Gaius." (1 Cor 1:14) He lived next to the synagogue in Corinth. So there is no reason to believe that the Gaius here is any of those three. Early tradition in the church said that this particular Gaius was sent by John to be the overseer of the church in Pergamum, and that is of course not too far from Ephesus.

And so again John refers to himself as the elder as he did in the previous letter to the Elect Lady. He calls himself

The elder and unto his well-beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth(1:1).

You can actually envision this old man John. He's now in his nineties. No wonder he doesn't like to write long letters. Now, thinking of these younger men who are carrying on the ministry, it is so important to him that they maintain the standards and that they maintain the truth of the Word of God. It seems like it is a very difficult thing to take the movement of God into the next generation. And by the time John was ninety, the turn of the century, many problems had already begun to develop in the churches. This, of course, is evidenced by the book of Revelation, chapters two and three, where Jesus addresses the churches of Asia, and He is rebuking them for their lack of love. He is rebuking them for the false doctrines that have already begun to infiltrate into the church. He's rebuking them for their lukewarmness. And we see problems that already begun to develop in the early church. This was, of course, of great concern and rightly so because when you have seen the marvelous work of God, you've experienced the work of the Holy Spirit, it is your heart's desire and prayer that the next generation can catch the fire. The next generation can carry on in the same love and enthusiasm and in the truth.

As you look at the history of the denominations, they began in a great movement of God, a powerful work of the Holy Spirit, but many of the men that were used in the formation of some of these major denominations would not recognize the churches today nor would they really be welcomed with their fundamental beliefs in the Word of God. We see how that it happens in practically every denomination. There is a gradual movement towards liberalism. If you read the charters of Yale and of Harvard, dedicated to train men for the ministry of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but oh, how far they are from that now! And that is the tragedy. And that is, I think, the concern of every true minister of God who has experienced the dynamics of God's Spirit at work and you see a sort of slow movement away from that. So Gaius, loved of John, loved in truth, and he loves him because he is carrying on in the truth. But in this opening salutation he said, "beloved and my well-beloved." I mean, look, how much he's talking about his love for this young man!

Beloved, I wish above all things that you may prosper and be in health even as your soul prospers (1:2).

Now, many people have taken this as a promise. It's not a promise of God. It is John's salutation to Gaius. It's like often when you receive a letter from your friends, they say I hope this letter finds you in good health. That's basically what John is saying. It's just a salutation. It isn't something that is given as a promise that you're going to be prosperous and you're going to be in good health, but it is John's wish. It is John's prayer for Gaius that he might prosper and be in good health, and that is a very wonderful and warm thing to feel towards your friends. I trust that you might prosper. I trust that you'll be in good health even as your soul prospers. Now, Gaius was prospering spiritually, and John is praying that the physical prosperity and health might match his spiritual prosperity and health. For John said,

I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as you walk in the truth (1:3).

Now, as we mentioned this morning in the early church history, they had itinerate evangelists, itinerate prophets and the apostles who would travel around from church to church ministering to the churches. Each church had its elders, the overseers, but to these churches these itinerate evangelists would come. There was a lot of movement within the early church, and those that were coming from the area where Gaius was, were telling of this man Gaius. He's straight-arrowed. He is walking in the truth. He's not compromising the truth. He's a very loving and hospitable person. And so the word was coming back, actually I would imagine when these itinerate evangelists or prophets came in and they'd say, "Well we were there in Pergamos," or wherever Gaius was. And John would say, "Well, how's Gaius doing?" And they would say, "Oh, he's doing great, really walking in the truth." And so John is rejoicing when the brethren came who had been with Gaius, and they testified of the truth that he was walking in. and John then expresses his heart. He said,

I have no greater joy than to know that my children walk in truth (1:4).

Many times when I am speaking elsewhere, people will come up with one of the books that I've written and ask me to autograph the book for them. And as I sign my name I usually will put this scripture underneath. 3 John 4 "I have no greater joy than to know that my children are walking in truth." What a thrill it is to train young men in the Word of God and then send them out and then get the reports back of how they are teaching the Word of God and how God is blessing His Word. And that's just a natural. God said He would bless His Word above His name! And what joy it brings to hear of how God is moving in these various churches in such a mighty way. I have no greater joy than to hear of this wonderful work of God as these men are out there proclaiming the Word of God, the truth of God to the people! Amazing! I love it!

Beloved, he said, [and again these terms of endearment to Gaius. He really loves this young man.] you do faithfully whatever you do to the brethren, and to the strangers (1:5);

In other words he is commending him now for his hospitality. Gaius, you're very good at this and what you are doing is excellent. Actually, in the New Testament there was tremendous encouragement towards hospitality. That was to be one of the characteristics of a person who was to be a bishop in the church. He was to be given to hospitality. And Peter exhorts them to be hospitable. In the book of Hebrews it said, be careful to entertain strangers because you don't know you might be entertaining angels unaware. So open up your door. Open up your home. He's commending Gaius for this in the early church. Now, most of the public places to rent were flea bags. They were places that were just notorious for their filth and for the immorality. They didn't have lovely motels or hotels in those days, lovely accommodations for the people, only these flea infested places. And that's why it was so important to open your home.

Now, today it would probably be commendable for you to put someone up in a hotel room or a motel room. We do that here at Calvary when we have guests come. We don't bring them into our home, but we put them up in a hotel and we figure that that's probably much better. They can get a better rest rather than being involved in the confusion that often exists with the busy, busy schedule that we have. But in the early church it was a very important, a commendable thing. And so

you do faithfully whatsoever you do to the brethren, and to the strangers; which have borne witness of

your love before the church (1:5-6):

Those that had come back told him what a wonderful, loving man this Gaius is, how well he received us. And in the church they would come back. And I can see the situation where someone has just returned on a mission trip and the leader of the assembly says, "Oh, I see that brother John has returned. He's been over in Yugoslavia. John, stand up and tell us a little bit about what's going on." And he would stand up and say, "Well, we were visiting there, and in this one city there was this fellow Gaius and he was so gracious. He took us into his home. He's such a loving man." They would bear witness of Gaius. He developed a reputation for his love and for his hospitality. And so these people who had itinerate ministries had borne witness of the love before the church.

Whom, he said, if you bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, you do well(1:6):

In other words, you are helping them and aiding them in their ministry, and that's good. It's an interesting thing, Jesus said that if you give a cup of cold water to the prophet in the name of the Lord, you will not lose your reward. You will receive the reward of a prophet. An interesting way by which God keeps books.

Paul the apostle was writing to the church in Phillipi, and he was thanking them for the money that they sent to him. And the church in Phillipi had consistently been supporting Paul. They would send money to him to support his ministry. And so while he was there in Rome in prison, he received a fellow who came from the church in Phillipi who had brought an offering for Paul from the church. And so as he is responding, sort of a letter of thanksgiving. He thanks them for the money that they sent. He said, "Not that I have a particular need." In other words, it isn't just because it's met my need, but I desire that fruit might abound to your account. In other words, Paul is declaring to them that the fruit of his ministry is going to their account because they were making his ministry possible by supporting it. And thus, here is Gaius supporting these men who are itinerate evangelists and prophets, entertaining them and helping them on their way. And John is commending him for this. Because he tells of these men, true men of God, who he said,

Because that for his name's sake they went forth, [In other words they went forth in the name of Jesus] taking nothing of the Gentiles(1:7).

They would not receive or accept support from nonbelievers. And John is commending them for that. I really do not believe that the church should go to nonbelievers for support. I think that if a person comes and is not a believer, it's just as well that they don't give. Quite often if Greg has me do something that I hate more than anything else, and that's, he said, "Would you mind, you know, getting up and receiving the offering?" I don't like to do that. But I know that they run on a different program than we do. But quite often, I'll say if you are here tonight and not a believer, than this is not for you, this portion of the service. We want you to just enjoy as a guest. But if you're a believer and you want to receive the rewards from the fruit of this ministry, which is very fruitful, then we encourage you that this is a great spiritual investment. But I don't believe that the church should solicit support from the world. I'm not in favor of going around to the businesses and the companies and so forth and soliciting support for God's work. That's something for God's people to do. And these men went out in the name of Christ. They wouldn't take support from the Gentiles or from the heathen.

We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellowhelpers in the truth(1:8).

In other words, that we might come alongside of them, that we might join with them and help them as they are taking the truth of God to the various churches. Now, Gaius was probably a part of a fellowship, and John said he wrote a letter to that church. But a man by the name of Diotrophes, and what a contrast he is to Gaius. Gaius is a man who is very hospitable, very loving, very supporting especially to the itinerate prophets and evangelists that would come through. This fellow, Diotrophes, John wrote a letter to the church.

I wrote unto the church: but Diotrophes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not(1:9).

He didn't read the letter to the church. He didn't accept the authority of John. Now, in the early church, the apostles were considered authorities within the church. When they would write, they would write with what was called apostolic authority. They were recognized as God's spokesmen, the leaders of the church.

And this Diotrephes had begun to rebel against the leadership, against John. And he would not read John's letter to the church. And, of course, John tells the reason for it. This fellow loved to have the preeminence. He wanted to be the important one. He didn't want any challenge to his authority nor was he willing to divide the authority with others. In the churches today quite often there are Diotrephes. People who love to have the preeminence. People who want to be seen and want to be noticed and are pushing and promoting themselves rather than the Lord. And such was Diotrephes loving to have the preeminence and not receiving John.

Wherefore, John said, if I come, [And that if is not an indicative kind of an if. It's sort of when I come. John was planning to come and visit.] I will remember his deeds which he does, [And he then tells what he was doing, the deeds.] prating against us with malicious words (1:10):

He was speaking malicious things against John. John the beloved. John chosen to be an apostle of Jesus Christ. John who was an eyewitness to Jesus, who walked with Jesus, and as he said, "That which was from the beginning which we have seen which we have gazed upon which we have handled, the word of life," and received directly from the Lord, his commission. And yet here is this man speaking malicious words against John.

There are some small people who feel that they can advance their cause by speaking evil of men of God that are being used mightily of God. But they become very critical of them, because when you criticize, you are actually putting yourself above that person. And if you can put yours above Billy Graham, you're pretty high. And so you hear people criticizing Billy Graham. The Lord said, "Touch not my anointed and do my prophets no harm." (Psalm 105:15).

Jude speaks of those false teachers who speak evil of dignitaries, men that God has used. On the other side of the coin, if ever you do anything of note for the Lord, if God uses you in a way that brings prominence or recognition, that God has used you in a mighty way, you can be sure that there will be those who will be critical of what God has done. The scripture tells to beware when all men speak well of us. If everybody is saying, you know, hale fellow, then there's probably something wrong with you. And thus here is this Diotrephes speaking against John, malicious words,

prating against us with these malicious words: and he's not content even with that, and neither does he receiveth the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church. (1:10).

Now, these brethren that came back and were witnessing in the church of the love and the truth of Gaius, they mentioned also this fellow Diotrephes. He's taken over. He's an autocrat. He's a dictator. He's sort of ruling over the people, lording over the people. And, of course, Jesus said that wasn't to be as He gathered the Disciples together, He said the Gentiles or the heathen loved to exercise lordship, but it shall not be so among you! Whoever would be the chief, let him be the servant of all.

And so this fellow Diotrephes lording over the others, not receiving. That is usually a sign of a position of weakness. You're afraid that the people might be drawn to someone else who may have stronger gifts than yours, greater ability than you. And because of this fear of losing control, he just wouldn't receive the brethren who came, the itinerate evangelists and prophets. He would not receive them but also, even worse, he would forbid them that would. He told the people, don't take them in. Don't receive them into your house. And if they did he would cast them out of the church. He would kick them out because, you know, you did not submit to what I said, you know, and that kind of authoritarian attitude, which is an abomination to the Lord.

Now, it's interesting in the second letter of John, he speaks about the false prophets that were going around from house to house. And he said, "Don't receive them into your house." In other words put them to the test. What is their testimony concerning Jesus Christ? And if they don't hold to the doctrines of Christ, don't receive them into your house, and don't bid them God's speed because you'll become a partaker of their evil deeds.

Now, here in the third epistle, John is saying how important it is to be hospitable to the true prophets, to the true servants of God who are going out to minister to the churches, important that you receive them into your home, that you be hospitable to them. So it shows that there's a necessity of discernment and of

judgment, and you judge them on their testimony concerning the testimony of Jesus Christ. Is He God come in the flesh? Is He the Son of God? And that was the litmus test. If they didn't accept or adhere to that, then they weren't to be received in the home. But if they were true prophets than they were to be accepted and received.

Beloved, he said, follow not that which is evil, [Don't follow this Diotrephes, an evil man. Don't follow after his evil deeds.] but follow after that which is good(1:11).

God always gives us good examples to follow. There are also bad examples. The Lord said don't follow those. Follow those that set a good example. Paul said to Timothy, "Be an example unto the believers! Paul was able to say, be ye followers of me even as I also am of Jesus Christ." Peter said that Jesus has suffered, leaving for us an example that we should follow in His steps who when He was reviled, reviled not again and sets for us the example that Jesus set for us.

And so don't follow that which is evil but follow that which is good. He that does good is of God(1:11).

Now, there's some people that do a good talk, but they don't have a good walk. And so it is as James said, really manifested in what we do.

He who does good of is of God, but he that does evil really doesn't know God(1:11).

Diotrephes really didn't know God. He wasn't walking in the ways of the Lord.

Now, we're introduced to the third person in this epistle. The first was Gaius, the one he's writing to; Diotrephes, this fellow who is an enemy to the work of the Lord. But then these men that had come back from their journey reporting to John, spoke of this fellow Demetrius.

Demetrius hath good report of all men, [Those men that came back spoke well of him, a good report.] and of the truth itself: [This is a man who is walking in the truth.] yes, we also bear record; and you know that our record is true(1:12).

It is interesting as you go back, and I would suggest that as just sort of extra credit that you would go back and read the Gospel of John and the first letter of John. And read it with this in mind, the witness. You see, John said that he is bearing witness of the truth, and he tells of all of the witnesses of Jesus Christ, how that God bore witness. Jesus bore witness of himself. The Holy Spirit bore witness. The works that is Jesus did, bore witness. And John declares that he was a witness. And notice all of the places where John talks about his bearing witness and his bearing record of the truth. As John closes his Gospel, he said many other things Jesus did, that I did not record. But these things were written that you might believe that Jesus is the Messiah and by believing have life in His name. So John is testifying that his record is not complete. In fact in the last chapter as he closes his Gospel, he said, "I suppose if all of the things were written that could be written, there would not be enough libraries in the world to hold the things that could have been written about Jesus Christ." So John is one who bears witness, and he speaks here of his making or bearing record. And the record, he says is true. "We know our record is true." Now, as with his second epistle he said,

I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee: But I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be unto thee. Our friends greet thee. Greet my friends by name(1:13-14).

And so he closes out this tender little letter to Gaius as he typically, hope to see you soon that we might talk face to face. And of course, he said that to the Elect Lady in his second letter "trusting to come there soon to speak face to face that our joy may be full." The fullness of joy in fellowship with one another, oh, what joy Christian fellowship is! What a joyful thing it is to get together with the body of Christ and fellow believers. That's one of the things I'm really looking forward to this Saturday, (Jesus People Reunion), is just the joy of seeing these guys again. I haven't seen a lot of them for many years and just the joy of being with them again, seeing them face to face, that's something that I'm really looking forward to is just a joy of fellowship that we'll have together this coming Saturday. So John is saying I trust to shortly see you, and we can talk face to face. In the meantime, peace, shalom, be to thee. "Our friends greet you and greet our friends by name."

Father we thank You for the beautiful, intimate relationships that we can experience as we fellowship together serving our Lord, Jesus Christ. And Lord we thank You for these records that we have that instruct

us and teach us how You would have us to live, what You would have us to do. And so Lord we pray that we might be blessed and benefited from the instruction in Your Word. We commit, now, Lord ourselves to You. We ask Your blessing upon this week, upon our lives, that we might, Lord, draw close to You, that You indeed will draw close to us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

The pastors are available to pray for you. Anytime you are in need, spiritual need, physical need, emotional need, we're here to serve you. As Jesus said, be the servant of all. And we take that very seriously here at Calvary Chapel. We don't see ourselves as lords over the flock. We see ourselves as servants to the flock of God. And so the pastors are down here in the front tonight, to serve you. If you have any prayer needs, they would happy to pray with you, to bear your burden, to minister to you the things of the Spirit tonight. So, as soon as we are dismissed, if you so desire, we invite you to come forward for prayer and for the ministry of God's Spirit to your life, as the pastors are here tonight for that very purpose. May the Lord be with you, bless, and keep you in His love. May this be one of the greatest weeks that you've ever experienced, as far as Spiritual growth is concerned! May you take a giant leap forward, in your relationship with the Lord!