

# TESTS OF TRUTH

FROM 1 JOHN, 2 JOHN & 3 JOHN

## WITNESSING TO THE TRUTH

**BIG IDEA:** Our witness either helps the truth or hinders it.

**DATE:** Sunday, August 3, 2025

**SCRIPTURE:** 3 John 1-12

## OPENING QUESTION

What behaviors or habits have you seen in Christians that either strengthened or weakened your view of the faith? (Write 3-4 responses on your whiteboard.) How do you think a nonbeliever would answer this question? (Write those responses down and note some may be the same.)

Then ask, "What if I asked those close to you – a family member, child, spouse or co-worker – this question about you? Would you be afraid to hear the answers?"

Today we are going to look at three Christians that John writes about in his letter to Gaius and the types of Christian witness they were. Our witness either helps the truth or hinders it.

## THE SETTING

The battle for truth and against apostasy is fought not only in the home (2 John) but especially in the local church, and that is where 3 John comes in. This little letter (the shortest New Testament epistle in the original Greek) gives us a glimpse into an early assembly, its people, and its problems. As you read this brief letter, you find yourself saying, "Times have not changed very much!" We have similar people and problems today! One of the key words in this letter is *witness*. It means not only the words that we say but also the lives that we live. Each Christian is the witness, either a good one or a bad one. We are either helping the truth (3 John 8) or hindering it. This letter was addressed to Gaius, one of the leaders of the assembly. But John also discussed two other men in these verses - Diotrephes and Demetrius. These men were examples of walking in truth and love but somewhere along the way Diotrephes lost his way. Wherever there are people, there are problems - and the potential for solving problems. Each of us must honestly face the question "Am I a part of the problem or a part of the answer?"

## SCRIPTURE READING: 3 JOHN 1-12 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup>The elder, To my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>It gave me great joy when some believers came and testified about your faithfulness

to the truth, telling how you continue to walk in it. <sup>4</sup> I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

<sup>5</sup> Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers and sisters, even though they are strangers to you. <sup>6</sup> They have told the church about your love. Please send them on their way in a manner that honors God. <sup>7</sup> It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. <sup>8</sup> We ought therefore to show hospitality to such people so that we may work together for the truth.

<sup>9</sup> I wrote to the church, but Diotrophes, who loves to be first, will not welcome us. <sup>10</sup> So when I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, spreading malicious nonsense about us. Not satisfied with that, he even refuses to welcome other believers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church.

<sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> Demetrius is well spoken of by everyone—and even by the truth itself. We also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true.

## DISCUSSION

*Today we will consider the three men involved in this letter and note the kinds of Christian witness they were.*

### Gaius – A Beloved Believer

READ: 3 John 1-8

- What does it mean to be spiritually healthy as Gaius was? How can we be spiritually healthy?
- How did Gaius practically support God's servants? (see Commentary below under "practical ministry")
- Why should Christians support and help God's servants?
- In what practical ways can Christians support God's servants? (Gaius was an encouragement to John. Ask your group who they can encourage today. Perhaps write a note to a staff member, someone you serve with, or your LifeGroup Leader!)

### Diotrephes – A Proud Believer

READ: 3 John 9-10

Diotrephes was a church leader, not a pagan, but pride got the better of him. Pride is a temptation we all face.

- Would you want to serve on a team with Diotrephes? Why or why not?
- How can Satan use a proud or selfish member (or a group of them) to destroy a church?
- False teaching and pride are both dangerous to a church's health and witness. Have you ever seen this happen in churches you have been involved in?
- Have you ever acted a little like Diotrephes? What kind of attitude do you want to have toward your church? (Remind your group if they have a problem with someone, the best thing to do is approach that person first and seek understanding. It is also helpful to

remember that the church is the “Bride of Christ” – would you talk poorly about something Jesus loved so much?)

## Demetrius – An Exemplary Believer

READ: 3 John 11-12

**Share the following from the commentary about Demetrius:** Like Gaius, Demetrius walked in the truth and obeyed the Word of God. This does not mean that either of these men was perfect, but it does mean that they were consistent in their lives, seeking to honor the Lord. An exemplar is “an ideal, a model, an example worthy to be imitated” and Demetrius was an example worth following according to John. The godly life and dedicated service of another believer is always an encouragement and a stimulus. By our good example, we can “consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds” (Heb. 10:24).

Demetrius was a man worth imitating because he had a “good report” (witness) from the church fellowship. All the members knew him, loved him, and thanked God for his consistent life and ministry. The only way to “check” on people in those days was through word of mouth – there were no background checks, internet to research or references to call. Your reputation in the eyes of others meant everything.

- Who has modeled a consistent faith to you? What habits or attitudes did you notice about them? Who are you modeling consistent faith to?
- We are all called to be disciples who make disciples. We are never too old or too young to do this. Who are you intentionally pouring into? Who is pouring into you?

What kind of Christian witness are you? Encouraging and beloved? Proud and bossy? Worthy of imitation? Our witness will either help or hinder the truth and the work of the church. Take some time to reflect on what other Christians would say about you.

**CLOSING ACTIVITY:** Go around the room or around your table and take turns telling each other how they have encouraged your faith! How have they been a good witness for the faith?

**Leaders:** this could be an impactful activity so consider leaving enough time for it. Be sure you think of things to say, too, especially to newer members. People who are consistent in their attendance are personally encouraging to us as LifeGroup Leaders.

## RESPONSE

This concludes our study through John’s letters. Have you passed these tests of truth? Are you walking in love, light and truth? There is more to being a Christian than your beliefs – it’s how you walk worth in your everyday life.

Lesson excerpted from “Be Alert: Beware of the Religious Impostors” by Warren Wiersbe. Copyright 1984.

### GAIUS THE ENCOURAGER (vv. 1-8)

There is no question that the apostle John dearly loved this man! He called him “the well beloved” in his greeting, and “beloved” in 3 John 5. It is unlikely that these were merely formal terms. Third John 4 suggests that Gaius may have been one of John’s converts, and, of course, those we lead to faith in Christ are especially precious to us.

#### Spiritual health (v. 2)

It is clear that Gaius was a man whose spiritual health was evident to all. Physical health is the result of nutrition, exercise, cleanliness, proper rest, and the disciplined order of a balanced life. Spiritual health is the result of similar factors. We must nourish ourselves with the Word, and then “work out” that nourishment in godly exercise. We must keep ourselves clean and avoid the contamination and pollution that is in the world. While exercise and service are important, it is also important that we rest in the Lord and gain new strength through fellowship with Him. A balanced life is a happy and healthy life, a life that honors God.

#### A good testimony (vv. 3 – 4)

Gaius was recognized as a man who obeyed the Word of God and “walked in truth.” Some of the brethren had made several visits to John, and they had joyfully reported that Gaius was a glowing example of what a Christian ought to be.

What made Gaius such a good testimony? God’s truth. The truth was “in him” and enabled him to walk in obedience to God’s will. Gaius read the Word, meditated on it, delighted in it, and then practiced it in his daily life. What digestion is to the body, meditation is to the soul. It is not enough merely to hear the Word or read the Word. We must inwardly digest it and make it part of our inner persons. It is clear that Gaius’s entire life was wrapped up in the truth. True living comes from the living truth. The Spirit of God uses the Word of God to reveal the Son of God and then to enable us to obey the will of God and “walk in truth.”

#### Practical ministry (vv. 5 – 8)

Gaius was also a fellow helper to the truth. In practical ways, he assisted those who were ministering the Word. We have no indication that Gaius himself was a preacher or teacher, but he opened his heart and home to those who were.

We have learned from John’s second letter the importance of Christian hospitality in that day. John warned the “elect lady” against entertaining false teachers (2 John 7-11) but in this letter he commended Gaius for showing hospitality to the true ministers of the word. Gaius was an encouragement, not only to the brethren in general, but especially to strangers who came to fellowship with the church and to minister.

Gaius not only opened his home, but he also opened his heart and his hand to give financial help to his guests. The phrase *send them on their way in a manner that honors God* means “to assist on their journey.” This could have included providing money and food as well as washing and

mending clothing. After all, our faith must be proved by our works, and our love must be expressed by deeds, not just words.

What is the motivation for this kind of practical ministry to the saints? First of all, it honors God. We are never more "godlike" than when we are sacrificing to serve others. Since these itinerant ministers were representing the Name of the Lord, any ministry to them was really a service to Jesus Christ.

A second motive is that the support of God's servants is a witness to the lost (3 John 7). Keep in mind that there were many wandering teachers in that day, sharing their ideas and begging for money. While the Lord Jesus taught that God's servants deserve support, the standard of the New Testament is that this support comes from God's people. "Taking nothing of the Gentiles" means that these itinerant workers would not solicit help from the unsaved.

When God's people adequately support God's servants, it is a powerful testimony to the lost.

The third motivation for serving is obedience to God. This ministry of hospitality and support is not only an opportunity, but also an obligation. Galatians 6: 6-10 makes it clear that those who receive spiritual blessings from the minister of the word ought to share with him and material blessings. It is unbiblical for church members to send their tithes and offerings all over the world and neglect to support the ministry of their own local church.

John gave a fourth motivation in 3 John 8: "That we might be fellow helpers to the truth." Gaius not only received the truth and walked in the truth, but he was a "jointworker" who helped to further the truth. We do not know what his spiritual gifts were or how he served in the congregation, but we do know that Gaius helped extend and defend the truth by assisting those who taught and preached it.

It is one thing to fight apostasy and refuse to entertain false teachers but quite another thing to open our homes (and wallets) to promote the truth. We need both the negative and the positive. We need more people like Gaius who are spiritually healthy, obedient to the truth, and sharing what they have for the furtherance of the truth. But, alas, not everybody is Gaius! We turn now to an entirely different kind of Christian.

## DIOTREPES THE DICTATOR (9 -10)

It seems like many churches have members who insist on "being boss" and having their own way. Our Lord's disciples often argued over which of them would be the greatest in the Kingdom. Jesus had to remind them that their model for ministry was not the Roman official who lorded it over people, but the Savior Himself, who came as a humble servant.

Diotrephes was motivated by pride. Instead of giving the preeminence to Jesus Christ, he claimed it for himself. He had the final say-so about everything in the church, and his decisions were determined by one thing: "What will this do for Demetrius?" He was most unlike John the Baptist who said, "He [Jesus Christ] must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). The Greek verb indicates that it was the constant attitude of Diotrephes to promote himself.

Whenever a church has a resident dictator in its membership there are bound to be problems, because people who are spiritually minded will not tolerate that kind of leadership. The Holy Spirit is grieved when the members of the body are not permitted to exercise their gifts because one

member must have his own way. At the judgment seat of Christ, we will discover how many hearts have been broken and churches destroyed because of the arrogant "ministries" of people like Diotrephes. Consider what this man was doing

#### **He would not receive John (v. 9).**

It is incredible to think that a church leader (Diotrephes may have been an elder) would not have fellowship with one of our Lord's own apostles! How much Diotrephes could have learned from John! But Jesus Christ was not preeminent in his life, therefore Diotrephes could afford to treat the aged apostle this way. Why did Diotrephes reject John? The obvious reason seems to be that John challenged the man's right to be dictator in the church. John was the threat to Diotrephes, because John had the authority of an apostle. John knew the truth about Diotrephes and was willing to make it known. Satan was at work in the church because Diotrephes was operating on the basis of pride and self-glorification, two of the devil's chief tools.

#### **He lied about John (v. 10a).**

Diotrephes was spreading religious nonsense. The phrase means "bringing false and empty charges against us." What Diotrephes was saying about John was sheer nonsense, but there are people who love to hear such talk and who will believe it. Apparently, Diotrephes had made these accusations against John at one of the church meetings when John was not present to defend himself. But John warned that the day would soon come when he would settle accounts with Diotrephes the dictator.

#### **He rejected John's associates (v. 10b).**

Diotrephes would not even receive the other brethren because they were in fellowship with John! It was guilt by association. It is impossible to practice this kind of "separation" with any degree of consistency, because nobody can always know all that he needs to know about what his brother is doing! If I refuse to fellowship with you because you have fellowship with somebody disapprove of, how do I know the extent of your fellowship? How can I keep track of what you have done? That person would need a computer and a full-time staff if he ever hoped to do a good job of keeping his associations pure!

Scripture makes it clear that we should have no fellowship with apostates and that we must refrain from entangling alliances with unbelievers. We must also avoid those whose doctrinal position is contrary to Scripture. This does not mean that we cooperate only with those believers who interpret Scripture exactly as we do, because even good and godly people disagree on some matters such as church government or prophecy. All true Christians can agree on the fundamental doctrines of the faith and, in love, give latitude for disagreement on other matters.

However, to break personal fellowship with a brother because I disagree with the circle of friends, is, to me, going beyond Scripture. Diotrephes rejected John and then rejected the believers associated with John! But he went even further.

#### **He disciplined those who disagreed with him (v. 10c).**

The church members who received John's associates were dismissed from the church! Again, it was guilt by association. Diotrephes had neither the authority nor the biblical basis for throwing

those people out of the church, but he did it. Even religious dictators have to be careful lest the opposition become too strong!

The New Testament does teach church discipline, and these instructions ought to be obeyed. But church discipline is not a weapon for a dictator to use to protect himself. It is a tool for a congregation to use to promote purity and glorify God. It is not a pastor “throwing weight around” or a church board acting like a police court. It is the Lord exercising spiritual authority through a local church in order to rescue and restore an erring child of God.

Church “dictators” are dangerous people, but fortunately, they are easy to recognize. They like to talk about themselves and what they have “done for the Lord.” They also have the habit of judging and condemning those who disagree with them. They are experts in putting labels on other Christians and classifying them to meet little categories of their own intention. They base their fellowship on personalities, not the doctrines that are fundamental to the faith. The tragedy is that these “dictators” actually believe that they are serving God and glorifying Jesus Christ.

It has been my (Warren Wiersbe’s) experience that most of the distress and division in local churches, and between churches, has resulted from personalities more than anything else. If only we would return to the New Testament principle of making the person and work of Jesus Christ our test for fellowship, rather than associations and interpretations of non-essential doctrines. But people like Diotrephes will always have their enthusiastic followers because many sincere but immature and untaught believers prefer to follow such leaders.

### DEMETRIUS THE EXEMPLAR (vv. 11-12)

According to the dictionary, an exemplar is “an ideal, a model, an example worthy to be imitated.” Demetrius was that kind of a Christian. John warned his readers not to imitate Diotrephes. “If you want to imitate an example, then follow Demetrius!”

But is it right for us to imitate human leaders? Yes, if they in turn are imitating Jesus Christ. You and I cannot see God, but we can see God at work in the lives of His children. The godly life and dedicated service of another believer is always an encouragement and a stimulus to me. By our good example, we can “consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works” (Heb. 10:24).

Demetrius was a man worth imitating because he had a “good report” (witness) from the church fellowship. All the members knew him, loved him, and thanked God for his consistent life and ministry. While it is a dangerous thing when “all men shall speak well of you” (Luke 6:26), it is a wonderful thing when all the believers in the local church can agree to commend your life and testimony. If all men, saved and lost, good and evil, speak well of us, it may mean that we are compromising and masquerading.

But Demetrius not only had a good witness from the believers in the church; he also had a good witness from the Word (truth) itself. Like Gaius, Demetrius walked in the truth and obeyed the Word of God. This does not mean that either of these men was perfect, but it does mean that they were consistent in their lives, seeking to honor the Lord.

Both the church and the Word bore witness to Demetrius’s Christian life, and so did the apostle John himself. The beloved apostle knew firsthand that Demetrius was a man of God, and John was not ashamed to confess it.

John had warned that he was going to visit the church and confront Diotrephes, and no doubt both Gaius and Demetrius would stand with John in opposing the "dictator." They were the kind of men who would support the truth and submit themselves to authentic spiritual authority. Because they followed the truth, they could safely be imitated by other believers.

It is interesting to contrast these two little letters and to see the balance of truth that John presented. Second John was written to a godly woman about her family, while 3 John was written to a godly man about his church. John warned the "elect lady" about false teachers from the outside, but he warned Gaius about dictatorial leaders inside the fellowship. The false teachers in 2 John would appeal to love so that they might deny truth, while Diotrephes would appeal to truth as, in a most unloving way, he would attack the brethren.

How important it is to walk "in truth and love" (2 John 3) and hold the truth in love! To claim to love the truth and yet hate the brethren is to confess ignorance of what the Christian life is all about.

When God's people love Him, the truth, and one another, then the Spirit of God can work in that assembly to glorify Jesus Christ. But when any member of that assembly, including the pastor, becomes proud and tries to have "the preeminence," then the Spirit is grieved, and He cannot bless. The church may outwardly appear successful, but inwardly it will lack the true unity of the Spirit that makes for a healthy fellowship.

What we need are more people like Gaius than Demetrius - and fewer like Diotrephes!