

Does Your Life Bring Praise to the Name of Jesus? (Four Men and Their Reputation)

3 John 1-14

Introduction

- All of us share an invaluable possession. It goes with us wherever we go, but amazingly, it also goes where we do not go. Furthermore, what you think of this prized possession is not necessarily what others think of it. I speak of our reputation. Your reputation is the estimation or evaluation others have of your character, integrity, and standing as a person. It may be good or bad, positive or negative. But be assured of this: 1) We all have a reputation. 2) People will watch you and talk about you. Count on it! 3) You cannot escape or lose your reputation. It precedes you, goes with you and follows you all of your life and beyond.
- Charles Spurgeon, the great British Baptist preacher in London, knew the importance of our reputation, especially for the Christian. He said, “The eagle-eyed world acts as a policeman for the church ... [it] becomes a watch-dog over the sheep, barking furiously as soon as one goes astray. Be careful, be careful of your private lives ... and I believe your public lives will be sure to be right; but remember that it is upon your public life that the verdict of the world will very much depend.”¹
- With that in mind let me raise 3 important questions for all of us to think about: 1) What do you think of yourself? 2) What do you believe others think about you? 3) What does God think about you? The shortest book in the Bible, the letter of 3 John, is very helpful in assisting us to reflect on these three questions. Only 219 words, this postcard epistle has been too often neglected to the detriment of the church. Like 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus and Philemon, it is written

¹ From his sermon on 2 John 4, preached December 21, 1873 at the Metropolitan Tabernacle. It can be accessed at <http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols19-21/chs1148.pdf>.

to an individual, a man named Gaius. Written by John between AD 80 – 95, Eusebius, the ancient church historian, says it was penned after John was released from the rock quarry island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea. If this is correct, 3 John may have been the last book written in the New Testament.

- The book is similar in length and style to its twin sister 2 John, and yet there are some important differences as well:
- 3 John revolves around 4 key men and their reputation. 2 John mentions no one by name. In 2 John the problem was showing hospitality to the wrong visitors. In 3 John the problem is not showing hospitality to the right visitors. In 2 John the major concern was truth. In 3 John the major concern is love.
- It is easy to outline the book biographically, around the 4 men of the letter. As we look at each one of them, continue to examine yourself and see if anyone here looks something like you. Ask yourself a very important question: Does my life bring praise to the name of Jesus?

I. Gaius: A Man with the Right Balance

1-8

- This letter begins in the same way as 2 John, identifying the author as “The Elder” (*presbuteros*). The word originally meant an older man, but came to convey ideas of respect, authenticity and integrity. An elder is a man of courage, commitment, and conviction. He is a man of authority rooted in his spiritual maturity. John was such a man and because he had a tender relationship with “the elect lady” (2 John) and Gaius (3 John) there was no need to assert his apostleship.
- John commends Gaius in 4 areas of his life. These are areas in which we also should seek to excel having come into a saving relationship with Christ.

1. Live spiritually.

1-2

- 4 times John will address Gaius, the recipient of this letter, as dear friend. It expresses deep, heart-felt love for this man. John loved this man and he told him so. He also knew his spiritual life was in good health and he told him this too.
- Gaius was a common name in that day and 3 men by that name appear in the New Testament: Gaius of Corinth (Rom. 16:23); Macedonia (Acts 19:29); and Derbe (Acts 20:4). Gaius of 3 John is probably none of those. All we know of this Gaius we learn from this short letter, and what we learn is outstanding.
- John's love for him is genuine; it is accompanied by truth (7x). There is nothing false or superficial here. The I in verse one is emphatic: "I myself love you in the truth."
- John is praying (cont.) for Gaius to prosper (cont.) in every way [fronted for emp.] and be "in good health physically just as you are spiritually" (v. 2). Prosper conveys the idea of having a good journey. Health is *hygiainein* (hygiene).
- Gaius had a clean bill of health spiritually. Perhaps he was suffering some physical difficulty but his soul was "ship shape," in top condition.
- A good point of application naturally arises from this prayer!_What if I were to pray for you and ask God to bless you physically to the same degree you are healthy spiritually and, He answered my prayer! What would happen?! Would you be fit, in bed, or nearly dead? Would we need to rush you to the emergency room of the hospital and have you ushered into the I.C.U. or C.C.U.? Gaius was "soul healthy." The life of Christ was vibrant and alive in Him. That same life is ours as we enjoy the blessings and benefits we have in Christ.

2. Walk truthfully.

3-4

- Living spiritually is intimately connected to walking truthfully. John could be “very glad” (v. 3) and “have no greater joy” (v. 4) because of what others were telling him about Gaius. The truth was in him and he lived what he believed. In doctrine and deed, Gaius was commendable, praiseworthy, a joy. There was no contradiction between his profession (talk) and practice (walk).
- “My children” may indicate John had led Gaius to Christ. John was fathering spiritual children into the Kingdom of God and Gaius was a child of his and in him he took great delight. Spurgeon knew the importance of this calling for every child of God, but especially those called to the ministry:

You may view, dear friends, the text as specifying the PASTOR’S greatest reward. “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.” The minister who is sent of God has spiritual children, they are as much his children as if they had literally been born in his house, for to their immortal nature he stands under God in the relationship of sire. No minister ought to be at rest unless he sees that his ministry does bring forth fruit, and men and women are born unto God by the preaching of the word. To this end we are sent to you, not to help you to spend your Sundays respectably, nor to quiet your consciences by conducting worship on your behalf. No, sirs, ministers are sent into the world for a higher purpose, and if your souls are not saved, we have labored in vain as far as you are concerned. If in the hands of God we are not made the means of your new birth, our sermons and instructions have been a mere waste of effort, and your hearing has been a mere waste of time to you, if not something worse. To see children born unto God, that is the grand thing. Hence every preacher longs to be able to talk about his spiritual sons and daughters.²

- However, Spurgeon was not satisfied to challenge ministers only in light of this text. He also walked into the home and looked parents straight in the eyes.

It is very grievous to see how some professedly Christian parents are satisfied so long as their children display cleverness in learning, or sharpness in business, although they show no signs of a renewed nature. If they pass their examinations and promise to be well fitted for the world’s battle, their parents forget that there is a superior conflict, involving a higher

² Ibid.

crown, for which the child will need to be fitted by divine grace, and armed with the whole armor of God. Many who ought to know better think themselves superlatively blessed in their children if they become rich, if they marry well, if they strike out into profitable enterprises in trade, or if they attain eminence in the profession which they have espoused. Their parents will go to their beds rejoicing, and awake perfectly satisfied, though their boys are hastening down to hell, if they are also making money by the bushel. They have no greater joy than that their children are having their portion in this life, and laying up treasure where rust corrupts it. Though neither their sons nor daughters show any signs of the new birth, give no evidence of being rich towards God, manifest no traces of electing love or redeeming grace, or the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit, yet there are parents who are content with their condition. Now, I can only say of such professing parents that they have need to question whether they be Christians at all, and if they will not question it themselves, they must give some of us leave to hold it in serious debate. When a man's heart is really right with God, and he himself has been saved from the wrath to come, and is living in the light of his heavenly Father's countenance, it is certain that he is anxious about his children's souls, prizes their immortal natures, and feels that nothing could give him greater joy than to hear that his children walk in truth. Judge yourselves, then, beloved, by the gentle but searching test of the text. If you are professing Christians, but cannot say that you have no greater joy than the conversion of your children, you have reason to question whether you ought to have made such a profession at all.³

- People cannot see your heart, but they can see your life. Walk, live out, day by day, the gospel truth that is in you by virtue of your union with Christ. Abide in Christ and bear much fruit (John 15).

3. **Serve faithfully.**

5-6

- “Dear friend, you are showing faithfulness...” What was he doing? Showing hospitality and entertaining brothers, traveling missionaries for Jesus sent from John. These were strangers, persons he did not know. John knew of Gaius’ service because on their return to John “they testified” (borne witness) of his love (love is an action word!) “in front of the church.” John’s response: Just keep on doing what you are doing (the gist of v. 6). In providing lodging, food, money, encouragement, prayer and standing with them and for

³Ibid.

them in spite of their “stranger status,” Gaius had honored God, the gospel and John. Sensitive to the hospitality expectations of the Mediterranean/Near Eastern world, Gaius had received these traveling teachers into his home and honored the Lord and apostle who sent them. His faithful service stands in striking contrast to the inhospitable Diotrefes, whom we will meet in verses 9-10.

4. **Minister generously.**

7-8

- These verses provide the reason why we should help those whom God has called and sent out.
 1. They “set out for the sake of the Name” (the name of Jesus; Acts 4:12; 5:40-41; 9:16; 15:26; 21:13; Phil. 2:9). This is the only mention of the Lord Jesus in 3 John. It is His Name we take to the nations. It is His gospel we proclaim. There is no other.
 2. They “accepted nothing from pagans,” unbelievers (Jew & Gentile alike). They did not attempt to finance God’s work with the world’s money. They depended, and rightly so, on the generosity and gifts of the Church. In so doing they avoided the scandal of other peripatetic (traveling) teachers who prided themselves in fleecing the countryside.
 3. “We (emphatic) ought (moral imperative) to support (“show hospitality,” *NIV*) such men so that we can be coworkers with the truth.” We may not physically go where they go, but we can go with them anyway by our support. All pray. All give support. Some are sent. All are essential as we cooperate together in the work of God. It is well said, “There is no limit to how much good you can do if

you do not care who gets the credit. God multiply the sent. God multiply the supporters.”

II. Diotrephes: A Man with a Harmful Agenda

9-10

- Third John now takes a surprising and unexpected turn. If Gaius had the right balance, a man by the name of Diotrephes did not. He was basically Gaius’ alter-ego at every turn, a man with a harmful and destructive agenda.
- Bottom line for Diotrephes: He wanted to be “boss” in the church. With perverted ambition and a dominating spirit, he opposed the apostle John and set himself up as lord in the church. If anyone took exception to his actions, that person was censured and dismissed from the congregation. Carnality personified, Diotrephes is mirrored today by many in the church who exhibit a similar lust for power. They are leaders who have a messianic complex. They have taken their eyes off of Jesus and forgotten He, and He alone, is Lord and Savior.
- Just as John commended Gaius in 4 areas, he condemns Diotrephes in 4 areas. His stern rebuke is instructive for us all.

1. Do not be driven by prideful ambition. 9

- John wrote a letter now lost to us (v.9). Its reception met a problem in the person of Diotrephes (mentioned only here in the New Testament) “who loves (cont.) to have first place among them.” The issue here was not a doctrinal problem but personal pride. He loved being first, #1, the captain of the ship, the CEO, the center of attention and the main attraction.
- Colossians 1:18 says only Jesus is “to have the preeminence,” “to have first place.” Amazingly, Diotrephes took for himself the position only Jesus should hold. Tragically many today take for themselves the position only Jesus should hold. It may be a pastor,

minister of worship or students, a deacon, prominent layman or a powerful and influential family. We do not know who Diotrephes was. We do know he was driven by prideful ambition.

2. Do not display pompous arrogance. 9

- Diotrephes would not receive John and his missionaries. Incredibly he felt the apostle had nothing to offer, nothing he or the church needed! John was old news. It was time for him to retire, move off the scene. Such arrogance would have been culturally shameful. It is spiritually unbelievable.
- Imagine you could hear today John or one who had studied with him. Would you say, “We don’t need to hear anything he has to say!” The older, wiser apostle was “kicked to the curb!” The arrogance of this behavior takes your breathe away.

3. Do not deliver perverse accusations. 10

- John did not fear personal and public confrontation when a situation demanded it (v. 10). If he comes and the implication is he will (cf. v. 14), he will confront Diotrephes, beginning with his perverse accusations (cf. 1 Tim. 5:20).
- Diotrephes was “slandering with malicious words.” He was talking nonsense, “gossiping maliciously” (*NIV*). With vicious and wicked intent Diotrephes had lied about John and slandered him. Trying to stack the deck and win the day, he would stop at nothing to get his way, even if it meant lying and ... acting with a heavy hand.

4. Do not dominate with profane activity. 10

- There is a sick, sad digression to Diotrephes’ behavior. Do you see it?
Ambition→Arrogance→Accusations→Actions.

- He acted exactly the opposite of Gaius, but then he went further. He slandered John, gave a cold-shoulder to these missionaries from John, stopped others who would have received them, and kicked out of the church anyone who attempted to help them – All because he loved himself, his agenda, and had to have his way no matter what (v.10B).
- In a somewhat funny but all too tragic comment the great Greek scholar A.T. Robertson wrote, “some...years ago I wrote an article on Diotrephes for a denominational paper. The editor told me that 25 deacons stopped the paper to show their resentment against being personally attacked in the paper.”⁴ Of course Robertson had mentioned no one by name!
- Proudful ambition: Watch your motives. Pompous arrogance: Watch your decisions.
Perverse accusations: Watch your tongue. Profane activity: Watch your actions.

III. Demetrius: A Man with a Good Testimony.

11-12

- In a wise rhetorical strategy John sandwiches evil Diotrephes between godly Gaius and a good man named Demetrius. A man like Diotrephes can be impressive, build a following and gather supporters who admire, even idolize him. John was aware of this.
- He knew we all imitate, try to be like, someone. Be careful who you admire. Make sure it is someone like Gaius or someone like Demetrius.

1. Pursue a Godly Example.

11

- John says in verse 11, “Do not imitate what is evil but what is good.” He calls Gaius “dear friend” a 4th time.
- “Do not imitate” is a present imperative. It is a word of command calling for continuous action. The word “imitate” is related to our word “mimic.”

⁴ Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1933), VI:263.

- Why imitate or mimic one (“the good”) and not the other (“the bad”)? It gives evidence to whom you belong.
- You see, “the one who does good is of God.” He gives tangible evidence that he belongs to God. In contrast, the one whose life is characterized by evil gives evidence that he is lost, that he “has not seen God.”
- B. F. Wescott said, “He who does good proves by his action that his life springs from God...”⁵
- Ultimately we should imitate Jesus (1 Cor. 11:1). He is our supreme example who will never fail us (see Heb. 12:2-3). However, we need earthly, every day examples to imitate as well. We need men and women to whom we can point our sons and daughters, our boys and girls, and say go and live like him, go and be like her! (See 1 Cor. 11:1).
- Be careful who you watch! And, be mindful of who watches you!

2. Possess a Good Testimony.

12

- Demetrius probably brought this letter to Gaius. The letter would also serve as his recommendation from John.
- A 3-fold witness is put forward to commend him (v. 12). He has a good testimony (witness): 1) From everyone, 2) the truth itself and 3) John and his community (cf. Deut. 17:6; 19:15).
- Over time people have watched this man Demetrius and found him to be a man of integrity and godliness. Like Gaius, what he believed and lived were beautifully balanced. It is doubtful everyone agreed with Demetrius’ commitment to Christ and Christian truth, but his life was above reproach and beyond question. He walked with

⁵ Brooke Foss Wescott, *The Epistles of St. John: The Greek Text with Notes and Essays* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1905), 241.

God, studied His word, loved Jesus, and loved people, both saved and lost. Here was a man I could point my sons to and say, be like him. Could I also point them to you?!

Could you point them to me?

IV. **John: A Man with a Pastor's Heart.**

13-14

- Throughout this letter John, through positive and negative examples, has painted a portrait of good, godly leadership. He has shown us the necessary balance of belief and behavior if we are to be faithful witnesses for King Jesus. He has revealed his pastor's heart. As he brings this letter to a close, that heart of love and compassion continues to shine brightly.

1. **Desire the Presence of Fellow Believers.** **13**

- With a full and burdened heart John longs to come and visit Gaius and his friends. He will embrace Gaius and he will confront Diotrephes. Pen and ink are nice, but they are not enough. Talk of online cyber churches sounds intriguing, but they can never be a substitute for a personal touch.

2. **Desire Peace for Fellow Believers.** **14**

- John hopes to “see them soon” (not later).
- He wants a face to face (literally, a “mouth to mouth”) up close and personal time together. A letter, e-mail, or text message is a poor substitute.
- He closes with an expression of “peace,” something the Diotrephes affair had robbed them of.
- John tells Gaius that, “The friends send you greetings,” they say hello. They know the situation with Diotrephes and they stand with John. This is the only place in the New Testament that believers are called friends, perhaps reflecting John 15:13 where Jesus

says, “No one has greater love than this, that someone would lay down his life for his friends.”

- Finally John says, say hello to everyone one by one, name by name. God saves us one by one. We should love and care in the same manner: one by one.