

Creeds, Deeds and the Great Commission

Insights From 3rd John

3 John 1-14

INTRODUCTION:

1. All of us individuals, churches, ministries, denominations share an invaluable possession. It goes with us wherever we go, and amazingly, it also goes where we do not go. Furthermore, what we 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 of who you are. It can involve your theology, your lifestyle, 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. They will form opinions about you.
2. Charles Spurgeon, the great British Baptist preacher in London, knew the importance of our reputation, especially for the Christian. “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.”
3. With that in mind let me raise three important questions for all of us to think about: 1) What do you think of yourself? I speak individually, as an organization and as a denomination. 2) What do you believe others think about you in those

- same three context? 3) Finally, what does God think about you? Us? As we reflect upon these 3 questions I want us to gain wisdom and insight from the shortest book in the Bible, the letter of 3 John. Only 219 words, it is written 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 our New Testament (Bible).
4. It is easy to outline the book biographically, around the men noted in the letter. As we look at each one of them, consider the issues of creeds, deeds and the Great Commission as it relates to each. Following the exposition, I will make some specific observations about Founders Ministries as a friend looking in from the outside.

I. Gaius: a man with the right balance. V. 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 areas of his life, areas in which we also should seek to excel. The balance between creed, deed and the Great Commission is evident.
- 4 times John will address Gaius, the recipient of this letter, as beloved (*agapeto*) or dear friend (*NIV*). 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.

- John's love for him is genuine; it is accompanied by truth (7X). There is nothing false or superficial here. The I is emphatic: Whom I myself love in truth.
- John is praying (cont.) for Gaius to prosper (cont.) in all things {fronted for emp.] and be in health as his soul prospers. Prosper means to have 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. His was a healthy and balanced Christian life.

Application:

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.? We must be spiritual men. Gaius was "soul healthy." The same is God's expectation for us.

- Living spiritually is intimately connected to walking truthfully (v. 3-4). John could rejoice greatly (v.3) and have no greater joy (v.4) because of what others were telling him about Gaius.

* Truth is in him (What he believed). Creed.

* He walks in truth (What he lived). Deeds.

In creed and deed, Gaius was commendable, praiseworthy. There was no

contradiction between his profession (talk) and practice (walk).

- My children may indicate John had led Gaius to Christ. John was busy fathering spiritual children into the kingdom of God and Gaius was a child of his in whom 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 that 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.”

- Beloved (3rd time) a faithful thing you do (cont.) v.5. What was he doing? Showing hospitality and entertaining brothers, traveling evangelists for Jesus sent from John who were strangers, persons he did not know. John knew of Gaius’

service because on their return to John they reported (borne witness) of his love (love is an action word!) before the church. John's response: Just keep on doing what you are doing (the gist of v. 6). Providing lodging, food, money, encouragement and standing with them and for them in spite of their "stranger status," John had honored God, the gospel and John the apostle. Sensitive to the hospitality expectations of the Mediterranean/near Eastern world, John had received these traveling teachers into his home and honored the Lord and elder who sent them. His faithful service stands in striking contrast to the inhospitable Diotrefes we will shortly meet.

- Verses 7-8 provide the reason why we should help those whom God has called and sent out. Three quick observations:
 1. They went forth for his name's sake (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 in 3 John.
 2. They took nothing from the gentiles (*Ethnikon*), 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 receive ("show hospitality," *NIV*) such in order that we may become fellow workers for the truth. We may not physically go where they go, but we can go

with them anyway by our support. Some give support. Some are sent. Both are essential as we cooperate together in the work of God and the fulfilling of the Great Commission. William Carey had the English Baptist in his corner. Adoriam Judson had New England Baptist and the advocacy of Luther Rice on his support team.

Gaius was a man with the right balance as a Great Commission Christian!

II. **Diotrephes: a man with a harmful agenda.** V. 9-10

- 3 John now takes a surprising and unexpected turn. If Gaius was a commendable Christian, a man by the name of Diotrephes was not. He was basically Gaius' alter-ego at every turn. Bottom line: he wanted to dominate the church. With perverted ambition and an autocratic 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. And please note: not a word is said about an aberrant theology. For all we know he was orthodox in every point of doctrine. His creed may have been fine! His deeds were not. He was a grotesque hindrance to the Great Commission!
- 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 the first. 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 attraction .
- Col. 1:18 says only Jesus is "to have the preeminence." 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.

- Diotrephes would not receive (have nothing to do, *NIV*) with John (v. 9B). Incredibly he felt the apostle had nothing to offer, nothing he or the church needed! Such arrogance would have been culturally shameful. It is spiritually unbelievable.

Illustration:

Imagine you could hear John today instead of me (!), or one who had studied with him. Would you say, “Nah! We don’t need to hear anything he has to say!” Diotrephes did. However, he met his match in the apostle John.

- 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).
- Prating (cont.) against us – 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.
- There is a sick, sad digression to Diotrephes’ behavior.
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 (W.P. 6:263), “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.” Of course Robertson had mentioned no one by name!
- Proudful ambition: Watch your motives. Pompous arrogance: Watch your decisions. Perverse accusations: Watch you tongue. Profane activity: Watch your actions.

III. Demetrius: a man with a good testimony. V. 11-12

- In a wise rhetorical strategy John sandwiches evil Diotrephes between godly Gaius and good Demetrius. A man like Diotrephes can be impressive, build a following and gather supporters who admire, even idolize him.
- John 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.
- John says pursue a Godly example (v.11).
- Beloved (4th and final time).
- Do not imitate (*me* with the pre. imp.) – mimic.
- What is evil (bad) but what is good. Why? It gives evidence to whom you belong.

- Good = From God. Evil = Has not seen (W.A.R.) God. Wescott said, “He who does good proves by his action that his life springs from God...”
- Ultimately we should imitate Jesus (1 Cor. 11:1). He is our supreme example who will never fail us. 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!
- Be careful who you watch! Be mindful of who watches you!
- 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 (W.A.R.) a good testimony (Witness): 1) From all, 2) The truth 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, his creed and his deeds 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 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?
- 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 creed and deeds if we are to be faithful witnesses for King Jesus.

Observations for my friends with the Founders

Words of Praise

1) I appreciate your purpose statement and abiding concerns very much. “The purpose of Founders Ministries is the recovery of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in the reformation of local churches. We believe intrinsic to this recovery is the promotion of the Doctrines of Grace in their experiential application to the local church particularly in the areas of worship and witness. This is to be accomplished through a variety of means focusing on conferences and including publication, education, pastoral training and other opportunities consistent with the purpose. Each of the ministries will be developed with special attention to achieve a healthy integration of doctrine and devotion.”

Our abiding concerns:

- We desire to be orthodox without being obnoxious.
 - We want to be confessional, yet contemporary.
 - We are Southern Baptist, though not sectarian.
 - Our goal is to be doctrinally and devotionally balanced.
- 2) I appreciate your robust confessionalism and commitment to the gospel and theological integrity.
- 3) I appreciate your call for regenerate church membership and integrity in church membership long before it was cool and long before we passed a resolution affirming it. We still have a long ways to go, but you helped get the conversation started.

- 4) I appreciate your emphasis on church discipline as an essential mark of a true New Testament church. We must recapture this important jewel of the church.
- 5) I appreciate your commitment to expository preaching that is biblical, theological and practical in its practice.
- 6) I appreciate your unwavering faithfulness to biblical inerrancy.
- 7) I appreciate your unwavering faithfulness to penal substitution.
- 8) I appreciate your unwavering faithfulness to a gracious salvation.
- 9) I appreciate your unwavering faithfulness to God's sovereignty and providence.
- 10) I appreciate your unwavering faithfulness to the glory of God in all things.

Words of Caution

- 1) Do not make your Calvinism and devotion to "The Doctrine of Grace" such a high priority that you cannot cooperate with other confessional, evangelical Baptist in Great Commission causes. Be careful not to lead with these banners, good though they may be. I believe Calvinism is an important issue and one we should lovingly and respectfully debate and discuss. However, it is not the most important issue in terms of our ability to cooperate within the Southern Baptist Convention family. Keep things in balance.
- 2) Take the "high road" in your rhetoric even if others don't. Don't be rude and condescending when you criticize other Southern Baptists with whom you disagree, even if they do not respond in kind. Simply be Christ-like.
- 3) Avoid being or coming across as a theological elitist. Hold firm to your convictions but do so with grace, humility, and kindness.

- 4) Be known as a Great Commission Calvinist, a Carey, Judson, Spurgeon, Calvinist who shares the gospel promiscuously and is passionate in calling people to trust Christ. Do not overreact to the abuses of easy believism, the sinners prayer and altar calls. Be a fervent and urgent seeker of souls. Do the work of an evangelist! (2 Tim. 4:5).
- 5) Cultivate a passion for the nations and go to them. Be a Great Commission Christian who is part of a Great Commission church.
- 6) Get involved in healthy church planting. Make your church a church planting church and train your people to think and live like missionaries regardless of their location or vocation.
- 7) Do not be known more for being a follower of John Calvin than Jesus Christ. Pay careful attention to who and what you talk about the most.

Please hear my heart this morning. I absolutely do not think those of you who sit in this room are to simply be tolerated as red-headed stepchildren, country cousins whom we pray will not show up at the family picnic, or a weird minority in the Southern Baptist Convention. If I have ever sounded like that, then please forgive me. I see you as a significant and important part of the family. I want you to know that I sincerely want to partner with you and all Southern Baptists who love the Lord Jesus, the gospel and the nations. I don't want to run you out of the Southern Baptist Convention and I will stand against those who might try. You are real Southern Baptists who are Calvinists, who represent a vital and important stream in our history. My prayer for you, for our convention: let's wed in a healthy balance our creeds and our deeds for the glory of God and the good of the nations as we seek to fulfill the final marching orders of our crucified

and risen Savior. Let us love the truth, walk in the truth, and share the truth til Jesus returns.