

**Four Men and Their Reputations**  
3 John 1-14

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## FOUR MEN AND THEIR REPUTATIONS

3 JOHN 1-14

### INTRODUCTION:

1. 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 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.
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 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? As you reflect upon these 3 questions I want us to examine the shortest book in the Bible, the letter of 3 John. Only 219 words, this postcard epistle has been too often neglected to the detriment of the church. Like 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon [and possibly 2 John], 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). Though Revelation certainly fits best as the finale of Holy Scripture.
4. 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.
5. 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.

### **I. Gaius Is A Commendable Christian.**

**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 4 areas of his life, areas in which we also should seek to excel.

### **1. Live Spiritually.                    V.1-2**

- 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.
- 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 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.

#### **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 live spiritually. Gaius was "soul healthy." The same is God's expectation for us.

### **2. Walk Truthfully.                    V. 3-4**

- Living spiritually is intimately connected to walking truthfully. 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).

- \* He walks in truth (What he lived).

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 in whom he took great delight. The great 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.

- Oh but Spurgeon was not satisfied to challenge ministers only in light of this text. He also walked into the home, looked parents straight in the eyes, asking them, concerning their children, what really mattered to them? 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 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.

**Application:** People cannot see your heart, but they can see your life. Walk about truthfully.

### 3. **Serve Faithfully.** V. 5-6

Beloved (3<sup>rd</sup> time) a faithful thing you do (cont.). 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 of 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. 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 apostle who sent them. His faithful service stands in striking contrast to the inhospitable diotrefes.

### 4. **Minister Generously.** V. 7-8

These verses provide the reason why we should help those whom God has called and sent out.

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) 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.

#### **Application:**

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."

Be a commendable Christian.

## II. **Diotrefes Is A Conceited Christian.** V. 9-10

- 3 John now takes a surprising and unexpected turn. If Gaius was a commendable Christian, a man by the name of Diotrefes was not. He was basically Gaius' alter-ego at every turn. Bottom line: 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, Diotrefes is mirrored today by many in the church who exhibit a similar lust for power.

- 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 Proudful Ambition. V. 9**

- John wrote a letter now lost to us. 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 top dog, the head honcho, the captain of the ship, CEO, 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 youth, a deacon, prominent layman or a powerful and influential family. We do not know who Diotrephes was. We do know he was drive by proudful ambition.

**2. Do Not Display Pompous Arrogance. V.9**

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

**Illustration:**

Imagine you could hear John next Sunday, or one who had studied with him. Would you say, “Nah! We don’t need to hear anything he has to say!” Diotrephes did.

**3. Do Not Deliver Perverse Accusations. V. 10**

- John did not fear personal and public confrontation when a situation demanded it. 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 heavy handed.

**4. Do Not Dominate With Profane Activity. V. 10**

- There is a sick, sad digression to Diotrephes’ behavior. Ambition→ Arrogance→Accusations→Actions.
- He acted exactly the opposite of Gaius but then 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.
- 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.”]

- “Be not like proud Diotrephes who loved to be the boss, for when we glorify ourselves, the Lord’s church will suffer loss.”
- Proudful ambition: Watch your motives. Pompous arrogance: Watch your decisions. Perverse accusations: Watch your tongue. Profane activity: Watch your actions.

### III. Demetrius Is A Consistent Christian. 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 Demetrius.

#### 1. Pursue A Godly Example V. 11

- Beloved (4<sup>th</sup> 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. Yet we need earthly, every day examples to imitate as well.
- We need men and women to whom we can point our sons and daughters, boys and girls and say go and live like him, like her!
- Be careful who you watch! Be mindful of who watches you!

#### 2. Possess A Good Testimony. V. 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. 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. Everyone is amazed! 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 the lost. Here was a man I could point my sons to and say, be like him. Could I also point them to you?!

### IV. John Is A Caring Christian. V. 13-14

- Throughout this letter John through positive and negative examples has painted a portrait of good, godly leadership. John would say to us:

## LEADERSHIP

IS....

IS NOT....

THE ABILITY TO MAKE WISE DECISIONS.	THE ABILITY TO MAKE SNAP DECISIONS.
THE ABILITY TO INFLUENCE OUR FRIENDS TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT.	THE ABILITY TO MANIPULATE OUR FRIENDS TO DO WHAT WE WANT THEM TO DO.
THE ABILITY TO DISCERN THE HEART OF OUR LEADERS.	THE ABILITY TO JUDGE OTHER PEOPLE HARSHLY.
THE ABILITY TO ACT AFTER PRAYER.	THE ABILITY TO ACT WITHOUT PRAYER.
THE ABILITY TO HEAR THE VOICE OF GOD.	THE ABILITY TO SPEAK IN GOD'S PLACE
THE ABILITY TO BE FIRM.	THE ABILITY TO BE STUBBORN.
THE ABILITY TO ACT QUICKLY.	THE ABILITY TO ACT WITHOUT THOUGHT..
THE ABILITY TO WAIT ON GOD.	THE ABILITY TO PROCRASTINATE
CONFIDENCE	COCKINESS
CALM	ERRATIC
DECISIVENESS	THE INABILITY TO CHANGE.
HEARING WISE COUNSEL	LISTENING TO ANYONE WITH AN OPINION.
PATIENT	STAGNANT
COMPASSIONATE	GIVING IN
CARING	CONTROLLING

- This godly leader now brings his letter to a close in a manner similar to 2 John. What closing words of wisdom he leaves them.

### 1. Desire The Presence Of Fellow Believers.

V. 13

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

### 2. Desire Peace For Fellow Believers.

V. 14

- John hopes to come soon (not later).
- He wants a face to face (mouth to mouth) up close and personal time together. A letter or email is a poor substitute.
- He closes with an expression of peace, something the Diotrephes affair had robbed them of, **Romans 5:1** – “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” **Philippians 4:9** – “The



things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.”

- Our friends greet you – 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, [“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.”]
- Finally, say hello to everyone one by one, name by name. God save us one by one. We should love and care in the same manner: One by One.

**Conclusion:**

**People see, people do** “People do what they see. They’ll forget your sermons but follow in your footsteps.” –John Maxwell (Quoted in *Ministries Today*, Mar/Apr 1997, page 70)

**Do you really want to be a leader?** “Christ says we are to take the lowest [spot], but we like to take the higher. And we have a lovely rationalization for doing so because every time we take a bigger place we say that we can have greater influence for Christ. But his is not the Lord’s way. Leadership is not to be sought; Leadership is to be waited for...to the extent that we want power among men, to that extent we are in the flesh and the Holy Spirit has no place in us. To the extent that I demand leadership and want leadership, to that extent I am not ready for Christian leadership.”-Francis Schaeffer in 1971 (Quoted in *Compass*, Sum 1997, Page 26)  
James said, “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” (James 4:6; Prov. 3:34) Humility is the way of service. Humility is the way of salvation. To be saved you must humble yourself before the cross of Jesus Christ, admit you cannot save yourself, and trust yourself completely to the Lord and the God who can.