

The Heart that God Blesses

3 John 9-14

July 8-9, 2017

The letters of second and third John are the shortest books in the Bible. Written by the famous apostle John, they nevertheless carried a lot of weight since, at this point, John was the oldest surviving disciple. He had been with Jesus, seen the miracles, witnessed the resurrection, and seen the spread of the gospel throughout the entire Roman Empire.

These are more personal letters than his other writings. The letter of 3 John is written to the beloved Gaius, who has a personal relationship to John.

John commends him for his maturity in Christ and for his hospitality in welcoming traveling missionaries, saying, *“These men go out for the sake of the Name and we ought to support such men that we may be fellow workers with the truth.”*

But there was trouble in the church and John is ready to call it out and to name names. There was a fellow in the church named Diotrophes who was a genuinely difficult person. The problem was in his character. He loved to be first, he loved to be over others, he was even saying some mean-spirited things about John, even though he is an elder statesman.

In contrast, there is Demetrius, most likely the one carrying this letter to Gaius. John commends him

highly; he has received a good testimony from everyone and from the truth itself and from John.

The contrast between Diotrophes and Demetrius is dramatic. We have a say in the matter of our character and we get to choose if we're going to be more like Diotrophes or Demetrius. The content of our character is important because the heart that honors God brings His blessings.

I. Don't Love to be First

- Verse 9 - *I wrote something to the church; but Diotrophes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say.*
- Favoring yourself at the expense of others is the very definition of selfishness and it comes from the selfish nature we were born with. In other words, you don't have to teach a child to be selfish, you have to teach a child how to share.

Illus – To see the favoring of self in living color, all you have to do is go to any softball game in America.

Philippians 2:3-5, Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the

interests of others. Have this attitude in you which was also in Christ Jesus...

Illus - Two boys were hungry for breakfast and started fighting over who would get the first pancakes. Finally, mom stepped in and said, “Now what would Jesus do if He were waiting for the pancakes?”...

- John knows a little bit about this because it was the brothers, James and John, that asked for high positions when Jesus came into glory...

Mark 10:41-45, Hearing this, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John. Calling them to Himself, Jesus said, “You know that those who are rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

A. Desire to be changed

- The name Diotrophes literally means, ‘nurtured by Zeus.’ How appropriate. It seems he was brought up nurtured by the

gods of this world. The problem is that his Christian faith hasn't changed his worldly character.

- God sent His Son to seek and to save that which was lost, to reconcile sinners to Himself. In other words, we come to Jesus "Just as I am," but God doesn't want us to stay just as we were. His intention is to bring transformation.

Revelation 21:5-6, He who sits on the throne says, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write this down, for these words are faithful and true."

2 Corinthians 5:17, Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

- Being transformed is a process. It's glorious to have the gift of eternal life, to be born again in Christ, but we're still living in this earthen vessel, our flesh, and it still gives us fits.

Illus - You can wake up in the morning with worship playing on your alarm, have a beautiful time in prayer just saying good morning to the Lord, get in your car and turn up the worship, and then as soon as you turn onto the highway and someone cuts you off, it's over.

- Transformation comes when your soul longs for something greater. In other words, it takes life to defeat death.

App - Have you ever felt that you would always be a victim of your circumstances? That the course of your life is fixed; that there is no way to break out of the cycle of failure? That your flesh would always have the last word?

- You can be transformed, you can be made new, you can be victorious, but this is what *God does* when the glory of His presence ignites your soul.

Illus - My father was an alcoholic and it would have been easy to follow in his footsteps. I was thankful I was one of the youngest kids because it gave me a good view; I could see destruction all around me. At the same time, my mom made sure we went to church. My soul was experiencing something better; God was bringing revival.

Isaiah 43:18-19, “Do not call to mind the former things, or ponder things of the past. Behold, I will do something new, now it will spring forth; will you not be aware of it?”

B. Let God be in control

- Diotrophes wanted to be in control so he became difficult and mean-spirited, trying to keep himself in the place where he was first by knocking other people down; he even unjustly accused the apostle John.
- Many people sow chaos and chords of discontent when they insist everything be done their way. But they reap what they sow, and what comes back to them is broken relationships.
- Diotrophes is difficult and mean-spirited, even unjustly accusing John; and what will come back to him? The famous apostle John is intending to come there and call attention to his deeds which he does.
- When God is in control, when you trust that God knows how to bless your life, you reap the joy of pleasant relationships and peace in the heart.

Matthew 16:25, “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.”

- God is just way better at blessing your life than you are. Trust that His ways will bless you. Those who give grace will receive it;

those who give kindness will receive it; those who give mercy will receive it.

Matthew 5:7, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.”

C. Let God’s Word direct your life

- Verse 9 - John wrote something to the church, but Diotrophes would not accept what he says.
- Diotrophes had to be first, therefore, nothing else could be first, including the word of God. In other words, by insisting on being first, he could receive nothing from the word of God. He was unteachable.
- When someone insists on having their own way, there’s no room in their life for God’s way, and yet His ways are higher and better.
- The contrast between Diotrophes and Demetrius reminds me of the contrast between King Saul and David in the Old Testament.
- Saul insisted on doing things his own way and would not receive the instruction of the Lord, so God made it clear to Saul that he had selected someone else to be king in Israel – David.

- But Saul would not accept it and insisted that things had to be his way; he had to be in control, even to the point of trying to take David's life.
- In contrast, David refused to take control. Though he knew he had been chosen by God is King, he would not place himself there.

Illus - When Saul threw a spear at David, he could've thrown it right back, but refused. At one point, David and his men were hiding in a cave when Saul came in to relieve himself. He could easily have taken Saul's life, but refused.

1 Samuel 24:11-12, "Now, behold, my father, see the edge of your robe in my hand! For in that I cut off the edge of your robe and did not kill you, know and perceive that there is no evil or rebellion in my hand, and I have not sinned against you, though you are lying in wait to take my life. May the Lord judge between you and me, and may the Lord avenge me on you; but my hand shall not be against you."

Jeremiah 10:23, I know, O Lord, that a man's way is not in himself, nor is it in a man who walks to direct his own steps.

II. Stay True in Difficult Places

- Verse 12 – Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself; and we also bear witness, and you know that our witness is true.
- There are many missing details, but it's clear that John sent Demetrius to carry this letter to Gaius, and into the very church where Diotrophes was being difficult.
- Demetrius was a good man and has been walking steady in his faith and John knows that he will stay true in difficult places.

A. God blesses faithfulness

- Demetrius gained his reputation the old-fashioned way, he earned it. He received a good testimony from everyone, John wrote.
- This should be our goal as well; to walk so steadily in your faith that you receive a good testimony from everyone around you. This is the kind of character that others recognize, whether you're at work, at home with your family, or at church.
- The challenge is that a man with a good testimony is now going to encounter a man who likes to be in control and is willing to use

despicable, mean-spirited methods to get his way.

- He made false accusation against John. He was bullying people by saying that if anyone received John's men he would put them out of the church.
- Does Diotrophes have the advantage? Can evil prevail? Can those who use worldly ways defeat the ones who are good?

Illus - When I was growing up, back when professional wrestling was actually real, I used to become so distraught when the bad guys got away with so much foul play.

- What should Demetrius do? What would you do?

1 Peter 3:9-12, Do not return evil for evil or insult for insult, but give a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. For, "The one who desires life, to love and see good days, must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking lies. He must turn away from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and His ears attend to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

B. May truth itself be a witness in your behalf

- Demetrius received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself, John wrote.
- When a person walks in the truth long enough, the truth itself becomes a witness in his behalf. In other words, the testimony of the truth gave authority to his life. This, we should all desire.

Illus - Many years ago, a self-proclaimed 'prophetess' had come from another city and appeared in the church, wanting to have a place of authority. I sent a word that I expected the same testimony about her that we see here in 3 John about Demetrius. Would even her home church be a witness on her behalf? She quietly left without saying a word.

- Each of us have a say in our character. These three men in this letter are examples of the different directions our lives can take.
- Gaius walks in the truth and he helps people on their journey through life and his soul is prospering.
- Diotrophes loves to be first and is mean-spirited to have control and preeminence over others.

- Demetrius received a good reputation from everyone and from the truth itself.
- We have a say in our character; I want the character that God blesses.