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Recommended Citation

Vaught, W. O., "A Church in Serious Trouble" (1979). *Vaught Sermon Notes: John*. 5.
https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/vn_john/5

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A CHURCH IN SERIOUS TROUBLE

A STUDY OF 3 JOHN

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We will not read the Scripture as we usually do in these studies, but I will ask you to read each verse with me as we come to it in this short study of this Third Epistle of John.

Verse 1 "The elder unto the well-beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth."

Here John introduces us to the first of three men he will mention in this short letter. The name of this man is Gaius. John here called himself an elder, and this means exactly the same as Bishop. They both are words that refer to the pastor of a local church. The greek word is presbuteros and this is the word from which we get Presbyterian. John was pastor in Ephesus and was an apostle. Here John mentions a great man and he had a great name. This is a famous Roman name. You recall that Caesar was named Gaius Julius Caesar. This name Gaius could only be used of an aristocrat. Gaius was an aristocrat in the service of the Lord. John called Gaius "beloved," not only to indicate that he was a born again man, a member of the family of God, but was also an outstanding man in this unnamed church. Then John said of Gaius, "Whom I keep on loving in the truth." This is the present, active, indicative of agapao. Please notice that the basis of the love John had for Gaius is "In the sphere of doctrine." Gaius was a doctrine man and John loved him for his stability and doctrinal knowledge.

Verse 2 "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth."

This verse not only lets us know that Gaius was a believer, but he had continued to be faithful in service in spite of the fact that two major problems had developed in his life. Gaius was a great successful businessman in this part of Asia Minor and he had had some business reverses. Also he had come upon days of ill health. John is here telling Gaius that he hopes he will be prosperous again and hopes that he will regain his health. In spite of these two major problems, the loss of health and the loss of success in business, he is still a faithful and devoted Christian. John says of him, "Even as thy soul prospereth." Gaius had enough doctrine in his mind that he did not allow business reverses and the loss of his health to defeat him.

Verse 3 "For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth."

We see that in spite of business disappointments and the loss of good health, Gaius is still a very happy and victorious man. Gaius is a man of doctrine and he applied this doctrine to his every day living. Gaius was a leader in his church. This church was near Ephesus but John does not give us the name of the church. Some people had come down from this unnamed church to Ephesus and had told John about their problem. They were without a pastor and they needed help from John. Gaius had sent the pulpit committee down to see John to get some suggestions from him. John asked this pulpit committee how Gaius, who was one of John's converts, was getting along. John then told them how happy he was to have this good report of Gaius. This good report encouraged John. The word "truth" all the way through this little chapter refers to doctrine. John rejoiced greatly because Gaius had

doctrine in his mind and had not allowed his problems to get him down. "Even as thou walkest in doctrine" refers to the fact that he not only had doctrine in his mind, but he put it into practice in his every day living. Gaius was spiritually successful and this was a great encouragement and inspiration to John.

Verse 4 "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."

In this verse John actually speaks for all pastors. Nothing made John happier than to know that one of his converts had enough doctrine in his mind so he was able to meet adversities. If in times of economic depression and in times of the loss of health we show forth a dominant faith, then we are able to make a tremendous impact on others around us. This convert of John's is an illustration that we do not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

Verse 5 "Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers;"

Here in this verse we have two different words for "do." The first word for "do" is poieo and it means to accomplish something by following a principle. It is used here with the word faithful and it means that Gaius followed the principle of faithfulness. Because Gaius had doctrine in his mind, he was able to live faithfully and was able to apply doctrine to experience. Faithfulness in little things leads to faithfulness in the big things. "What thou doest faithfully" is a present, active, indicative and this means that this was the principle of his life. He lived like this all the time. Then the second word for "do" in this verse is ergazomai and it is in the aorist tense. This refers to those points of time when opportunities for service arose, Gaius never failed to come through with flying colors. The middle voice means that Gaius was benefited by this service and the subjunctive mood means that he did this of his own free will because this was the mark of his character. Therefore, we conclude from these verses that Gaius was a great man, oriented to doctrine.

Verse 6 "Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well:"

As a result of all these things, the leadership of Gaius operated on the basis of spirituality. The word for "charity" is the strong word for love and it really means that this man Gaius was filled with the Holy Spirit. We need to correct this next phrase for the little word "if" is not in the greek and should be translated "You do well when you send them forward." In other words, it is faithful doctrine people like Gaius who really inspire missionaries and cause them to go forth in service. The thing that sustains missionaries is doctrine and faithfulness.

Verse 7 "Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles."

"They went forth" is a description of these faithful missionaries. "They took nothing from the Gentiles" is an idiom for the fact that they didn't depend on the contributions of unbelievers in order to do their work. This is a warning to us that we are to support our own missionaries and not depend on the world to pay our bills and do our work.

Verse 8 "We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellow-helpers to the truth."

This is a verse which reminds us that we are to support those who go out to carry the gospel. The word "receive" also carries the idea of "underwrite." We are to underwrite their expenses and provide for all their physical needs. The words "that we might be" come from ginomai and this means to become something that we were not before. Before our conversion, we didn't have any real concern about providing for the missionaries. After our conversion, this concern falls upon us and we desire to care for their needs. The word fellow-helpers means partners. We are to be their partners in the sharing of doctrine. What a glorious privilege this is for us. We are to give prayer support, financial support and have spiritual fellowship with those who carry the gospel for us. Doctrine will stabilize us so we will do these things. All of these things describe for us this man Gaius. He was indeed a very great man and we need to emulate him in our daily living.

The next verses introduce to us Mr. Troublemaker.

Verse 9 "I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not."

This bird did everything he could do to distract others and split the church. Notice that he had a very striking name. It sounds good as we pronounce it, Diotrephes. But wait until you know what that name means. It means one who has been nourished by Zeus. Now Zeus is Jupiter. Jupiter is the head of the pantheon of all the Greek gods. Diotrephes was a wheeler dealer and he wanted others to think well of him. He was just full of ego and approbation lust. So the question is this--Are you nourished by Zeus or are you nourished by doctrine? John is presenting us a contrast between this great doctrine man Gaius and this big, loud-mouthed, church wrecker Diotrephes. Gaius was nourished by doctrine and Diatrophes was nourished by Zeus. John tells us that he wrote a recommendation for a pastor for their church. John knew this man would make a good pastor, but big headed Diotrephes would not accept John's recommendation. This was Mr. Smarter-Than-Everybody-Else Diotrephes and he refused to take John's recommendation. Evidently Diotrephes was chairman of the deacons or some other leader in the church and he turned a deaf ear to the recommendation of John. For that reason this church had no pastor. Diotrephes was standing in the way of the operation of this church and he was just a thorough going rat. He was an obstructionist and fat-headed and was determined that this church was not going to get out from under his control. You will find that kind of people in almost every church. These are people who can't cut it themselves, but they will cut to pieces anyone who can. You probably have met a few people like that in your lifetime. We read of this bird, "He loved to have the preeminence among them." This was his approbation lust. He wanted everybody in the church to kow-tow to him. "Received us not" means that he would not receive John's recommendation. John had the authority of an apostle but Diotrephes refused to accept that authority.

Verse 10 "Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church."

John here reminds this church that when he pays them a visit, he will set this troublemaker Diotrephes straight. This big troublemaker was about to destroy this church and John was going to dethrone him when he made them a visit. Notice what I call the thundering diction of the King James Version--"prating" means to malign, to criticize, to undermine authority of a leader. This man was doing this with malicious words. "And not being content" is the participle John used here. He wouldn't even let the pastor John had recommended come before the church and preach a trial sermon. This bird was a real giant of a troublemaker and went so far that he would throw people out of the church who didn't agree with him.

Verse 11 "Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God."

John here gives a principle and this is the principle he had used in recommending this pastor to them. I am sure it was a bad day for Diotrephes when this letter from John was read in the church business session. But he had it coming to him and as we say, "John really cleaned his plow." John's recommendation to this church was, "Follow not the evil one" and in this statement, he was referring to Diotrephes.

Verse 12 "Demetrius hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself: yea, and we also bear record; and ye know that our record is true."

We now come to the one John had recommended to this church to be their pastor. His name was Demetrius. Demetrius had outstanding recommendations. These recommendations were based on the fact that he knew doctrine. "Hath good report" is a perfect tense and it means this was the man's reputation for a long time. Everybody knew this about him. The passive voice means that he had received this good report from the doctrine he had received. The indicative mood means the reality of this good reputation he had made for himself. This was a good doctrinal preacher that John had recommended. John told this church that he had seen this man in action and he could vouch for him that he would make them a good pastor. They needed a good doctrine man and this man met those specifications.

Verse 13 "I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee:"

John had many other things to discuss with this church congregation. There was one problem in the church but he didn't want to discuss it in this letter and would let that wait until he made them a visit.

Verse 14 "But I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be to thee. Our friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name."

John planned to visit them and at that time he would discuss this problem with them. So here was one loud-mouthed, fat-headed believer who had just about taken over this church. I believe this is the purpose the Holy Spirit had in mind when he prompted John to write this one chapter book. John was reminding all Christians and all church members not to allow an egotistical troublemaker to get in the driver's seat in a local church. Even as great as Gaius was, Diotrephes had just about wrecked the church and even refused to let Demetrius come and preach a trial sermon. So, we end with the statement, every local church needs a pastor.