

A Tale of Two Men

(3 John 1-15)

1/11/17; Wed PM Pine Grove

Introduction

When the final numbers are counted, it is likely that close 36,000 people died in traffic accidents last year in the US...

Now, there are plenty of causes of car accidents each year..

Sometimes, they are caused by weather conditions.

Sometimes, there is mechanical failure.

Sometimes, they are caused by road hazards....

But the consistent #1 case of traffic accidents is the person behind the wheel of the car....

Sometimes, they are distracted and that leads to accidents...

Sometimes, they are slow to respond to other drivers...

But every year, many accidents and many fatalities result from drivers who over correct their cars...

And what I mean by this is their car either drifts left or right, and instead of easing off the accelerator, many drivers hit the brakes and attempt to jerk the car back onto the road...

The usual result of that is a car that ends up flipping over and over or ends up in a head on collision with a car that is approaching...

Over correcting is a consistent cause of accidents and traffic fatalities each year...

But it is our fallen human nature to over correct.

We see a problem on the road and we think the solution is to steer as fast in the opposite direction...

The same is true in life often...

We see a problem and our minds think that the solution is to run in the opposite direction as fast as we can..

This is called over correcting in life and it happens very often in the lives of believers...

You see, the word of God points out problems in our lives...

God's Word is very powerful and convicting and as we read it, we see more and more sin in our lives...

But often times, we turn from that sin so strong that we find sin on the opposite side as well...

This is going to be the case in 3 John tonight as we read John's 3rd and final letter to the church...

Now if you were here last Wednesday when we looked at 2 John, the problem in that letter was a lady who was too being too hospitable to false teachers...

Remember, the latter part of the 1st century was not a day where there were hotels and bed and breakfast inns on every corner...

Most travelers spent the night with other families as they travelled from place to place in the 1st century...

And for Christians, this type of set up was perfect for the gospel..

As people travelled from town to town, believers were often the most hospitable to these overnight guests as a way to spread the gospel...

They would not only give testimony to Christ in their kindness to the stranger..

They would also be afforded the opportunity to talk these people about the gospel of Jesus Christ...

And for the most part, this Christian hospitality was a good thing..

But John noticed a problem with it in certain situations and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he wrote 2 John as a personal letter to a lady who was showing hospitality to false teachers...

She was a lady that maybe discernment or even the knowledge that false teachers were a real threat to the church...

And she had been welcoming them into her home, and by doing so, she had become an accomplice to their false teaching...

And so John wrote her to ask her not to accept false teachers into her home who didn't have a correct view of Jesus Christ...

In fact, John told her not to even offer these evil men a greeting but to send them on their way...

And the point of 2 John was simple...

Not everyone who claims to be of God is actually for God..

Not everyone who claims to teach about Christ teaches the truth about Him...

And therefore, the people of God must be very discerning in who they help and support..

And 2 John was and is a great reminder of that truth...

Now as people read John's 2nd letter, there were all sorts of reactions...

Some read it and did nothing, and still extended hospitality and help to everyone without any examination....

Some read it and did just as the letter suggested and began to be more discerning about who they extended support to....

Still others read it and said, "Who is John and why should I even listen to him.."

And others read it, and stopped practicing hospitality all together....

In other words, these people over corrected...

They didn't respond in a balanced way...

They went from the sin of showing hospitality with no discernment to the sin of not showing hospitality at all...

They saw they were running over the white line on the right, so they tried to jerk the car back on the road but crossed the yellow and crashed into a truck...

And both of those are things not pleasing to God...

So, John is going to write 3 John to correct people who refused to listen to him and refused to show hospitality at all...

And I think these two letters illustrate how hard it is to be balanced in the Christian life...

But also the importance of balance and not running from one extreme to the next....

So, let's look at John's 3 letter tonight....

I have divided this short letter into 3 parts...

I. Generous Gaius (1-8)

II. Disobedient Diotrphe (9-10)

III. Simple Summary (11-15)

So let's begin in verses 1-8 with...

I. Generous Gaius (1-8)

Verse 1...

1 The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.

2 Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers. 3 For I was very glad when brethren came and testified to your truth, that is, how you are walking in truth. 4 I have no greater joy than [a]this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.

John open 3 John in a very similar way to the opening of 2 John..

He introduces himself as the elder who is writing to a man named Gaius...

Again, we have a personal letter from John to someone in the church...

John is an elder, an authority figure...

A man who walked and talked with Jesus...

A man who had been taught by Jesus and remained faithful to Him for all these years...

John was a man who had pastored churches and taught Christians for many years...

John was the foundation of the church in human terms...

And so when he speaks, people listen...

But John had not let that kind of respect go to his head...

He is a humble man even in his old age...

He is a kind hearted man full of love for the church and for God's people in the church...

And he begins out this letter to Gaius in a most kind way...

Now, we know nothing very little about Gaius...

It is clear that he was believer....

It is assumed that John knew him personally..

It is evident that Gaius was a man obedient to God in his personal life...

But we don't know his age or his occupation or his family...

We simply know from verse 1 that John loved him because Gaius loved the truth...

And a common love of the truth is what joins Christians together...

We learned that from 2 John as John told that lady that he loved her in the truth...

But Gaius didn't just love the truth, he lived the truth by his life....

In verse 3, John notes that he had gotten good reports about Gaius walking in the truth...

And nothing thrilled John's heart more in his old age than to hear of his children walking in the truth...

It seems that John had influenced Gaius at some point in his life, so much so that John considered him a son in the faith...

And so John opens the letter by flooding Gaius with encouragement...

And praying in verse 2 that Gaius would continue to prosper spiritually and even physically...

And that is a good reminder to us to pray for one another spiritually and physically...

For Christians who are living right and obeying God and being good gospel witnesses, we should pray for their health...

So they can physically go out and continue to live out their faith and be a great witness for Christ...

And Gaius was that sort of believer...

He was preparing spiritual and growing in the Lord, and John points out one area of his life in verses 5-8 where Gaius was excelling...

5 Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and [b]especially when they are strangers; 6 and they have testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. 7 For they went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. 8 Therefore we ought to [c]support such men, so that we may [d]be fellow workers [e]with the truth.

While the lady who got the letter in 2 John needed some counsel on how she practiced hospitality, Gaius received nothing but compliments on how he practiced hospitality...

John tells him in verse 5 that he is acting faithfully in his love for the his fellow believers, especially to those fellow believers who were strangers...

Though John doesn't tell us, Gaius was as hospitable as the woman in 2 John but he was also discerning...

He examined everyone to see what they taught, but once he had determined they were faithful teachers..

Gaius poured out his love on these believers whether he knew them or not...

And let's face it, it is easy to show hospitality and generosity and kindness to Christians we know, but Gaius showed it to Christians that he didn't know...

If a Christian came to Gaius' church, he was examined and tested...

But once it was deemed that he was a true believer, Gaius showered him with blessings...

Food, bed, love, care....

Gaius was so hospitable that even the church recognized his gift and had reported it to John, according to verse 6...

And John told Gaius that he was doing well to take this Christian strangers in and then send them on the way in a matter worthy of God....

And why is this hospitality so commendable?

Well, for one it was difficult on Christians in the 1st century...

Especially on men who were traveling evangelists....

These men had sacrificed their way of life to travel from city to city preaching the good news of the gospel...

They had put their families through difficulties to follow God...

They had sacrificed jobs and therefore the traveling teachers were dirt poor...

They couldn't afford any kind of inn or overnight lodging...

They had put their lives on the line for the gospel and trusted God to provide for their needs...

And Gaius was a man that God was using to provide for these teachers...

And what a blessing that is to the teacher, but also to Gaius...

Who was a very real partner in the gospel going into the world...

In fact, he was a very important part....

Without people like Gaius, these teachers could not have done it...

And without us today, missionaries could not do it...

As we sacrifice to give to them, we support the gospel going to the ends of the earth...

As we write the check, we are just giving money to the church, we are supporting families that are in the field and in our churches preaching the gospel to the world...

And this sort of hospitality and support isn't optional for the Christian....

John even says in verse 8...

We ought to support such men so that we become fellow workers with the truth....

In other words, when you find faithful teachers, invest in them...

Give to them...

Encourage them...

Support them financially...

God doesn't bless Christians with wealth so they can buy more toys for themselves...

He blesses them so that they can use that wealth to support Christian workers and the spread of the gospel....

Many of you that John Andrew was born in California....

He was delivered by Michael Frields, an OBGYN was a member of the church we attended and a supporter of the seminary...

Yet, Dr Frields was the most generous doctor imaginable...

He had delivered over 13000 babies in his career and over 700 babies that were born to seminary student...

Yet every deliver he performed for seminary students was done FREE of Charge...

We never got a bill from his office....

The only we received from him was the words...

“I am blessed and privileged to be able to do this for families that are training for ministry....”

At roughly \$10000 per birth, Dr Frields had supported Christian teachers to the tune of 7 million dollars and that doesn't even count what he gave to the church or other Christian organizations....

And though Dr. Frields has never left Burbank California, his support makes him a fellow worker in the truth and God blesses that and him and his business...

If you remember from last week, those who support false teachers take part in their evil deeds...

But the reverse is also true...

Those who support true teachers, they take part in their good deeds and become fellow workers in the truth....

Though his hospitality, Gains was a fellow worker in the truth and had brought John much joy...

Now, let's move from generous Gaius to....

II. Disobedient Diotrophes (9-10)

If Gaius was an example of balanced hospitality, we are about to meet someone who over corrected the car steering wheel to the danger on the opposite side of the road...

Let's read verses 9-10...

9 I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept [f]what we say. 10 For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, he himself does not receive the brethren, either, and he forbids those who desire to do so and puts them out of the church.

In verse 9, John turns from his commendation of Gaius to his condemnation of a man named Diotrephes...

Apparently, John had written a previous letter to the church where Gaius attended...

And though it wasn't a Spirit inspired letter, it was a letter that instructed the church much like 2 John...

It probably mentioned the fact that not all teachers are created equal and that some must be examined before hospitality is offered..

However, this didn't sit well with Diotrophes...

Diotrophes may have been someone like the lady in 2 John who had been receiving any and everyone into his home without much discernment...

And he had a choice when John wrote to be careful about who you should show hospitality to...

Choice #1 was to listen to John as an authority figure in the early church and re-evaluate his hospitality to others....

Choice #2 was reject John's authority and continue to do what he had been doing...

Or choice #3 was to spite John and his teaching by refusing to show hospitality to anyone...

This is like the kid who gets corrected by his friends and picks up his toys and goes home...

He isn't humble enough to take correction, so he lets his pride take him to the other extreme..

And Diotrophes was filled with pride...

John even writes in verse 9 that Diotrophes loved to be first...

And he resisted authority....

So what did he do?

Well, instead of easing the tires back on the road and being more discerning, Diotrophes jerked the wheel to the other side and stopped offering hospitality to anyone...

John says in verse 10 that he did not receive the brethren and even stopped other believers from doing it as well...

In fact, he stopped practicing hospitality and he even put people out of the church who wanted to show hospitality...

Diotrophes was a man that is a cancer to a church...

He was prideful...

Power hungry...

Resistant to authority...

He was not a teachable man...

He was a stubborn and spiteful and hostile man, and John tells Gaius that he is coming to correct Diotrophes when he comes for a visit.

Now, what do we learn from Diotrophes?

We learn how not to show hospitality...

We learn how not to respond to authority.

We learn that the best response to correction is not to go from one extreme to the other but to listen to authority and respond with submission and respect.

Diotrophes was not a balanced or submissive man.

It was his way or the highway, but God is not pleased with such stubbornness...

So, let's move to the final section of 3 John, and this is John's reaction and instruction to his readers...

III. Simple Summary (11-15)

Verse 11....

11 Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. The one who does good is of God; the one who does evil has not seen God. 12 Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself; and we add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true.

13 I had many things to write to you, but I am not willing to write them to you with pen and ink;

14 but I hope to see you shortly, and we will speak face to face.

15 Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.

John ends the letter to Gaius with shortest but clearest sermon..

By telling Gaius and the church to not act like evil men, but to imitate the actions of god men..

And he reminds them and us that those who practice evil are not of God, while those who practice good are of God...

This is the once again one of John's great tests of salvation...

If you confess Jesus as Lord but practice evil, you show that your confession is false...

If you confess Jesus as Lord and your practice doing the right thing, you prove that your confession is true...

I am sure that both Gaius and Diotrophes had made confessions of faith in Jesus...

Yet one was real, and the other was nothing but hot air...

And the way to tell was the actions of both men...

One was generous Gaius, and the other was disobedient Diotrophes...

And John tells his readers to follow the example of Gaius and not Diotrophes...

And John closes the letter with the mention of a 3rd person in this letter, and his name is Demetrius...

Most likely, Demetrius is the one who brought the letter from John to Gaius...

And John's recommendation of him to Gaius would serve to prove the trustworthiness of the letter...

Demetrius was a man with a good testimony like Gaius, and it is possible that Demetrius was going to stay at Gaius' church for a while...

So, John is not endorsing Demetrius as a trustworthy messenger but as a trustworthy church member should he plan to stay with Gaius...

And then John closes the letter with a simple sign off expressing his desire to come see Gaius...

And passing along greetings from those who were with John....

Conclusion

So, what are some lasting principles from 3 John for us tonight?

1) Be generous with your hospitality to true believers.

This would apply to believers that you don't know well but who show by their actions and words to be true believers...

Christians are a true brother and sisterhood...

God uses believers to bless other believers in this world...

If we don't show hospitality to each other, no one else is going to show hospitality to us..

We live in a day where people shut their homes up and their lives and their pocketbooks to other believers....

But that shouldn't be so...

And that leads to Principle #2..

2) Be generous with your financial support to true teachers of the word.

When you see a true man of God or a true ministry of God or a true seminary of God or a true missionary of God, support him or her or it..

If you had bought 100 shares of Microsoft stock in 1986 when it went public for \$21 share, you would now have \$1.4 million by 1999..

For a \$2100 dollar investment, you would have been a millionaire in 13 years...

If only you've have known, right?

People spend 1000s of dollars each day on investment advice hoping to hit it big in the next Microsoft or Google or new upstart company...

And they take that advice and then invest 10s of thousands of dollars in these new companies with the promise of guaranteed return...

Let me share something with you tonight...

There is but one investment guaranteed to grow forever and ever...

And that an investment in the gospel of Jesus Christ...

Long after Microsoft and Google and Facebook are gone, the kingdom of God will still be steady and sure...

And you need to be investing in it now...

You need to be supporting men and women of God who are sharing the gospel around the globe...

You need to be supporting good churches and Christians schools and pastors who do it right by the Bible...

You may see those as investments with no return but don't fool yourself...

When it comes time to look at his your investment is grown, you want to have put as much money in the work of God as possible...

Gaius gave and Gaius will get.

Diotrophes was stingy and God will be stingy with him...

One final thought of 3 John...

#3) Imitate people who do it right.

Surround yourself with people who live to please the Lord.

John told his readers to imitate what is good and not what is bad...

In order to imitate what is good, you need to find people who are striving to live God pleasing lives and then follow their example...

So many people don't have role models of the Christian life that much them to live better and more righteous lives...

Don't let that be you...

Find someone who does it right and ask them to help you and encourage you and teach you...

Put good examples around you and do what they do as they seek to do the things that please the Lord..

It is easy to find people who make you feel better about yourself...

But find people who make you see the need to keep pressing on and who push you to be better and do better...

John told his readers....

Be like Gaius and he told Gaius to be like
Demetrius, but he also told them to avoid the exam-
ple of Diotrophes...

May we have wisdom to know who to follow and
who to avoid...

Let us pray...