

## Christian Hospitality and Truth

As I mentioned last Lord's Day, we were going to look at the last of John's epistles, the third epistle of John. It is a very personal letter in which he mentions three men, Gaius [gah·ee·os], Diotrephes [dee·ott·ra·fees] and Demetrius [day·may·tree·os], who belong to the same church community. Two John commends and one he rebukes. In fact, it is so personal of a letter one might wonder why it ended up in the canon of Scripture. The answer to this question becomes clear as this morning's message unfolds. Third John emphasizes the truth, some form of the word "true" appears seven times. **John's letter to Gaius, inspired by God, is based on the same eternal truth the church is always built on.** John affirms in all of his writings the importance of bearing witness to truth, of walking in truth, of being fellow workers of the truth, and having a good testimony by truth. At the foundation of everything in the church is God's truth. That was our emphasis in the second letter and it certainly spills over here in 3 John. This third letter is about how to love and be hospitable in the truth.

Now as I told you when we studied 2<sup>nd</sup> John, in the ancient world hospitality was a necessity and important within the culture. There were few hotels or inns, and there certainly were no resorts like those you find today. People were largely dependent upon somebody opening their home to them as they traveled. On the day of Pentecost, you will remember, there were all kinds of pilgrims in Jerusalem who had come to celebrate the Passover. Many stayed through Pentecost. When Peter preached, three thousand were saved. Three thousand were brought into

the church of Jesus Christ, which was the only church that existed on planet earth at that time and the church was located in Jerusalem. Many of these new believers didn't want to go back to where they came from because they now were part of the body of Christ and the place they could meet, be discipled and have fellowship was with the Apostles in Jerusalem. So the church is suddenly much larger, those that had come to Christ on the day of Pentecost numbered over 3000 but prior to Pentecost, in the upper room there had only been about 120. How many believers there were prior to Pentecost is uncertain, but it was a relatively small number. How many new believers were from Jerusalem is unknown. Now all these people who had come to Christ on the day of Pentecost had to be absorbed by the small number of believers. As many as, three thousand people suddenly needed to be cared for and their needs met. That's why later on the Apostle Paul took a collection in order help the church support the new believers who chose not to go back to where they came from. They wanted to live among believers and be part of Christ's church and the church was in Jerusalem.

Only a short time later many of the **believers were driven from Jerusalem by persecution and the church expanded from city-to-city and country-to-country.** **During this rapid growth and expansion believers took the gospel with them as they went.** As they went out to spread the gospel they were dependent upon the believers in towns they traveled to. When they arrived in a new town they needed food, a place to rest and even financial support.

This wasn't really anything completely new in the ancient world. Hospitality was a duty even in the secular society. Travelers and strangers were supposedly under the protection of Zeus Xenia [**zē-nē-ə**] who was known as the god of hospitality.

The ancient world understood that there was a deity that required one to take care of traveling strangers. If they wanted to have favor with Zeus they needed to be kind to strangers. The ancient world even had a system of friendships for people from other locations. Families in different parts of the country undertook to give each other's members hospitality in their country when these people traveled there. It was reciprocal arrangement common especially along the trade routes. People carried a token to identify themselves to their hosts. The host would know the token and open up his home to show hospitality. If the pagans did that, how much more important should it be for the Christians to do this? That is why when you look at the New Testament you see this emphasis on hospitality. The Apostle Peter wrote, **“Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. <sup>10</sup> As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.”** (1 Peter 4:9-10) The Greek word for hospitality means, “love of strangers.” It's just basic to the Christian responsibility of hospitality to open up our home to other believers who may be strangers to us, but are sent by believers we know. The author of Hebrews instructed believers and the church, **“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.”** (Hebrews 13:2)

Paul wrote to the believers in Rome saying, **“Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.”** (Romans 12:13) In 1 Timothy chapter 3 verse 2, you have the qualifications for an elder, **“Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, **hospitable**, able to teach.”** All of these qualifying traits are important including hospitality. Paul also wrote to Titus that an elder is to be “hospitable.” (Titus 1:8)

Elders, pastors, shepherds needed to be the first to open their homes and embrace believing strangers in order to set the example for everybody else. This is why when Joyce and I remodeled our home we did so in a way to be a place of peace and rest for traveling missionaries and pastors. We have had many come. Caring for the brethren in Christ is an honor and privilege. Serving and caring for fellow Christians should be done with a heart of love that desires to be hospitable.

At the time of John's letter to this church and for us today hospitality is a responsibility, a basic expression of Christian love. In fact, in the early church, unlike today, the home was the center of everything, absolutely everything. As you read the New Testament you will not find church buildings written of. As the authors of the New Testament finished God's inspired writings, of which John is the last, there hasn't been a church building built. They met in homes for prayer. They met in homes for fellowship. They met in homes for the apostle's teaching. They met in homes for evangelism. They met in homes to break bread and to have the Lord's Supper. They met in homes to worship. They met in homes for personal discipleship. They even met in homes for preaching. This is what Luke was referring to when he wrote; **"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."** (Acts 2:42) Everything happened in the homes of believers. The home was the church, the place where the brethren gathered and so it was very natural for them to open their homes to the traveling believers who came their way, even though they didn't know them.

### **Hospitality Limited**

Hospitality is one concern behind both the letters of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> John. As we already learned in 2<sup>nd</sup> John, you have to be very careful whom you welcome into

you home and church. God's truth and the Lordship of Christ is essential ground on which your hospitality is built. Hospitality is a form of Christian love. We are called to Christian love, to love other Christians in a special and embracing way, but we have to be very careful. Why? John wrote of why in his second letter, in verse 7, "For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist." Because of the many deceivers whom claim to be Christian have gone out to the churches John continues, "Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward. <sup>9</sup> Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. <sup>10</sup> If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, **do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting,** <sup>11</sup> for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works." (2 John 7-11) These are strong words, words of warning. Christians and churches were to hold true to the teachings of Christ and show hospitality to those who are believers, but, but, John is warning them to steer clear of those who are deceivers and false teachers.

Believers are to be careful, discern the difference between truth and attractive lies, and act accordingly.

It doesn't mean you shouldn't let an unconverted person in your home. You are not, however, to harbor and aid a false teacher. You are not to open yourself and the church to those who come to secretly destroy. Jesus warned, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves." (Matthew 7:15) Second John looked at the negative, who not to receive. Third John is the positive, who to receive. So together we get a great insight into how we deal with those who say they represent Christ and who come to us for support and help and with needs. There

are some we reject and there are some we accept.

## Hospitality Commended

Now another way to look at 3 John is to look at it in comparison to not only 2<sup>nd</sup> John but also to 1<sup>st</sup> John. First John was written generally to the whole church. It was written to all Christians; in general, telling them how they could test the validity of their faith and how they could be sure they were saved. The tests were given for the church to use; doctrinal tests and moral tests. The second epistle narrows the audience and it's written to a family within the church or written in a narrow sense to a church. The family is identified as the chosen lady and her children, and the children of her chosen sister is also mentioned in the last verse. John begins with his first epistle, which is broad and general to all the family of God. The second epistle is to a family and their church. The third epistle is to an individual, to the beloved **Gaius [gah·ee·os]** and the church he serves. The first epistle calls for the Church to hold fast to God's truth, the second calls for families to be loyal to God's truth and the third calls for individuals to be loyal to this same truth.

In 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> John truth and love are always related. Hospitality is also related to truth. However, hospitality does have limits. It is limited to those who are in the truth. This is where 3 John comes in both in the extending and receiving hospitality. John writes to **Gaius** and the people of the church, follow as I read beginning in verse 5 of 3 John, **“Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, <sup>6</sup> who testified to your love before the church.** You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. <sup>7</sup>For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the

Gentiles. <sup>8</sup>Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.” The church provided for these missionaries or itinerate teachers, who were known to John but strangers when they arrived at this local church. The church’s hospitality was a testimony to the love they had for Christ by showing love and care for these individuals and they also showed their love to the greater broad community of the church. Hospitality helped make sure the love of Christ and His gospel was being preached. It expressed the love to strangers that all Christians are to do. It often amazed me that Joyce and I could land in a distance country with different customs and language, and quickly develop friendships and brotherly love because of our common love of Christ as Lord and Savior and the love of the Word of God. **God’s truth transcends borders, languages and customs.** Initially, they offered hospitality because we were sent by those they trusted. So it was with those coming to **Gaius’** church. This group of men taught the apostle’s teaching, the truth of God. Then they came to trust these missionaries, just as the people came to trust Joyce and me and love us as we served and taught and loved them consistent with the Scripture. We demonstrated that we knew, believed and lived the truth of God and shared His truth with love and grace and mercy given to us by God through His Holy Spirit.

### **Hospitality Refused**

First John warns of false teachers coming from outside the church. He warns that these false teachers are not to be let into the church. Here in 3<sup>rd</sup> John the problem has arisen from within the church. It is hard for me to imagine this - since I have personally never experienced problems within the church created by follow Christians. I am sure the same is truth for you. So I assume you have never

experienced any conflict within the church either. My tongue-and-cheek is meant to show that the problems we experience are exactly the same as those experienced by the early church and this is why these short letters are included in the Bible because they explain how to deal with truth and falsehoods, love and sin as God would want us to.

John apparently addressed the problem in a prior letter, but it did not correct the problem. Reading verse 9, “I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes [dee·ott·ra·fees], who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority.” What is unclear by this short letter is what is Diotrephes’ role within the church. Is he an elder that is opposing both John and Gaius or a member of the church? We do not know, but what we do know is that Diotrephes does not recognize John’s authority or that of Gaius. John gives us at least one reason for Diotrephes’ attitude, “~~who~~ he likes to put himself first”. Ah, so, Diotrephes’ felt life within the church community was to be focused on him instead of focused on Christ’s love for others. Diotrephes has taken advantage of John not being physically present and takes opportunity to oppose Gaius. He has not received correction by John’s prior letter and he shows no repentance and there is no change in his selfish behavior. To support and justify his disobedience Diotrephes does not recognize John’s authority and wants to claim authority for himself. Gaius may have been unable to stand up to Diotrephes so John sent a letter and now sends another to express his support of Gaius and extend his authority to him.

Any authority an elder has within a local church is given through Christ and that pastor is a servant of Christ. Christ gave John’s authority to him and he is extending his authority to Gaius. It is God who has set what is right and wrong for

Christ's church. What is to be taught and the parameters of Christian life are put forth in the Bible and as Christians we are to be obedient and not just obedient, but obedient because we are grateful that God has saved us and because of our love for Christ.

John sets the stage to deal with this disobedient [Diotrephes](#) face-to-face. But until John can get there he puts forth the problem in the form of a letter to give [Gaius](#) encouragement and the people of the congregation the framework to challenge this self-serving trouble causing person who is demonstrating disrespect to God, Jesus His Son and the authority of an appointed elder. In an effort to position himself to not have to submit to God's appointed authority found in His apostle John, [Diotrephes](#) tries to threaten the brothers and sisters with being put out of the church if they do not do as he insists. **“And not content with that (defying John and Gaius' authority), he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.** (3 John 10) It would be interesting to know if [Diotrephes](#) accepted correction at some point or not. At this point his actions are that of a self-important bully. Church discipline has always been difficult, working to help people become submitted to Christ. It is difficult to practice church discipline in today's environment because many people, self-serving people, will just leave and go create problems in another church. However, this does not mean the church and its leadership should not do what is right before the Lord. This is John's message to [Gaius](#) in his letter.

### **Hospitality Advocated**

John moves on to his closing instruction after having dealt quickly as a follow up to his first letter concerning [Diotrephes](#). He commended [Gaius](#) and rebuked

**Diotrephes** to tie these actions together he writes in verse 11, “Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God. <sup>12</sup>Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself. We also add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true.” John is saying I do what is good by imitating Christ and teaching only the truth of God as my witness has testified to. So John and **Gaius** are doers of good and are true witnesses to Christ. On the other hand **Diotrephes** in his self-serving ambition does not serve Christ or the brethren, which means he is sinning and in his sinful behavior, the truth is, he is doing evil and therefore, does not know God in a way that has caused him to surrender and serve. John wrote in his first letter, “Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.” (1 John 2:18) The church often rallies when attacked from outside, but it is the attacks from within that are difficult and insidious. The church must be aware of false teachings, holding true to the Gospel living it out with love, grace and mercy. These are made evident by the practice of hospitality. The remnant, the brave and the faithful hold fast to the living out of God’s Word, His whole Word. **Demetrius** has received the instructions from John and from the scriptures and is giving a good testimony by imitating good.

This brings us to Canyon Bible, are we living to serve God and His chosen? Do we practice bountiful hospitality towards fellow Christians? Is both our worship service and our homes warm with love towards others and inviting to those who come? Are we living for Christ’s glory or our own? Do we look for opportunities to serve or watch others serving?

It is my desire to preach the Word of God faithfully to hold onto His truth and to fill you spiritually that you might serve others in Christ's name and with His love and grace and mercy. Let it be said of Canyon Bible that we are living the whole Word of God, not just the parts that we find convenient. Let our practice of love, exhibited in generous hospitality, causing others to want to know Jesus! As our Lord Jesus commanded, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’<sup>31</sup> The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:30-31) My beloved if we live this out, everything else will fall into place because of our deep love for Christ and each other.

As John wrote to close his short letter, and as I now say,<sup>15</sup> “Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends, each by name.” Let's spend time greeting each other in fellowship and talking of the truth of God found in Christ. Then let us go from this place out into the world sharing the truth and love of Christ for this is right and hospitable to a dying world.