

Shepherding Notes

3 John

By Caleb Bunch

This letter is deeply personal. John refers to Gaius as his beloved, and then proceeds to call him beloved at the beginning of each new paragraph. Not only that, but he also cares for his entire being. "Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul." Dear church, I join with John and say that I pray for your health and for your souls. I say that genuinely, just as John did. God does not downplay your physical health. He simply does not elevate it to the matter of ultimate significance either. Please imitate John and pray for one another, that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous person might have great power as it is working.

Truth Is Magnetic

What does it mean that John loves Gaius in truth? It means that their common bond is the truth itself. Ray Van Neste describes it this way: "Real friendship is always rooted in a common bond, whether fleeting or significant. This friendship is rooted in ultimate truth." Truth is magnetic. If others have the truth, you will be naturally attracted to that person. You will desire to encourage and support and care for that person. You have common goals and purposes. You share an understanding of ultimate reality, so you should share in terms of earthly priorities. If you share in Christ but have nothing else in common, you have everything in common. You have more in common with a complete stranger from another nation who does not speak your language than if you had an unsaved identical twin.

Gaius: Love in Deed

We see that kind of love lived out in Gaius' life. Verse 5 reveals this mindset: "Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, who testified to your love before the church." Gaius recognized the truth was in these brothers, so he opened his home and cared for them. He did so even though Diotrephes rejected them and would not permit them to stay or speak to the church. Some scholars believe that John is writing this encouragement because Diotrephes used Gaius' actions as cause for kicking him out of the church. John promises to address it: "So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church." (vs. 10)

So Gaius not only knew the truth — he loved those who also knew the truth. He was carrying out exactly what John said in 1 John 3:18: "Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth."

Diotrephes: The Antithesis of Love

Diotrephes is displaying the antithesis of love. John describes him as someone who "likes to put himself first." I am thankful that we have a Savior who did not put Himself first. What about you? Has this season revealed selfishness in your heart? Are you only interested in your own comfort? Or are you propelled by the gospel to truly love others? Love always has a cost. If it didn't, it wouldn't be love. It requires your time and effort and energy.

"If you share in Christ but have nothing else in common, you have everything in common. Truth is magnetic — it bonds us at the deepest level."