

The Church is Full of Characters

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[0 : 00] So we come now to our Bible reading, and you'll find that at the end of the New Testament, in John's third letter, 3 John.

That's on page 1026 of our church Bibles. We're delighted to have Terry McCutcheon here, the Executive Director of Hope for Glasgow.

I can always tell when Terry's going to preach, because the lectern is just a wee bit lower than what it is for when Willie preaches. There you go. But great. Terry, we're delighted that you're here.

And Terry's going to take us through this short but crucial letter. So, 3 John. And we begin reading at verse 1.

Hear the word of the Lord. The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth. 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.

[1 : 07] For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

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.

You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles.

Therefore, we ought to support people like these, that they may be fellow workers for the truth. I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority.

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.

[2 : 31] Beloved, do not imitate evil, but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God. Whoever does evil has not seen God.

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.

I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink. I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. Peace be with you.

The friends greet you. Greet the friends, every one of them. Well, amen. And may God bless to us. This is his word. I invite you to take your Bibles and to turn with me again to the letter of 3 John, which you will find in page 1026 of the Pew Bible.

3 John. And as you turn that page up, a brief prayer. Father, we pray that what we know not, you would teach us.

[3 : 48] What we have not, you would give us. And what we are not, through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, you would indeed make us. In Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. I remember a number of years ago, a good friend of mine was getting a new bathroom suite fitted in his house.

And I phoned him up a few days later just to ask how the work had gone. And also to inquire if the plumber that he got in to do the work was any good. As my mother-in-law needed a bathroom suite fitted.

And you don't want to disappoint your mother-in-law. And my friend said to me, Terry, I wouldn't let that guy anywhere near your mother-in-law's bathroom suite. In fact, I wouldn't let him anywhere near her house.

He was an absolute nightmare. And the work he done was absolutely shambolic. But my friend went on. There is another plumber. A guy that I had to get in to fix all the shoddy work of the first guy.

[4 : 52] Now this guy. This guy is excellent. And I would thoroughly recommend and trust him to do the work. And any other work that might need him done in the house as well. The first guy.

Don't let him into the house. The second guy. I thoroughly recommend and recommend this guy. Welcome him and trust him to do the work.

Now friends, I share this story this morning. I hope as a helpful way into this morning sermon. The letters of 2 and 3 John are actually letters that really go together.

And so in order to get our bearings. If you would just turn back a page to the letter of 2 John. And I'll just make some comments to help us get the context. At the heart of 2 John is a letter that the Apostle John wrote from the elder, the Apostle John.

And in that letter was a warning. A warning that he gave to ensure that deceivers, false teachers were recognized by the church.

[5 : 55] And then having been recognized by the church, they would be rejected. And rejected robustly by the church. 2 John verse 10. Now remember, in those days the church met in houses.

House churches. So effectively, don't receive them into your church. So church leaders have a responsibility. Not only to preach the truth.

But also to protect the church from false teachers and deceivers. And so that means then friends. There are church leaders have to be very careful.

About who is given access to the pulpit. Or any platform to teach in the church. They must give attention to the hymns that we sing when we are gathered together.

All hymns are full of theology. And some hymns are full of bad theology. It wouldn't be the first time that the preaching of the word has been totally undermined by the singing of a dodgy hymn immediately following the sermon.

[7 : 11] Church leaders must be aware of the books and the offers that they promote. And what books are sold in the church book room. They must be very careful about the conferences that they promote.

Do not let them into the house. Do not let them into your church. Why? Because they will flood your church. Not with water like a dodgy plumber.

But with something far, far worse. That will have devastating and destructive consequences amongst your congregation. So that's 2 John.

But what we have in 3 John is instruction and encouragement again from the elder, the apostle John. To welcome and support genuine Christian workers.

3 John verse 7. For they have gone out for the sake of the name. Verse 8. Therefore, we ought to support people like these.

[8 : 14] And verse 6. And to do so in a manner worthy of God. So at the heart of 2 John, recognizing and rejecting the deceivers.

While at the heart of 3 John, welcoming and supporting genuine Christian brothers and workers. And as we study this letter together this morning, friends.

I suspect that some of us. Some of us will be encouraged greatly. Encouraged greatly by the practice and the importance of the ordinary. And others amongst us may be greatly challenged.

Greatly challenged and warned. As we are convicted of a mindset. A mindset that is all too common amongst us. The church is full of characters.

3 John is full of characters. 3 of them to be exact. The letter revolves around these 3 men. So I would like to take each of them in turn. So firstly what we have in verses 1 to 8 is Gaius the faithful.

[9 : 17] Gaius the faithful. John is really excited about Gaius. But what is it about Gaius that has got John really excited?

Well it is what others have told him about Gaius. Look with me at verse 3. For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth.

Or as the NIV puts it. It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell me of your faithfulness to the truth. Truth is the setting for the whole of the introduction to John's letter.

The truth here is the gospel. The faith. So verse 1. To the beloved Gaius whom I love in the truth. Verse 3 speaks of Gaius faithfulness to the truth.

And walking in the truth. And by the time we come to verse 4. It is others who are walking in the truth. As we read these verses friends.

[10 : 19] You might begin to think that John's a narrow minded type. Obsessed with doctrine and creeds. But when we read verse 2. We learn just how rich John's truth is.

Verse 2. 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.

It's such a comprehensive verse isn't it? Taking in the whole of life. As John prays for his dear friend. He prays for the physical. That you may be in good health.

He prays for the material. That all may go well with you. I suppose taking in Gaius' work life. And he also prays for his spiritual life.

As it goes well with your soul. And friends I think this verse is a great verse. To measure our praying by. Don't you agree? We do pray I'm sure for people's material physical needs.

[11 : 22] But do we ever get to praying for people's souls? That it might go well with their souls. Not that the material and the physical don't matter. They do.

Our heavenly father is interested in these things. But do we ever get to praying for people's souls? Or maybe the challenge of this verse is the exact opposite for you. Maybe you do pray for people's souls.

But you never ever get to praying for their physical or material well-being. Well John here. John here prays for all three. Which is right I'm sure.

I'm not going to argue we're an apostle. But John knows what matters most doesn't he? Look with me at verse 4. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

The children in this verse could be his converts. Or it could be that John led Gaius to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Or it may be that as he is writing as a pastor to those that God has entrusted to his care.

[12 : 25] But either way I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth. And this verse friends has got to be the deepest concern of any minister I'm sure.

The deepest concern of any small group leader. And it has to be right surely that this is the deepest concern of any Christian parent. I have a good friend and she was born to Christian parents.

A fine Christian couple. And her father was a Presbyterian minister. He was a fine, fine godly man. And my friend, well, she'd obviously been baptized as a baby.

But some years later when she was living away from home, she had come to personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And she was going to be baptized by full immersion, the heretic.

And she tentatively told her father, fearing that what she was about to do would upset her father. Her father's response. He sent her a card.

[13 : 28] And written in the card was 3 John verse 4. Friends, whether you're a parent, whether you're a small group leader, whether you're a minister, the concerns are the same, aren't they?

But I wonder if you notice that as we move into verses 5 to 8, all the talk that we've had about truth in verses 2 to 4 is now reflected in love.

Verses 5 to 8. Look at verse 3. For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth.

The testimony that he heard in verse 3 is put this way in verse 6. Who testified to your love before the church. You see, friends, that's why John is confident Gaius is walking in the truth.

Because of the love he is showing. And the love he is showing turns out to be all about hospitality. That's what showed Gaius was walking in the truth.

[14 : 38] In those times, the church was dependent on travelling teachers. But where would these travelling teachers stay? Well, certainly not the travel lodges of the day, as they were really seedy, really dodgy places.

Well, it's obvious then, isn't it? They would stay with the Christians in the places that they were visiting to preach. But friends, this was still a big ask for Gaius and people like him.

Because these brothers, verse 5, were also strangers. Gaius had never met them before. The love that he had shown that was reported back to John, verse 6, was love that was shown to strangers who were his Christian brothers.

And John explains, verse 7, that they have gone out for the sake of the name. That is, for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ. And this is the total opposite of those from 2 John, verse 7.

For many deceivers have gone out into the world. Those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. These guys in 3 John 7 are genuine Christian brothers.

[15 : 48] And what we have here is an encouragement to welcome true brothers. See how John finishes off verse 6. And you will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God.

Now what would that look like? Fed, for sure. Watered, I would imagine. Rested, definitely. Helped financially, most probably.

Why? Well, verse 7. For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Accepting nothing from the pagans.

Not necessarily refusing help from the Gentiles and the pagans. Not refusing help, but not looking and expecting them to help you.

They were genuine Christian missionaries to be supported by Christian people. Not like the other religious teachers of their day who looked to be paid by anyone and everyone who listened to them.

[16 : 57] I suppose a wee bit like a religious busker being paid by every passerby. People should hear the gospel for free. A Gentile, a pagan, shouldn't pay to hear the gospel.

These men have gone out for the sake of the name. Therefore, those of us who know the grace of the name, we have an obligation to support the missionary cause.

So what did Gaius do to merit a place in the Bible? Well, he let missionaries use his spare room. He gave them bed and breakfast. And he gave them a couple of quid to get the bus to the next town.

And look what John called it to the end of verse 8. Being a fellow worker for the truth. Now friend, maybe you've heard someone say it or maybe you've said it yourself.

I can't really do much for the gospel. Well, I suppose I could pray. And I suppose, well, I have a little money and I could give that to the work of the gospel.

[18 : 02] And maybe, well, maybe the odd time I could have somebody run for dinner or somebody run for lunch. Well, friend, the next time you think like that, the next time you feel inadequate like that, remember Gaius.

Gaius the faithful. That's what Gaius did. And it was, verse 8, being a fellow worker for the truth. It put Gaius right up there on the front line with the missionaries, sharing in the work.

We sang earlier in our service, we all are one in mission. We all are one in call. Our varied gifts united by Christ, the Lord of all.

Friends, don't ever forget the power of hospitality. No, everybody can be a missionary in a foreign land. But who here, who here can't be hospitable?

Do you have a front door? A table? Do you have chairs? Have you got money for a loaf of bread and money for a packet of cold meat? Then if you have, congratulations, you've just qualified to serve in the most ancient of ministries, the ministry of hospitality.

[19 : 14] And in serving in the ministry of hospitality, you can join the ranks of Abraham, who fed not just angels, but the Lord of angels. You can join the ranks of Mary and Martha.

They opened their house for Jesus. And he in turn opened the grave of their brother Lazarus. You can join the ranks of Zacchaeus, who welcomed Jesus into his house and around his table.

Wouldn't you love to be the one who opened their home to Jesus? Wouldn't you? Well, friend, you can be. The Lord Jesus Christ said this, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.

Friends, as you welcome strangers to your table, you are welcoming God himself. When you open your door to someone, you're sending them this message. You matter to me and you matter to God.

You maybe think all that you're saying is, come on, run for a cup of tea. But what is communicated to your guest is this, they are worth the effort. Friends, always remember this.

[20 : 26] It's not about the spreading the table or the quality of your china or how clean even your house is. The thing that matters most is the open door and the shared fellowship.

These are the things that really matter. Gaius, the faithful. But secondly, John moves on and this character, this character is very different from Gaius.

So we have in verses 9 and 10, Diotrephes, the fraud. Diotrephes, the fraud. Diotrephes is clearly a local church leader.

I think maybe he is Gaius' minister. But it does seem a little strange that John would have to write to tell Gaius what is going on in his church.

Some have thought maybe Gaius was unwell, explaining John's prayer of verse 2 or that maybe Gaius lived quite a distance away from the church. Well, whatever the reason, there is no denying the problem of Diotrephes.

[21 : 30] Verse 9, John writes, I have written something to the church. But Diotrephes, who likes or who loves to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority.

Some have tried to, I suppose, understand and defend Diotrephes' actions here, saying something like this, well, you know, maybe as the time of the living apostles on the earth was coming to an end, most probably at the time of the writing of 3 John, the apostle John was the only living apostle.

Some have said, well, you know, maybe as the time of the living apostles here on the earth was coming to an end, maybe Diotrephes was just trying to get ready for that time, that period, when the apostles would no longer be around.

And so he was going alone, an independency. Well, friends, an independency that will have nothing to do with the apostles' ministry is a very dangerous independency.

Don't you agree? John goes on, verse 10, not only does he blank the apostle John, but he also bad mouths the apostle.

[22 : 44] Verse 10, so if I come, I will bring up, I will make public what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us, gossiping maliciously about us, presumably Diotrephes was doing this because he wanted others to reject John as well and to look to him instead.

And not content with that, verse 10, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He resents their intrusion onto his patch. And he also stops.

He blocks those who want to welcome the brothers. And he puts them, he boots them out of the church. He blanks and bad mouths the apostle John. He blanks the brothers.

He blocks others from welcoming the brothers. And he boots them out of the church if they dare to welcome the brothers. It's absolutely terrifying. Absolutely terrifying to think that a church leader would behave like this.

There is no theological issue with John or with the brothers. But behind it all is this wee phrase that appears in verse 9. Diotrephes who likes or who loves to put himself first.

[24 : 01] No doctrinal heresy is mentioned. None of the dangers that we were warned of in 2 John welcoming and endorsing deceivers. No. No.

Here there is just no welcoming and endorsing of true believers at all. Because Diotrephes loves to be first. Not that there is anything unusual about this.

This is just human nature in the raw isn't it? Loving to be first. I know that is me in my most sinful moments. That is certainly true of me. Especially round about dinner time.

Serve me first. Diotrephes loves to be first. first. And friends when you get that in leadership you have a leader who must be the centre.

He must have the spotlight and he must call the shots. And friends I'm afraid to say it's all too common. And ultimately loving to be first is the sin of Satan.

[24 : 59] Isaiah 14 verse 14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds and I will make myself like the most high. The sin of Satan also the sin of the teachers of the law whom the Lord Jesus Christ rebuked so strongly.

Beware of the scribes said the Lord Jesus Christ who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces and have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honour at feasts who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers.

They will receive the greater condemnation. Friends to love to be first guarantees massive insecurities in the leader. Insecurities that will be there in your life and in your ministry.

Always feeling constantly under threat under threat that somebody's gonna come along and take my place from me. Insecurity within leadership is damaging and not just within leadership within a church but also leadership within a small group even leadership in a family.

To love to be first stops me from ever reflecting the Lord Jesus Christ who told the apostles didn't he you know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles they lord it over them and their great ones exercise authority over them but it shall not be so among you but whoever would be great among you must be your servant and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all for even the son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

[26 : 51] You see friends Diotrefes didn't just want to be on stage and center he didn't want anyone else on the stage with him. Our good friend David Jackman writes in his commentary the Holy Spirit gets drummed out of office in churches where Diotrefes rules.

Why? Because Diotrefes is first it is no longer the Lord Jesus Christ who is first no longer the Lord Jesus Christ having preeminence as the apostle Paul writes in Colossians chapter 1 again from David Jackman churches in the pocket of one person or one family dynasty where nothing can happen without the approval of Mr. X because it's his church.

So if I come says John if I come yes John if you come what will you do John? Well if I come says John I will make public I will bring up what he is doing.

What? Is that it John? Is that all you're going to do John? Are you not going to give him the book the way he's been giving the book to others?

No says John I will bring up what he is doing. I don't know about you friends but this all just sounds rather weak and feeble to me but it may not be so weak and feeble as it sounds.

[28 : 20] John is not getting involved in a war of words. He is not prepared to sink to the same level of diatrophies in his wicked talk no but for Gaius and any others who make up the oppressed minority there is plenty of encouragement here.

That may well be the reason that this paragraph has been written in order for Gaius to show his other friends in the church in order to assure them that the apostle John knows all that is going on he knows what is happening and he will do something about it.

He will come and he will expose diatrophies for the fraud of a Christian leader that he is. Gaius the faithful diatrophies the fraud and thirdly in verses 11 and 12 Demetrius the challenge Demetrius the challenge verse 11 Beloved do not imitate evil but imitate good John knows that we all have role models or mentors that we will imitate well says John make sure you choose your role models carefully I think it's clear that going on from verses 9 and 10 diatrophies is the evil not to be copied well given of what we know of him why would anyone want to copy diatrophies well remember diatrophies is the local church leader and he is the nearest role model and if verse 10 is right then I would imagine that Gaius is due a pastoral visit pretty soon a visit that I would presume would put plenty of pressure on Gaius to stop the generous ministry of hospitality that he's been exercising whoever does good is from God

John goes on in verse 10 and as you chose those to model remember this to be gods will show itself in goodness or to put it the other way around whoever does evil has not seen God if there is no godly character then you can be sure there is no experience of the living God I think we all know what John means by has not seen God John is very clear that no one has seen God he has written it twice before once in his gospel in John chapter 1 verse 18 no one has seen God the only God who is at the father's side he that is Jesus Jesus makes the father known and the second time he writes it is in his first letter just turn back just a page or two to 1 John chapter 4 and to verse 7 the apostle John writes verse 7 beloved let us love one another for love is from God and whoever loves has been born of God and knows

God verse 8 anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love these verses parallel are verses in 3 John here they speak of love in 3 John it's good and evil but let's continue in 1 John chapter 4 verse 9 in this the love of God was made manifest among us that God sent his only son into the world so that we might live through him and this is love not that we loved God but that God loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins beloved if God so loved us we ought to love one another and friends here's our point verse 12 no one has ever seen God if we love one another then we can see God if we love one another God abides in us and his love is perfected in us you see with

[32 : 22] Diotrefes and his followers there's no loving one another there is no love for the apostle John no love for those who have gone out for the sake of the name and certainly no love for those that would dare to welcome them so you won't see God in Diotrefes his church he is not the model to imitate Gaius Demetrius Demetrius is the model to follow Gaius Demetrius is almost certainly the carrier of this letter and he comes highly recommended verse 12 Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone everyone speaks well of him and from the truth itself if the truth could speak it would vouch for him even if Diotrefes disapproves and we also add our testimony and you know that our testimony is true Demetrius is the model to imitate that is the testimony to have

Gaius do you want that testimony about you Gaius John is saying then keep on doing what you are doing keep on welcoming the brothers and showing them hospitality don't let Diotrefes or anyone else for that matter pressure you into having a testimony that doesn't match Demetrius well that's good for Gaius but what about us here at the Tron we've come here this morning to learn and to be instructed in the things of the faith and we're being asked about how we use our homes well yes friends that's the challenge of free John the challenge to be a Christian community a love one another community and just like Gaius it will involve strangers who are brothers and sisters in Christ it will include our spare room our spare bed our spare cash and our spare time and all of these things will face me square on with the challenge who will

I imitate will I imitate diotrophies or will I imitate Demetrius will I imitate good or will I imitate evil will I put the gospel and others first or will I continue to love being first myself and all of these things all of these things will determine if we here at the tron are to be a people a community where the living God can be discovered and experienced the church is full of characters what kind of character will you be let us pray together welcome others gladly just as you have welcomed us we ask this in the name of the Lord

Jesus Christ and for his glory alone amen amen