

The Church is full of characters

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[0 : 00] Our Bible reading today is from John's third letter, 3 John, which you will find in page 1026 of the Bible in your chair.

These last few weeks we've been looking at the letters of John. We considered one John a fortnight ago. Last week we looked at two John and today under consideration is John's third letter.

And we're going to read the full letter together. Let us hear then the word of God. The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth, beloved or dear friend, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health as it goes well with your soul.

For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth or to your faithfulness to the 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 testify to your love before the church.

[1 : 15] 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 we may be fellow workers for the truth. I have written something to the church. But Diotrefes, 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 contempt with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers.

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.

[2 : 16] 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 to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends. Every one of them.

Amen. And may God add his blessing to this. The reading of his word. A moment of prayer. Father, we give you great thanks for this opportunity to gather together in the middle of this day, in the middle of this week, to hear your word preached.

We ask, Father, that you would be with us in our time together. That you would speak to us from your word. That you would give us ears to hear and understand your word. And hearts and wills to obey and believe your word.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, during the summer, my best friend moved into a new house.

[3 : 22] And he needed a new bathroom suite fitted in the house. And I phoned him up a few days later to ask how the work had gone. And also to see how good the guy was who'd done the work.

Because 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, don't let him anywhere near her house. He was an absolute nightmare. And the work that he'd done was absolutely shambolic. But my friend went on.

There is another guy. A guy that I had to get in to fix all the shoddy work of the first guy. Now this guy. This guy is excellent. I would thoroughly recommend and trust him to do the work.

And also to do any other work that might need it done. The first guy. Don't let him into the house. The second guy. I thoroughly recommend and trust this guy.

[4 : 29] Welcome him. And trust him to do the work. Now friends, I share this story as a helpful way into this afternoon's sermon. Last week we studied 2 John together.

And at the heart of that letter is a warning from the elder, the apostle John. A warning given to ensure that deceivers, antichrists were recognized and rejected.

And rejected robustly. 2 John verse 10. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house. Or give him any greeting.

Do not receive him into your house. And remember in those days that the church met in houses, house churches. So effectively, do not receive them into your church.

Why? Because they will flood your church. Not with water like a dodgy plumber fit in a bathroom suite. But with something far worse.

[5 : 29] That will have devastating, destructive consequences amongst your congregation. 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. Look with me at verse 7. For they have gone out for the sake of the name. Verse 8.

Therefore, we ought to support people like these. And in 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.

As we study this letter together this afternoon. I suspect some of us will be encouraged greatly. By the practice and the importance of the ordinary.

[6 : 29] And others amongst us. May be greatly challenged and warned. As we are convicted of 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 in verses 1 to 8.

We have Gaius the faithful. Gaius the faithful. John is really excited about Gaius. But what is it that has excited John?

Well it's 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.

[7 : 29] The truth here is the gospel. The faith once delivered to the saints. 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 verse 4. It is others who are walking in the truth. And you might begin to think that John is a narrow minded type.

Obsessed with doctrines and creeds. But when we read verse 2. We learn just how rich John's truth is. 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 all of life. As he 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. As opposed to taking in Gaius' work life.

[8 : 32] He also prays for his spiritual life. As it goes well with your soul. And friends. This is a great verse to measure our praying by. Don't you agree? We do pray.

Don't we? For people's material physical needs. But do we ever get to praying for people's souls? That it may 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? John here prays for all free. Which is right I'm sure.

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. Could be his converts. Or it could be that John led Gaius. To faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Or it may be that he is writing as a pastor.

[9 : 29] To those that God has trusted to his care. For either way. I have no greater joy. Than to hear that my children. Are walking in the truth. And this has got to be surely.

The deepest concern of any minister. The deepest concern of any small group leader. And it has got to be right surely. That this is the deepest concern. Of any Christian parent.

I have a 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 had obviously been baptized as a baby. But some years later. When she was living away from home. She came to personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And she was going to be baptized by full immersion. And she tentatively told her father. Fearing that her getting baptized again. Would upset him.

[10:27] Her father's response. He sent her a card. And written in the card was 3 John verse 4. I have no greater joy. Than to hear that my children.

Are walking in the truth. Whether you're a parent. A small group leader. A minister. The concerns are the same aren't they? But I wonder if you notice. That as we move into verse 5 and 8.

All the talk about truth in verse 2 to 4. Is reflected in love. Verse 5 to 8. Look with me at verse 3. For I rejoice greatly. When the brothers came and testified to your truth.

As indeed you are walking in the truth. The testimony he heard. Is put this way in verse 6. Who testified to your love.

Before the church. That's why John is confident. Gaius is walking in the truth. Because of the love he is showing. And it turns out to be.

[11:25] All about hospitality. That's what showed Gaius was walking in the truth. In those days. The church was dependent on traveling teachers. But where would they stay?

Well certainly not the travel lodges of the day. Really seedy. Really dodgy places. Well it's obvious isn't it? They would stay with the Christians. In the places that they were preaching.

But this was still a big ask for Gaius. Because these brothers. Verse 5. Are also strangers. Gaius had never met them before. The love he had shown.

That was reported back. Verse 6. Was love for strangers. Who were his Christian brothers. And John explains. Verse 7. That they had gone out for the sake of the name.

That is Jesus. And this is the total opposite. Of those from 2 John. Verse 7. For many deceivers have gone out.

[12:22] Into the world. Those who do not confess. The coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. No. These guys in 3 John. Are totally different from the guys of 2 John.

These guys are genuine Christian brothers. What we have here is an encouragement. To welcome true brothers. See how he finishes off. Verse 6. 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. Water. 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. The pagans. Not necessarily. Refusing help from the Gentiles. The pagans. The non-Christians.

[13:21] Not refusing help. But not looking for help from them. They were genuine Christian missionaries. To be supported by genuine Christian people. Not like the other religious teachers of their day.

They. Who looked to be paid from anyone and everyone who listened to them. Like a sort of a religious busker. 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 gave them a couple of quid. To get the train to the next town. And John called it verse 8. Being a fellow worker for the truth.

[14:21] Maybe you've heard someone say. Or maybe you've said it yourself. I can't do much for the gospel. Well I suppose I could pray. And I suppose I could.

I could give a little money. And maybe the odd time I could have. Someone round for. For dinner. Or for lunch. Well the next time you say that.

The next time you feel inadequate. Remember Gaius. Gaius the faithful. That's what he did. And it was verse 8. Being a fellow worker.

For the truth. It put Gaius right up there. In the front line with the missionaries. Sharing in the work. As the words of the hymn say. 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 forget the power of hospitality. It's not about the spread on the table.

[15:19] Or the quality of your china. The thing that matters most in hospitality. Is the open door. And the shared fellowship. Gaius.

The faithful. But secondly. John moves on. And our second character. Well this second character. Is very different from Gaius. So what we have in verses 9 and 10.

Is Diotrephes the fraud. Diotrephes the fraud. Diotrephes is clearly. A local church leader.

I think maybe. He could be Gaius's minister. But it does seem a bit strange. That John would have to write. To tell Gaius. What was going on in his church. Some have thought.

That maybe Gaius was unwell. Explaining John's prayer of verse 2. Or that he lived. A distance away. Whatever the reason. There is no denying.

[16:15] The problem of. Diotrephes. Verse 9. I have written something. To the church. But Diotrephes. Who likes to put himself first. Does not.

Acknowledge. Our authority. Some have tried to. I suppose. Understand. And defend. Diotrephes's actions here. Saying. You know.

Maybe as the. The time of the living apostles. On the earth. Was coming to an end. Probably at this time. The. The apostle John. Was the. The last. Surviving. Apostle living.

Maybe as the time of the living apostles. Was coming to an end. Diotrephes. Was just trying to get ready. For that period. When the apostles. Would no longer be around. And he was going. Alone.

In. Independency. Well friends. An. Independency. That will have nothing to do. With the apostles ministry. Is a very dangerous. Independency.

[17:09] Don't you agree? As John. Goes on in verse 10. Not only does he. Blank the apostle. But he. Bad mouths. The apostle. 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 too. 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. And he puts them out.

He boots them out. Of the church. He blanks. And bad mouths. The apostle John. He blanks. The brothers. He blocks others. From welcoming. Welcoming them.

[18:04] And he boots them out. Of the church. Of the two. It's absolutely. Terrifying. When you think about it. Isn't it? There is no theological. Issue here. With. With John.

Or with the brothers. But behind it all. Is that wee phrase. In verse 9. Diotrephes. Who. Who likes. Or who loves. To put himself first.

No doctrinal heresy. Is mentioned here. None of the dangers. We were warned of. In. In 2 John. Welcoming. And endorsing deceivers. No. No. Here.

There is just no welcoming. And endorsing of true teachers. At all. He 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. And my most sinful moments. That's. That's. Certainly. Certainly me. Diotrephes. Loves to be first. And friends.

[18:59] When you get that. In leadership. You have a leader. Who must be the center. He must have the spotlight. And he must call all the shots. And friends.

Sadly. It's all too common. And ultimately. Loving to be first. Is the sin of Satan. Isaiah 14. Verse 14. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds.

I will make myself like the most high. It's 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. 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 honor at feasts.

Who devour widows. Houses. And for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation. To love to be first.

[19:57] Guarantees massive insecurities in the leader. Insecurities that will be there. In your life. And in your ministry. Feeling constantly under threat.

That someone will come along. And take your place from you. Insecurity within leadership is damaging. But not just leadership within a church. But also in small groups.

Or even within a family. To love to be first. Stops me from ever reflecting the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus told the apostles. Didn't he? You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles.

Lord, the over them. And that 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.

[20 : 55] But to serve. And to give his life. As a ransom for many. You see friends. Diotrephes didn't just want to be on stage and center.

He didn't want anyone else on the stage with him. David Jackman writes in his commentary. The Holy Spirit gets drummed out of office. In churches.

Where Diotrephes rules. Why? Because Diotrephes is first. It is no longer the Lord Jesus Christ who is first. No longer Christ having the pre-eminence.

As the Apostle Paul writes in Colossians 1 verse 18. Churches. In the pocket of one person or a 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.

[21 : 51] If you come. What will you do John? Well if I come he says. I will make public. I will bring up what he is doing. What? Is that it John?

Is that all you are going to do? Are you not going to give him the book? The way he's been giving it to others? No says John. I will bring up what he is doing.

It sounds all so weak and feeble doesn't it? But friends. It may not be so weak as it sounds. John is not getting involved in a war of words. He's not prepared to sink to the same level of.

Of Diotrephes. And his wicked talk. No. But for Gaius. And any others who make up the oppressed minority. There is plenty of encouragement here.

That's the reason this paragraph may well have 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.

[22 : 48] He knows what is happening. And he will do something about it. He will come and expose Diotrephes. For the fraud of a Christian leader he is. Gaius the faithful.

Diotrephes the fraud. And thirdly. Demetrius the challenge. Verse 11 and 12. 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 look up to. That we imitate. Well says John. Choose your role models carefully. I think it's clear that going on from verse 9 and 10.

Diotrephes is the evil not to be copied. Well given what we know of him. Why would anyone want to? Well remember. Diotrephes is the local church leader. And the nearest role model.

[23 : 47] 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. Will 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 choose those tomorrow.

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 know what John means by. Has not seen God. John is very clear that.

That no one has seen God. He has written it twice before. Once in his gospel. In chapter 1 verse 18. No one has seen God. The only God. Who is at the Father's side.

[24 : 46] He. That is Jesus. Has made him known. And once in his first letter. If you just turn back a page or two. To 1 John. Chapter 4. And to verse 7.

John writes. 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. Or verses in 3 John. Here they speak of love. In 3 John. It is good and evil.

But let's continue in 1 John chapter 4. In verse 9. In this the love of God was made manifest among us. That God sent his only son into the world.

[25 : 41] So that we might live through him. In this is love. Not that we have loved God. But that he loved us. And sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Beloved. If God so loved us. We also ought to love one another. And here's our point. Verse 12. No one has ever seen God. If we love one another.

God abides. In us. And his love. Is perfected. In us. You see with. Diotrephes. And his followers. There's no loving one another.

There is no love for the apostle John. No love for the brothers. That have gone out for the sake of the name. And no love for those. That would dare to welcome them. So you won't see God.

In Diotrephes. His church. He's not the role model. To imitate Gaius. Demetrius. Is the model to follow Gaius. Demetrius.

[26 : 39] 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 Diotrephes disapproves. And we also add our testimony.

And you know that our testimony is true. Demetrius is the model to imitate. The testimony to have. Do you want that testimony about you Gaius.

John is saying. Then keep on doing what you are doing. Welcoming the brothers. And showing them hospitality. Don't let Diotrephes.

Or anyone else for that matter. Pressure you into having a testimony. That doesn't match Demetrius. But friends. What about us here. As we are gathered here this afternoon.

[27 : 36] We have come here this afternoon. To learn to be instructed. In the things of the faith. And we have been asked about. How we use our homes. Well yes friends. That is the challenge of 3 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. All of which will face me. Square on with the challenge.

Of who will I imitate. Diotrephes. Or 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 friends. All of these things. All of these things. Will determine.

[28 : 35] If all the various fellowships. And churches. That we belong to. It will determine. If we 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. I have no greater joy. Than to hear that my children. Are walking in the truth. Our loving heavenly father.

We have learned. That this walking in the truth. Cannot be separated. From loving the brothers. So help us father. And our various fellowships. To welcome others.

As you have welcomed us. Let us learn. How to serve. And in our lives. Enthroned the Lord. Jesus Christ. Help us. Each other's needs. To prefer. For when we do.

[29 : 32] It is Christ. We are serving. We ask this. In the name of the Lord. Jesus Christ. And for his great glory. Amen. Amen.