

3 John 1-14

INTRODUCTION: Are you interested in being prosperous? I hope you are because God wants you to be prosperous.

Psalm 35:27 says this, “Let the Lord be magnified with his pleasure in the prosperity of his servant.”

We serve a gracious God who delights in our prosperity.

But when I use the word “prosperity” most people automatically think of being rich.

They think of owning a mansion, having a fleet of Cadillacs, cornering the market on stocks, bonds, securities and so on.

In fact, there is a false gospel being preached today called, “The Health, Wealth, and Prosperity Gospel” which teaches that it is God’s will for every Christian to be wealthy and to never be sick a day in their life.

In fact, they teach and preach that if you are not a millionaire or if you suffer from some sickness you are out of God’s will.

People who preach this seem to forget that the OT prophets, the apostles, and disciples and even Christ Himself were poor, persecuted, and some suffered physically.

The Apostle Paul had a thorn in the flesh – some believe this was a physical sickness.

The proponents of this false teaching brazenly appeal to the greed and selfishness of their spiritually naïve audiences.

These are the kind of people Paul was talking about when he wrote in 1 Timothy 6:5 - “who suppose that godliness is a means of gain”.

In the Bible, some of God’s servants were rich and some were poor.

Some like Paul and Job were physically sick and God used their sickness for His glory.

ILLUSTRATION: I have met some very godly saints who were suffering physically with an illness but spiritually they were very healthy.

Their soul was prospering.

THIS IS THE PROSPERITY THAT JOHN WROTE

John wrote this letter to a friend of his named Gaius.

In verse 2, John is praying for his friend, Gaius, that he would prosper and be in good physical health to the same degree as his soul actually was prospering.

It’s worth pondering, if someone prayed that for you, would it be a blessing or would we need to call the paramedics?

Thank God for the material blessings and physical health that God gives us, but we should be more concern about spiritual prosperity.

We should be more focused on the prosperity of the soul than the prosperity of the body.

Americans today are obsessed with physical health and care very little for their soul or their spiritual health.

v. 4 - Notice what the apostle John said v. 4, “I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth” (*not*, “prospering financially”).

He was talking about his spiritual children, of course.

But, Christian parents should be able to say about their children, that their greatest joy is to hear that their children are walking in the truth.

Sadly, I’ve known of Christian parents who are ecstatic when their children land top-paying jobs, but they don’t seem to be as happy if the kids decide to be missionaries.

Our main prayer for our children and for every Christian should be that they have prosperous souls.

John describes for us here the prosperous soul.

CONTEXT OF 3 JOHN:

Author: John

This is another personal letter from John.

2 and 3 John are similar in style and structure.

John uses the same introduction here as in 2 John. He does not give his personal name but simply calls himself the “elder.”

Recipient:

He is writing to a man named Gaius. We know nothing about this man other than what John writes here in this letter.

The name Gaius appears several times in the NT but it was a common name:

There was a Gaius of Macedonia who together with Aristarchus was seized by a rioting mob at Ephesus (Acts 19:29)

There was a Gaius who accompanied Paul on his last trip to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4)

There was a Gaius of Corinth in whose house Paul lived while dictating the letter of Romans (Romans 16:23).

But it was a common name and no reason to say this is one of the three.

Purpose: What is the purpose behind the letter?

A. For the Purpose of Commendation

1. This is the shortest book in the NT just one line shorter than 2 John.
2. The key words in 2 John are truth and love. We find these are the same key words in 3 John but there is a significant difference.
3. In 2 John, John was writing to an “elect lady” warning her that she should not admit false teachers into her home.
4. 3 John is John writing to a man named Gaius commending him for receiving teachers into his home.
5. Both 2 and 3 John deal with the issue of Christian hospitality but they deal with it from opposite sides.
6. 2 John deals with the negative side and 3 John the positive side.
7. We see the two sides of love. In 2 John love does not open its doors to everyone and everything.

Love is protective towards the church.
8. In 3 John love is kind, gracious and its doors are never closed to those who are truly in Christ. Hospitality should never be refused to those who are

B. For the Purpose of Recommendation

ILLUSTRATION: Sometimes a preacher or evangelist will call me and ask if I would write a letter recommending them to a certain ministry position.

In that letter, I am basically testifying as to that person's character. I am saying this person is a godly and trustworthy man.

This is nothing new.

This was practiced by the early church.

1. John is writing to Gaius recommending Demetrius.
2. Why was this necessary in the early church?

Historical Background: The Romans built roads all throughout the empire. Missionaries and preachers took advantage of these roads and traveled.

Roman roads were well paved wide roads, they were guarded, cities and towns were built alongside these roads to for the purpose of trade.

There were inns for travelers but these were places of ill-repute and brothels where sinful revelry took place.

Missionaries and preachers, therefore, depended upon the hospitality of Christians.

As we saw last week Christian hospitality is a duty.

3. False preachers sought to take advantage of Christian hospitality.

This was the problem John addressed in 2 John. A lady was receiving false teachers into her home and being hospitable to them.

John wrote and said basically three things to her:

- a. Keep practicing Christian hospitality.
- b. But be careful to test the preacher's doctrine before you take them in.
- c. If they are not a true preacher of the gospel don't even bid them God's speed.
- d. You are in danger of losing your reward.

4. One way to ensure that this did not continue and to guard the truth was to present letters of recommendation.

A person could bring with them a letter from a well known and trustworthy apostle and preacher attesting to their character.

5. Examples of Recommendation in the NT

a.) Paul wrote recommending Timothy.

Philippians 2:19-22 ¹⁹ But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state. ²⁰ For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. ²¹ For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's. ²² But ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel.

b.) Paul rebuked the Corinthians for questioning his credentials as an apostle.

^{KJV} **2 Corinthians 3:1** Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some *others*, epistles of commendation to you, or **letters** of commendation from you?

c.) The whole letter of Philemon is a recommendation letter from Paul to Philemon on the behalf of Onesimus.

Philemon 1:9-12 ⁹ Yet for love's sake I rather beseech *thee*, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ. ¹⁰ I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds: ¹¹ Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me: ¹² Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels:

6. John also rebukes Diotrephes because he refuses to receive those John recommends.

3 John 9

He wouldn't receive John's recommendation, not respecting John's authority, he would not receive these missionaries disobeying God's Word.

In this church, a self-willed, power-hungry man, Diotrephes, had grabbed power. He openly attacked the authority of the apostle John, he denied hospitality to traveling Christian workers, and he even excommunicated those who defied him by offering hospitality to these workers.

Gaius, however, to this point had resisted the strong-armed tactics of Diotrephes. He had given hospitality and financial support to these traveling missionaries.

John encourages Gaius to continue doing so, and he commends to him Demetrius, who was probably the bearer of this letter.

John assures Gaius that he will deal publicly with Diotrephes when he visits the church in the near future. I'm sure that it would have been interesting to have a box seat to watch the fireworks when that happened!

The three characters named in the book provide us with three keys to pursuing a prosperous soul:

TRANSITIONAL SENTENCE: I want you to see three marks of a prosperous soul.

I. Gaius: *A Prosperous Soul walks in Love and Truth.* (vv. 1-8)

John give three attributes of this man.

A. He was lovable.

Notice how John greeted him.

“wellbeloved...” beloved (v. 5)

People who knew this man loved him. Three times in this greeting John alludes to the fact that he is loved.

1) by John (v. 1)

John loved him because he loved the truth and walked in it. It is not hard to love a person who lives the truth.

ARGUMENT: Gaius is one of those people in the church who is easy to love because they seem to show love to others and live the truth.

We have many like this at Grace. I am constantly refreshed by you.

v. 4 – This man brought John great joy!

This can be said of any true pastor!

Because of this verse I think John led him to Christ. This man was one of John's converts.

“my” is in the emphatic position in the Greek, “my own children”

There is nothing that brings greater joy than to watch a person you led to Christ walk in truth!

That was John's joy.

That is why we need to emphasize follow-up in our evangelism – not just getting people saved but discipling them and getting them mature in the faith.

2.) By other believers (v. 3)

Someone said men would rather see a sermon than hear a sermon.

This man was a sermon in shoes. He lived the truth!

He was a walking Bible, the truth translated into shoe leather!

ARGUMENT: The world can argue against Christianity's doctrine, against our creeds, theology, but they have no argument against a holy life!

Gaius is what I would call a 'glasshouse Christian', transparent.

What you see is what you get. He's the real thing.

B. He was Spiritual - v. 2

This is still part of John's greeting. It is a prayer that this man would do as well physically as he was doing spiritually.

This was a nice way of saying Gaius was a spiritual man.

He had his priorities right. He was more concerned about his spiritual life than his physical life.

Some are more concerned about their:

- Social life – their life is wrapped up in friends.
- Financial life – wrapped up in finances
- Physical life – world emphasizes the body the outward man.

We have health clubs etc...

^{KJV} **1 Timothy 4:8** For **bodily exercise** profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.

Greek culture prized the physical body. Each city had it's gymnasium.

There is nothing wrong in exercise and being healthy but with some people it is an obsession.

Gaius had his priorities right because his focus was on the inward man, the spiritual man.

2 Cor. 4:6 “Though our outward man perish, our inward man is renewed day by day.

Physical health is the result of nutrition, exercise, cleanliness, proper rest, and the disciplined order of a balanced life.

Spiritual health is the result of similar factors.

We must nourish ourselves with the Word, and then “work out” that nourishment in godly exercise (1 Tim. 4:6–7).¹

^{KJV} **1 Timothy 4:7** But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and **exercise** thyself *rather* unto godliness.

C. He was Hospitable (vv. 5-8)

John writes commending him for being hospitable to strangers and missionary travelers.

LOVE MANIFESTS ITSELF IN PRACTICAL GOOD DEEDS.

We already talked about the importance of hospitality.

1.) Important in the Culture

¹Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. 3 Jn 1

The culture placed a premium of it.

Strangers were supposedly under the protection of Zeus

Xenios - who was known as the god of strangers... *xenos* means stranger.

And if they wanted to have that deity on their side and not against them, they needed to be kind to strangers.

The ancient world even had a system of guest friendships, whereby families in different parts of the country undertook to give each other's members hospitality in their parts of the country when they traveled. It was reciprocal.

People carried what was called a "Sumbalon(?)," they carried a token to identify themselves to their hosts.

The host would know the token that belonged to him and open up his home to show hospitality.

If the heathen did that, if the pagans did that, how much more importantly should the Christians do that?

2. Important in the Church

1 Peter 4:9, "Be hospitable to one another without complaint."

The Greek word for hospitality is love of strangers, love of strangers.

Romans 12:13 it says, "We are to be practicing hospitality."

1 Timothy 3:2, required for an elder. And in Titus 1:8 it says the same thing. They are to be hospitable.

3) Important to Christ

^{KJV} **Matthew 25:40** And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me.

^{KJV} **Hebrews 13:2** Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

Gaius was faithful in this practice.

John commends Gaius for being a tremendous helper of the truth! How?

He was doing his part to take care of missionaries.

He took good care of them and sent them forth in a worthy manner!

v. 6 – “after a godly sort” literally reads in the Greek “axios tou theou” or “worthy of God”

In other words treat them the way you think God would treat them.

He treated these preachers and missionaries in a manner that is worthy of God.

ILLUSTRATION: A delegation that returned from visiting Gaius had testified of his love. Gaius had welcomed them into his home, even though they had been strangers to him before their visit. He had treated them “in a manner worthy of God.”

When they left, he loaded them with supplies for their journey and with money for their mission work. His love was not just talk. It showed itself in treating others as he himself would wish to be treated.

Biblical love isn't just feeling the warm fuzzies; it is practical good deeds.

Listen to Jesus' words, Matthew 10:40, "He who receives you, receives Me. And he who receives Me, receives Him who sent Me. He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward."

Did you understand that?

The way you treat a missionary or preacher is going to determine your eternal reward.

You're literally going to share in their eternal reward by supporting them.

God is saying give them the best be generous WHY?

v. 7 - Because they go in the Name of Christ. They don't go out for their own name's sake but for His.

(false prophets do it for their own sake but not a true man of God.)

“taking nothing from the Gentiles...” They take nothing from the world.

The church does not need the support of the world and the unbeliever. We don't want to be supported by the world.

If the church and Christians do not support the work of getting out the gospel who will?

They would not solicit help from the unsaved!

ILLUSTRATION: When God's people adequately support God's work it is a powerful testimony to the lost.

ILLUSTRATION: In Maryland I see churches that send members to street corners with five gallon buckets raising money to support their building program.

v. 8 – It is our responsibility to be fellow helpers to the truth.

I. Gaius: *A Prosperous Soul walks in Love and Truth.* (vv. 1-8)

II. Diotrephes: *A Prosperous Soul Submits to Spiritual Authority.* (vv. 9-11)

Unfortunately, not everyone was like Gaius. John introduces us to another character. His name is Diotrephes.

This man is the exact opposite of Gaius. He hindered the truth because of his egotistical and selfish ways.

Thank God that every church has a Gaius but unfortunately many also have a Diotrephes.

Diotrephes did not submit to apostolic authority (he did not accept what John said, v. 9).

Rather than being a prosperous soul, Diotrephes was a destitute soul.

His negative example gives us four characteristics of the destitute soul that we need to avoid if we want to have prosperous souls:

Five accusations – The characteristics of a destitute soul.

A. The destitute soul demands to be first.

v. 9 – preeminence – from two Greek words.

Phileo – lover proteau – to be first.

Therein lies the explanation for the majority of church problems down through history! People want to be first.

It was the same word used in Colossians 1:18 speaking of the preeminence of Christ.

ONLY CHRIST SHOULD BE FIRST IN THE CHURCH.

This man wanted the spotlight, he wanted the stage, he wanted to be in control and for things to be done his way!

Diotrephes – the very name is identified with Greek nobility. His name was an aristocratic name meaning “nourished by Zeus.”

Since he probably came from an upper class family and had wealth he was perhaps accustomed to being in charge and having his way.

He wanted to exercise control over the flock.

He was not concerned about what was best for the church but what was best for him.

He was placing himself on the throne instead of Christ!
This is nothing new!

ILLUSTRATION: We see this all the time with young men that come out of the seminary. They go into a church. They are the servants of Christ.

They are prepared. They are heart ready. They are mind ready. They are soul ready.

They're ready to labor, to pour their lives into the congregation.

They run right into a Diotrephes who loves to have the power in the church.

And before they know what hit them, they're out of the church. It happens all the time. It's a constant battle, so common.

ILLUSTRATION: I have Pastors who call me all the time and tell me about the Diotrephes they have to deal with.

A. The destitute soul demands to be first.

B. The destitute soul is defiant to authority. (v. 9)

“receiveth us not...”

Another way to translate that, "Will have nothing to do with us."

He is his own authority, even to the point where he rejects one with apostolic authority.

ILLUSTRATION: I heard of a little boy who formed a club with his friends as young boys tend to do.

Of course, such clubs must have rules.

This little boy's club rules were very simple: (1) I am the boss of this club. (2) You don't boss the boss!

Those were Diotrophes rules! He was the boss and you can't boss the boss.

He would not submit to John's authority.

John had written a letter of recommendation before for a traveling missionary and Diotrophes would not receive the letter or the individual.

In his lust for power and control he viewed John as a threat.

He would not submit and get in line with John's authority. He would not receive the missionary in defiance of John.

ARGUMENT: Obviously Diotrophes had some leadership position in the church but he was proving he was unworthy to lead.

If you can't submit to authority you have demonstrated you are not fit to lead.

^{KJV} **Hebrews 13:17** Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is* unprofitable for you.

A. The destitute soul demands to be first.

B. The destitute soul is defiant to authority. (v. 9)

Also:

C. The destitute soul uses malicious gossip to run down his opponents. v. 10a

Prating – Greek “phularon – “talking nonsense”

Malicious – poneros – evil

He went around spreading lies about John and making insinuations about his leadership.

He was very negative against John.

Diotrephes unjustly accused John and his delegates with wicked words.

He barred these traveling teachers from the church because he wanted to be the sole authority and leader of the church.

He wanted everyone to look up to him, not to Jesus Christ. It threatened him if people learned from others, and so he used gossip and slander to criticize even the apostle John.

This is very characteristic of these people who rise up desiring preeminence.

EXPLANATION: They falsely accuse other people. This is how they gain trust. They don't gain trust by the virtue of their life.

They don't gain trust by their character.

They don't gain trust the long, slow, true way by exposing all that they are to people and letting people make a judgment on their righteousness and on their integrity.

They get the trust of the people by destroying the people's trust in everybody else.

They are malicious and destructive, accusing...the word accusing here is actually a word that occurs only here in the entire New Testament but a cognate form of it occurs in 1 Timothy 5:13 where it can be translated tattlers.

They are tattlers. They go around telling malicious, gossiping tales.

By the way, the root word in the Greek comes from boiling up, or bubbling over.

There's a reason for that. Bubbles are hallow.

This is hallow talk, foolish talk, but they foment foolish nothing, bubble talk that bursts when it's poked.

Amplified reads – “his boiling over and casting malicious reflections upon us with insinuating language...”

False, unfounded, foolish, contrived, manipulated accusations to cause people to distrust those in leadership and then the people are left with them as the only one they can trust.

There's a certain viciousness here.

- A. The destitute soul demands to be first.
- B. The destitute soul is defiant to authority. (v. 9)
- C. The destitute soul uses malicious gossip to run down his opponents. v. 10a

Also:

D. The destitute soul uses relationships for power. v. 10b

“Neither doth he himself receive the brethren. . .”

Anyone that John recommended he rejected. Anyone that associated with John he rejected.

So he was deliberately undermining anything that John tried to do.

Why didn't Diotrephes welcome these godly Christian workers?

Because he did not value people and relationships. Rather, he *used* people to build or protect his power base.

If you didn't go along with him, he would force you out of the church, no doubt under the pretense of keeping the church pure.

That's exactly how the world operates. The way to move up in the world is to build relationships with powerful people.

You do favors for them so that they owe you in return.

You play one person off of another, all in an attempt to put yourself in a powerful position.

But it leads to poverty of soul, not to prosperity of soul.

E. The destitute soul bullies others through intimidation. v. 10c

“. . .and forbiddeneth them that would. . .”

Not only personally rejecting John and the other preachers, but he *koluo*, prevents, hinders, everybody else.

If people in the church didn't agree with Diotrephes, he bullied them into compliance or he put them out of the church.

He had the power to do it. It was church politics at the worst!

v. 10 – “and casteth them out of the church.”

"Puts them out of the church," *ek ballo*, literally means to toss them out, throw them out.

He's protecting his...it's like King of the Mountain, protecting his power base.

Anyone who received John's associates were dismissed from the church.

He didn't have the authority or the biblical basis for throwing these people out of the church.

- He literally shuts off the Apostle John,
- he maliciously destroys the people's confidence in their other spiritual leaders and their true spiritual leaders
- he will not acknowledge true preachers of the gospel and he forbids people to receive those?

How does he get into that position in the church of Jesus Christ?

It's amazing how subtle and devious people can be.

How does one deal with a person like this?

Notice: v. 10 - "if I come, I will remember his deeds..."

A face to face confrontation is how John will handle this.

EXPLANATION: In other words: I'm going to expose the man if I come. John is saying, I will not forget.

I will bring up the subject of Diotrophes' conduct and I will make it an issue in the church because it is an issue for discipline.

- I. Gaius: *A Prosperous Soul walks in Love and Truth.* (vv. 1-8)
- II. Diotrephes: *A Prosperous Soul Submits to Spiritual Authority.* (vv. 9-11)

Notice also:

III. Demetrius: *The Prosperous Soul Imitates Godly Examples.* (vv. 12-14)

Demetrius is the one that John is recommending. He is the man who is receiving hospitality from Gaius.

John confirms that this man is worthy of support.

v. 11 – John encourages Gaius to follow that which is good.

If you receive him you will be following that which is good.

If you don't receive him, if you allow yourself to be intimidated by Diotrephes, you will be following that which is evil.

Follow – this is the Greek word *mimeomai*, do not become a mimic of what is evil. Don't follow that model, just do what is good.

John is saying don't follow the pattern of Diotrephes, don't mimic his evil.

This word is used in the NT in several places.

^{KJV} **1 Corinthians 4:16** Wherefore I beseech you, be ye **followers** of me.

^{KJV} **1 Corinthians 11:1** Be ye **followers** of me, even as I also *am* of Christ.

^{KJV} **Ephesians 5:1** Be ye therefore **followers** of God, as dear children;

^{KJV} **Philippians 3:17** Brethren, be **followers** together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.

^{ESV} **Philippians 3:17** Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.

^{KJV} **1 Thessalonians 1:6** And ye became **followers** of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost:

ILLUSTRATION: When I first got saved, I didn't know how to live the Christian life. But I watched those who did and I would mimic them.

We need Godly people in the church that others can mimic and follow.

Here John says, "If you want to mimic someone, mimic Demetrius."

Three affirmations of Demetrius.

In the OT if you wanted to affirm something was true you needed two or three witnesses according to Deut. 17:6, 19:15

Notice three witnesses to Demetrius in verse 12

A. Everyone speaks well of him.

From everyone, *hupo panton*, all.

The testimony of everyone to Demetrius in the past remains valid in the present, perfect passive.

He has received an ongoing and continually good testimony from everyone. These are believer who love the truth.

Do you have a good testimony?
Do those who love the truth speak well of you?

Not everybody will, but those who love truth will if you walk in it.

B. The Truth speaks well of him.

The truth itself bears witness that he is walking in it.

That is to say you can measure him by his doctrine, you can measure him by the truth.

He is loyal to the truth.

And again, it's an ongoing thing, the truth he professes and the truth he preaches is the truth he embodies and lives.

C. John speaks well of him.

John himself bears witness to this man.

There is an old saying it takes one to know one.
John was a true man of God and he knew one when he saw them.

John knew Demetrius walked in truth!

CONCLUSION:

- I. Gaius: *A Prosperous Soul walks in Love and Truth.* (vv. 1-8)
- II. Diotrephes: *A Prosperous Soul Submits to Spiritual Authority.* (vv. 9-11)
- III. Demetrius: *The Prosperous Soul Imitates Godly Examples.* (vv. 12-14)

ILLUSTRATION: The story is told of a Texas millionaire who wanted to be buried in his Cadillac.

So, when he died, the undertakers dug an enormous grave and placed the Cadillac on a huge lowering device.

They dressed the corpse in his sportiest clothes.

They put a cigar in his mouth, seated him behind the steering wheel, and set the speedometer at 80 miles per hour.

The mourners gathered around the grave.

As the unusual coffin slowly sank into the ground to the appropriate words of committal, a millionaire friend of the deceased brushed a tear from his eye and sighed, “Man, that’s living!”

But, of course, it’s not living—it’s death!

True prosperity is not to live as a millionaire and be buried in your Cadillac.

True prosperity is to be rich toward God (Luke 12:21). True prosperity is to have a prosperous soul.

The way to that eternal prosperity is to walk in the truth and in love, to submit to spiritual authority as revealed in the New Testament, and to imitate godly examples.

Then it may be said of you, “Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers.”

And your pastors will have great joy to hear that you are walking in the truth.

