



“Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God; but he that doeth evil hath not seen God” (III John 11).

Follow Good Examples

Central Truth: Believers should imitate those who practice truth.

L261. Date: February 1990. **Text:** III John 1-14. **Topic:** Growth: Spiritual.

God has so designed our minds that we learn by explanation, illustration, and application. When seeking to understand a matter, we might ask three questions. (1) What does it mean? That requires explanation. (2) How does it work? That involves illustration. (3) Of what benefit is it? That demands application. God designed us so that we function that way.

The third epistle of John affords three illustrations of Christian hospitality and missionary support. The first is a good example, the second is a bad example, and the third is another good example. Those illustrations are in the persons of three men: Gaius, Diotrephes, and Demetrius. We can learn from each of them what to do and what not to do in the church of God today.

Look beyond those three men as you study this epistle. Look at principles that apply to you and your support of men of God through your church. Get some direction for your life and follow it as you come away from this study.

I. A GOOD EXAMPLE - A SERVANT OF GOD (III John 1-8)

Meet Gaius, a faithful servant of God. He is spoken of as the “*beloved*” (III John 1, 2, 5, 11), as walking “*in the truth*” (verses 3, 4), and as doing a faithful work toward “*brethren*” and “*strangers*” (verses 5, 6). He seems to be a man worth knowing.

Four or five men are identified by the name Gaius in the New

Testament. Gaius of Macedonia was a companion of Paul in part of his missionary work (Acts 19:29). Gaius of Derbe accompanied Paul from Greece on the third missionary tour (Acts 20:4). Gaius was Paul's host when the epistle to the Romans was written (Romans 16:23). Gaius of Corinth was a convert whom Paul baptized there (I Corinthians 1:14). We do not know if Gaius of III John was one of the above brethren or was yet a fifth man by that name. Whoever he was, he set an example for us.

A. Gaius was an example in love. John loved him dearly, perhaps in part because Gaius loved God's servants so sincerely. His love was manifested in receiving ministers into his home, providing for their needs while they ministered in that place, then sending them with supplies to their next place of ministry. That is real love. That is love in action. He obeyed the biblical injunction to love with a pure heart fervently. He loved, and he showed it.

B. Gaius was an example in spirit. He was such a spiritual man that John could write a wish that Gaius may be as healthy in body as he was in spirit (verse 2). He must have delighted in the Word of God and fed his spirit upon it daily. Like King Uzziah of old, he sought the Lord and the Lord made him to prosper.

C. Gaius was an example in loyalty to truth (versed, 4). The truth was in him, and he lived by its principles. Could he have prayed the prayer of Psalm 86:11, *“Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth”*? Perhaps so. At least, he lived that kind of life and set a worthy example for us.

D. Gaius was an example in benevolence (verses 5, 6). There were many traveling evangelists, prophets, and teachers among the early Christians. The New Testament was not yet completed, and the converts needed someone to guide them into a fuller understanding of their new-found faith; There were no denominational organizations or mission departments to support the itinerant ministers. Believers had to receive them in their homes and provide for their needs. Gaius excelled in that ministry, receiving brethren he knew personally as well as brethren who were strangers to him. Do you suppose he knew the teaching of Jesus, *“Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me”* (Matthew 25:40)?

E. Gaius was an example in helping (verses 7, 8). He, like the household of Stephanus, was *“addicted . . . to the ministry of the saints”* (I Corinthians 16:15). It was something he just had to do when the opportunity presented itself. Every minister of God has met such people. Thank God for each one. He still has many saints today who have the spiritual gift of

helping and serving.

Do you see any qualities in Gaius that you feel should be cultivated in your life?

II. A BAD EXAMPLE - A CHURCH DICTATOR (III John 9-11)

Not everyone loves God's servants. Not every church member wants to invest in ministries away from their local community. Not every believer is willing to receive the ministry of those whom God has called to an itinerant ministry. One such man was Diotrephes. He was a bad example.

Who was Diotrephes? We do not know. There is no other reference to him in the Bible. He may have been some officer of the church who tried to usurp authority which his office did not obtain. It is evident from the text that Diotrephes was contentious, filled with pride to the extent that he refused to submit to the authority of the apostle John, critical in speaking harshly against the apostle, and domineering with other leaders in the church. Perhaps we are fortunate that we do not know more about him. He is hardly the kind of person one would enjoy knowing.

A. An effort to dominate is a bad example. Diotrephes loved to have the preeminence among the leaders. How tragic; yet, how human. Jesus had to deal with that problem among His twelve apostles. They got into arguments various times and had hard feelings between themselves as to which would be the greatest in the kingdom. Jesus had to teach them humility, to wash one another's feet, and that He alone was Master while they were brethren (Luke 22:24; Matthew 23:12). How much better it is to follow Jesus' example and be a servant to all.

B. A slanderous tongue is a bad example. Diotrephes was constantly ridiculing the apostle John by spiteful charges and foolish gossip (verse 10). What a sinful thing. To speak against the servant of God is to speak against God who has commissioned His servant. God calls such a person a fool (Proverbs 10:18) and a hypocrite (Proverbs 11:9). He warns, "*Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I cut off*" (Psalm 101:5). He hates that kind of spirit and will judge it severely. The New Testament warns that religion is vain (empty, meaningless) in the person who does not bridle his tongue (James 1:26). Be warned about a loose tongue connected to a bitter spirit.

C. A selfish spirit is a bad example. Diotrephes refused to help his Christian brothers, even though they were missionaries and evangelists, and forbade others in the church to help them also (verse 10). God teaches us to share our resources with those in need, saying, "*with such sacrifices God is*

well pleased" (Hebrews 13:16). The brother who labors in word and doctrine is worth twice the salary he receives (I Timothy 5:17). To support brethren in their ministry is to give to the Lord, even to Jesus himself. To neglect them is to grieve the Spirit of God.

D. An abuse of authority is a bad example. Diotrephes did not support Christian brothers in ministry; neither was he content to try to influence others who wanted to support them. He cast out of the church those who went beyond his wishes and supported them (verse 10). That is an abuse of authority. God never authorized any individual to exercise a discipline which he reserved for the congregation alone (Matthew 18:15-18; I Corinthians 5:1-5). Can you imagine a faithful member being cast out of the church because he gave to the support of a missionary? God will judge any person who abuses the ministers of Christ.

E. Doing evil is a bad example. John summarizes the character and conduct of Diotrephes in this statement: "*He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God*" (verse 11). Diotrephes told on himself by his attitude and actions. He is classed with those "*whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame*" (Philippians 3:19). "*They that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Romans 16:18). How very tragic such an example is. Some will know no better than to follow it.

What do you see in Diotrephes that is a warning to you? If you see in yourself any tendency to dominate, to speak evil, to be selfish, or to abuse authority in the church, flee to Jesus about it. Confess it to Him. Ask His forgiveness. Ask Him to help you to be strong in the virtues of humility, kindness, benevolence, and willingness to serve. He will, and you will rejoice as He does.

III. A GOOD EXAMPLE — AN HONORABLE REPUTATION (III John 12-14)

Two men are called by the name Demetrius in the New Testament records. There was a silversmith by that name in Ephesus who manufactured little silver shrines of the goddess Diana. He raised a riot because Paul was leading so many people to Jesus that the sale of the silver idol dropped off (Acts 19). The second man called Demetrius was mentioned in the third epistle of John. We know nothing more about him. Demas (mentioned in II Timothy 4:10) is a shortened form of the name Demetrius. The name was quite common among the Greeks, so we cannot identify the Demetrius of our text.

A. Gaining the respect of people is a good example. Demetrius had a good report in that people who knew him spoke well of him. They did not say, “*He is a good man, but. . .*” It was enough that they said, “He is a good man.” The New Testament places such a reputation in high esteem. The bishop (pastor) must have such a reputation before he is chosen to lead the church (1 Timothy 3:7). The first deacons were chosen because they had such a reputation (Acts 6:3). And the church in Rome had that kind of reputation throughout the empire (Romans 1:8; 16:19). That is an example worthy of our emulation.

B. Agreeing with the truth is a good example. Demetrius not only had the respect of people, but he also lived in agreement with the truth. As was said of Levi, “*The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity*” (Malachi 2:6). What better example could one follow?

C. Esteem of spiritual leaders is a good example. John respected Demetrius and bore testimony that he was an honorable brother in Christ. Are you living in such a way that your spiritual leader would give such a report of you?

Here are three examples, two were good and one was bad. If you have such examples, which will you choose to follow? Follow that which is good. Shun that which is evil. In your personal life and in your church work, be an example to the believers that those who follow you will also follow Christ.

Questions for discussion

1. How is Gaius described in III John?
2. How can you follow his example today?
3. What example is set for us in I Corinthians 16:15?
4. How did Gaius set an example in supporting missionaries?
5. What was wrong with Diotrephes?
6. How might that same bad spirit show up in a church today?
7. What should a church do about a dominating brother?
8. What were the good traits of Demetrius?
9. What have you learned from this study that you can put into practice?
10. What is the most significant truth you have learned from the three epistles of John?