



“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.

Soul Prosperity

Lesson Aim: to see the blessedness of a benevolent spirit.

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Topic: Growth (Spiritual).

INTRODUCTION—Character is what a man is; reputation is what people think he is. Today's study deals with Christian character and reputation. Three men in a church demonstrate the blessedness of a benevolent spirit and the curse of an un-Christian attitude. These men are named Gaius, Diotrephes, and Demetrius.

The title of today's study is “Soul Prosperity.” It underscores the ugliness of a spiritually destitute soul and the beauty of spiritual health. It also separates between the condition of the body and spirit. One may be healthy in body and sick of soul or he may be sickly in body and enjoying great spiritual health. We should come from this study resolved that we will work to be as healthy in spirit as we are in body, giving as much attention to the former as to the latter.

Here is an opportunity for a spiritual inventory. Are you a prosperous soul like Gaius? Are you a sickly soul like Diotrephes? Does your spiritual health manifest itself in the honorable reputation you bear as did Demetrius?

The world system of which we are a part is centered on the body. It is concerned only with material things. But the Christian knows this is only one side of life. It is foolish to take thought of the body but not of the soul. Let this lesson be God's Word to your heart concerning this truth.

Spiritual vitality expresses itself in many areas of life. It involves your affection, service, attitude, relationship to other people, concern for missionary evangelism around the world, and even your willingness to

cooperate in your church. How wonderful it would be if all Christians were thus spiritually full grown!

The aim of today's study is, "to see the blessedness of a benevolent spirit."

EXPOSITION

I. A BROTHER IN CHRIST

Meet Gaius, a "well-beloved" brother in Christ. It is to him that John addressed this Third Epistle. He was a faithful Christian worthy of respect and affection by other Christians. His conduct was marked by truth and his attitude by hospitality. The exact identity of this brother cannot be ascertained with certainty. No less than three Christians by this name are mentioned in the New Testament. One lived in Corinth, another in Macedonia, and a third in Derbe—I Corinthians 1:14; Acts 19:29; Acts 20:4. Each was a friend of the Apostle Paul. The Gaius of this Third Epistle may have been either or neither of these. But he was a "well-beloved" brother in Christ.

1. A brother in Christ should be loved by all Christians, verses 1, 2, 5. Three times Gaius is called by a term of great affection. He is "the well-beloved Gaius," and two other times called "beloved." How John must have loved him! But note the nature and basis of this affection between them: "whom I love in the truth." Theirs was a bond of esteem forged upon the anvil of truth revealed in Jesus Christ. It was a Christian affection based upon truth. Christian love is a common thing among those who know Jesus personally. It results from the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, Romans 5:5. And it is a testimony to the world that we truly know Him, John 13:35.

2. A brother in Christ should have the good will of his fellow Christians, verse 2. John's "wish" for Gaius to prosper in body as he does in spirit is a blessed expression of Christian concern. The term "wish" also means to pray and is commonly used to express a strong and earnest desire. His wish must have expressed itself in prayer to God for the brother Gaius.

A Christian spirit is never vengeful, envious, nor harmful to another. It is concerned that the worldly prosperity, comfort, and bodily health of every other brother be as prosperous as his spiritual health. The Christian looks upon every man with good will. Is this your spirit?

3. A brother in Christ will walk in truth, verse 3. Some brethren who were friends of both John and Gaius had reported to John as to the quality of this brother's manner of life. The Apostle wrote of their report: "What happiness it gave me when some Brothers came and spoke so highly of your fidelity to the truth, how you live in obedience to the truth." One is reminded of I Corinthians 13:6 which teaches, "Love is never glad when others go wrong; love is gladdened by goodness."

4. A brother in Christ will rejoice to see others walking in truth, verse 4. John testified that nothing afforded him more enjoyment than to hear from time to time that his spiritual children (those he had led to Christ and started in Christian growth) were continuing to live guided by the truth. Many parents have felt this same sense of pride as they watched their children grow up to be honorable men and women. If we rejoice in the flesh, how much more in spiritual growth!

5. A brother in Christ serves in love, verses 5-8. True devotion to Jesus is not just emotion. It is service to others in His name. In this, Gaius set an example for all believers.

(1) He served without respect of persons, verse 5. Some whom he served were "brethren" who were well known to him. Others were "strangers" whom he had not met before. But he faithfully served them all.

(2) He served in open example, verse 6. Loving treatment by Gaius was not for show and praise, but neither did he do it in a secret. Many bore witness of his love "before the church"—in the assembly of Christians. Thus others were stirred up to serve in love. We may all follow such a standard of Christian hospitality.

(3) He served missionary-evangelists in a special way, verse 7-8. Doubtlessly the "strangers" whom Gaius served were brethren engaged in the work of missionary-evangelism. When they came by his church, Gaius received them into his home, gave of his resources to supply their needs, encouraged their spirits, and sent them on their way.

(4) He served because of his devotion to Jesus. Gaius did not receive these brethren and provide for their needs because he was obligated through an office of the church or because he was asked to do so by the church. It will be observed below that the church as a whole neglected this ministry. Diotrephes, who was in charge of the church, refused to receive a missionary and even cast out of the church those who did. Yet Gaius, in devotion to Jesus, helped these brethren to the limit of his ability. Are you this kind of Christian?

II. A BOSS IN THE CHURCH

Meet Diotrephes, a church boss! We know nothing of him except what is written in this Third Epistle of John. But what we know is enough. He was a church boss. Refusing to recognize the authority of John as an apostle, he had no concern for mission work nor mission workers. His primary concern was his own preeminence. God deliver us from such leaders or members in our churches today!

1. A church boss is marked by egotism, verse 9. The Apostle had written a letter to the church. But Diotrephes had intercepted it, refused to let the church follow its instructions, and cast out of the church those who objected to its ways. His desire to be in control of the church would permit no place for John's counsel or authority to be expressed.

2. A church boss may promote evil gossip, verse 9. Diotrephes was “prating” against John with “evil words.” This is the only place in the New Testament where this term “prate” is used. It means to “overflow with talk.” It describes one who talks of idle, foolish, unprofitable, and sometimes untrue things. “Malicious words” which should never be spoken by a Christian were not only spoken by Diotrephes but were spoken against a beloved Apostle of the Lord Jesus.

3. A church boss is often anti-missionary, verse 10. A church boss cannot risk the congregation becoming interested in some other person than himself nor can he risk the teachings it hears from someone who is not “on his side.” Therefore, he commonly withholds interest from missionary work, refuses to welcome missionary workers, and causes the church to lose interest in missionary-evangelism. We are thereby warned to watch out if our church begins to lose concern for world evangelism. It could be the beginning of a dictatorship in the congregation.

4. A church boss should never be the example of a devoted Christian, verse 11. John warns, “Do not follow bad examples, but good ones. He who does good is a child of God; he who does evil has never seen God.”

III. A BROTHER'S GOOD REPUTATION

Meet Demetrius, a well-respected man. And how did he get such a good reputation? By honorable and Christ-like behavior. Thus testimony of his honorable character was born by those of his home church and all others who knew him. This is as it should be to one who is a devout disciple of Jesus Christ.

The life of Brother Demetrius was in full accord to the truth revealed in Jesus. This was the secret of his spiritual prosperity. The presence of such

truth in him produced the qualities of faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and love, II Peter 1:5-8. No wonder all men respected him and spoke of his good character. This is what Jesus wants to do to every man.

Is this the kind of Christian you are? If not, it is the kind you can become. All the resources of Jesus Christ are available to make you so.

Place yourself at the full disposal of the Lord Jesus. Ask Him to fill you with His Holy Spirit. Make every correction and change He asks for in your life. Let self die, being put off the throne of your life, and let Jesus reign. Then you will be so caught up in the joy of knowing and serving Him that you will not be ambitious for the praise of men. But God will make you the kind of person that men will honor for they will know that you are living with Jesus.

CONCLUSION — Today's study has looked at three men: Gaius, Diotrephes, and Demetrius. Gaius was a well-beloved brother in Christ whose great joy was in serving missionaries in the name of Christ. Diotrephes was a dominating character whose great joy was in ruling the church. Demetrius was an honorable man whose great joy was in living the life of the Lord Jesus day by day.

Which of these three men came closest to characterizing your own life? Do you welcome fellow Christians, even those you do not know personally, and delight to help them? Or, do you leave that to others? Do you seek to help and encourage God's servants, even to your own inconvenience, or do you seek only to please yourself? Do you love and support mission work around the world or are you concerned only about your ideal community?

There is no question about the relationship Gaius and Demetrius had with the Lord Jesus. There is a question about Diotrephes' relationship with Him. What do people think of you in view of your Christian attitude and conduct?

QUESTIONS

1. Who was Gaius?
2. What qualities about Gaius do you admire?
3. What was wrong with Diotrephes?
4. What is "soul prosperity"?
5. Why was Demetrius honored by all?
6. How does concern for missions reveal one's spiritual maturity?

7. How are truth and love related?

8. How can a Christian earn the respect of men?