



**“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.**

## **Spiritual Prosperity**

**Lesson Aim:** To increase spiritual maturity by cultivating a benevolent spirit

**L351. Date:** August 1976. **Text:** III John 1-14. **Topic:** Growth: Spiritual.

The Third Epistle of John is a study in character. Three men of very different characters are presented in it. (1) **Gaius** was the “well beloved” brother to whom the epistle is addressed. There is no way to determine his exact identity. Three friends of Paul who bore that name lived in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:14), Macedonia (Acts 19:29), and Derbe (Acts 20:4), respectively. The Gaius who was mentioned by John probably lived in Pergamos. He was a loyal layman who loved God and the people of God.

(2) **Diotrephes** was a brother who “loveth to have the preeminence” among Christians. He seems to have been an officer of the church, dominating her affairs and “running” things to suit himself. Though he was in a position of authority in the congregation, he was spiritually weak.

(3) **Demetrius** was the messenger who delivered the epistle from the Apostle John to the well-beloved Gaius. He was a good man, highly recommended by all those who knew him.

Those three men represented three kinds of people who are to be found in churches today. As you study, ask yourself which of these three personalities reflect your personal attitude and relationship with God and His church.

The study aims “to increase spiritual maturity” in each believer. Please keep that aim in mind as you read. Look for qualities of character to be cultivated and qualities to be shunned. Let the study help you grow in Christ.

### **I. GAIUS: A Prosperous Soul (1-8)**

Believers should praise God for growing Christians. Such a man was Gaius. It is possible to examine him and find those qualities which should mark each believer in Christ, identifying him as one who is growing to maturity in the Lord.

A. A prosperous soul loves and lives in the truth (verses 1-4). Like Gaius he “walks in the truth.” Truth is more than a cold, hard knowledge of the facts of the Christian revelation. To Gaius it was a warm reality which he manifested in obedience to God's will and in his ministry to a brother's need. His spirit was alien to that of one who boasts that he has truth but whose attitude is cold and harsh to saint and sinner. If truth has its proper influence in the life, it will temper both spirit and actions.

**“Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth,”** verse 2. How would it fare with you if your physical health was in exact relationship to your spiritual health? The spiritual health is as important (or more important) as the physical health. Be sure you keep your soul healthy.

Spiritual life is never to be lived in a vacuum. Gaius lived among his brethren in such a way that they knew of his spiritual prosperity and reported it to the Apostle John (verse 3). The aged apostle rejoiced at the report. Many people must have been blessed again and again by the well-beloved Gaius.

B. A prosperous soul walks in love toward his brethren (verses 5, 6). Friend and stranger alike are to receive the good will and loving ministry of the Christian. Of course, one would be kind to his friends, but Hebrews 13:2 testifies that some have entertained angels unawares by receiving strangers and ministering to them. Like Gaius, Christians should open their fellowship in church and in private homes to welcome God's people.

John referred to the custom of Gaius to receive Christian missionaries and evangelists who were on their tours of service. Gaius housed them, provided the needs for their journey, and saw them on their way with joyous spirit. Many of God's saints through the generations have been hosts to God's messengers and found their homes blessed as a consequence,

Gaius may have remembered the words of Jesus, **“... He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me,”** John 13:20. What a blessed promise! God's representatives (preachers, evangelists, missionaries, and other workers) are to be treated as one would treat God. Such a spirit of concern indicates true spiritual prosperity and shows that one is truly a man of God.

C. A prosperous soul supports the Lord's work (verses 6-8). Many bore

witness of Gaius' "charity before the church." Believers should thank God for those faithful men and women of God who have received and supplied the needs of God's messengers. The missionaries cannot depend upon the heathen for their support; they rather depend upon God's people. God has ordained that those who "preach the gospel should live of the gospel." As help is rendered to one of God's messengers the helper becomes a co-worker with the missionary of the truth.

Some men will try to use the Lord's people for personal advantage. Christians should be doubly careful about financing only those who are true workers. They should be careful about sending offerings to men or ministries about which they are not fully familiar.

The best method of financial support of the Lord's work and workers is the systematic contribution of tithes and offerings to the local church. The church will, in turn, faithfully disburse those offerings to the many areas of work where there is need. That system is fair, proportionate, free from covetousness, encourages more liberal offerings, and will provide ample supply to meet the financial needs of the Lord's work.

## II. DIOTREPHESES: An Impoverished Soul (9-11)

A. An impoverished soul loves to have pre-eminence over his brethren (verse 9). Diotrephes was such a man. It is not clear whether he was pastor, deacon, teacher, or some other official; however, there is no question that he had a place of authority and was ambitious to rule the whole congregation. He refused to recognize the authority of the Apostle John or any other brother. Like many other impoverished souls, much trouble arose from his vain ambition.

Diotrephes was opposed to missionaries. He refused to welcome the workers to the church, even casting out those members who received them. He held to the doctrines of the church, but denied them by his practice. He looked on the congregation as his personal flock. He ignored the admonition of the Apostle Peter not to be a "lord" over God's heritage (I Peter 5:3). Poor Diotrephes. At the time he was feeling so important, spiritually minded people knew him for what he was — an impoverished soul.

There are still too many people with that spirit. A certain religious journal carried an article on Diotrephes. Twenty-five church leaders stopped their subscriptions because they thought they were being personally attacked by the publication. May God deliver His churches from the rule of spiritually-starved descendants of Diotrephes.

B. An impoverished soul will use malicious words to get his way (verse

10). A pastor once advised a young man who was entering the ministry, “You can never build anything permanent on the wreckage of something else.” Diotrephes did not know that. To build his own image, he tried to berate and destroy the influence of an apostle of Jesus Christ. How different is that spirit from the attitude of Him who was “meek and lowly of heart.” A spiritual leader will not try to rule over the heads of the church, but he will be willing to wash their feet if that will serve the Lord.

Enemies of the Lord often resort to malicious slander when faced with losing their place of influence or authority. God gave a principle through the Apostle James: **“If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain,”** James 1:26.

C. An impoverished soul is estranged from God (verse 11). Some church bosses are not saved. Others trust Christ, but are so backslidden that they have lost His motivation and spirit in service. It is bad when an unsaved person gets prominence in the church. It is also bad when a saved person acts like a Diotrephes because he is so backslidden. The only way for a modern Diotrephes to draw near to God is to renounce self, repent of sin, and seek the Lord. **“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up,”** James 4:10.

### III. DEMETRIUS: A Growing Soul (12-14)

A. A growing soul will be respected of men (verse 12). Demetrius was such a person who “hath good report of all men.” That is the kind of reputation each Christian should have. No Christian ever advances by lowering his standards. No one respects a person of small convictions. Demetrius is remembered with honor because he was faithful to Christ. May God give us more of that kind of men!

B. A growing soul will stay close to the truth (verse 12). There is no need to fear the man whose life coincides with God's revealed truth. Spiritual prosperity always attends such a man. He grows in faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and in divine love. Those qualities make him fruitful in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ (II Peter 1:5-8). One needs to keep close to the truth if he would be in spiritual health.

C. A growing soul delights in fellowship with Christian brethren (verses 13, 14). Christian fellowship is the highest fellowship of all. It is the natural expression of relationship with God and His children. Can a believer imagine any thing better than being a friend of God and of the people of

God?

Today's study has reviewed the character of three men. Did you see yourself reflected in any of them? Did you find any qualities to be cultivated and any to be shunned? Make a list of the good qualities that you wish to add to your life. Pray over them day by day and ask God to make you that kind of Christian.

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

May you be a growing, Christ-honoring Christian in all of your life.

### Questions

1. How would you characterize Gaius?
2. How would you characterize Diotrephes?
3. How would you characterize Demetrius?
4. What qualities of Gaius should you copy?
5. What qualities of Diotrephes should you shun?
6. What qualities of Demetrius should you cultivate?
7. What does verse 2 mean to you?
8. How can you help another with the truths of this lesson?
9. How can a Christian earn the respect of men?
10. How has the study helped you?