

**Date:** May 31, 2009  
**Series:** A New Testament Postcard  
**Sermon:** A Tale of Three Men  
**Scripture:** 3 John  
**Speaker:** Phil Thengvall

What did you see as you took your first look in the mirror this morning? A bad bed-head? A reminder that you need a haircut? A new pimple, wrinkle, or gray hair? Or maybe you are a 10 year-old boy and you haven't looked in a mirror since last February!

As I sneak up on the age when I have to sign up for Medicare, I keep thinking to myself, "but I don't feel like I am almost 65!"

Even though the face I see in the mirror belongs to a man in his mid-sixties, I still think of myself as being in my mid-twenties. I keep firming up that mental image by looking at an old picture of myself taken as I graduated from the Charles Atlas body building course, standing on the beach in Malibu, flexing my well developed muscles.

If you don't recognize the name of Charles Atlas, he was the developer of a bodybuilding method which has been described as one of the most lasting and memorable ad campaigns of all time. According to Atlas, he trained himself to develop his body from that of a "97 lb. weakling" into the most popular muscleman of his day.

Now in my case, a look in the mirror gives me a reality check and puts me back in touch with the truth.

Something that can serve as a mirror for me when it comes to evaluating my spiritual life is the Bible.

The Bible was given to us to show us God's heart, and to show us how he wants us to live.

In 3 John the mirror of Scripture lets us look at the lives of three men, three persons in a local church; Gaius, Diotrefes, and Demetrius. Two of these individuals lead exemplary lives, the third one did not. Turn in your Bibles to 3 John.

This letter was written by John near the end of the first century, around 85 or 90 A.D. The recipients of this letter lived in the vicinity of Ephesus, what is western Turkey today.

Pastor Dick skillfully taught from 2 John last Sunday, which included a warning against welcoming deceivers. 3 John is a warning against turning away those who are true believers.

The first person we will look at in 3 John is Gaius, a Christian whom we should imitate. John calls him a faithful fellow worker.

It appears that John knew him well because he wrote to him in a warm and friendly manner. He addressed him as "Dear Friend" or "Beloved" four times in this brief postcard. In *The Message*, Eugene Peterson puts the greeting this way, "How truly I love you! We're the best of friends." Three things that John says about him are important to notice. **First, he was spiritually fit;** he was strong of soul: <sup>1</sup>*The elder, To my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth.* <sup>2</sup>*Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.*

I like the way the Authorized Version reads: ... *that you may prosper in health just as you prosper in soul.*

That is a wonderful thing to say about someone, isn't it? "I hope that you are as healthy physically as you are spiritually." Would you like someone to wish that for you? John knew Gaius well enough that this was a positive thing to desire. Would it be for you? If your physical appearance reflected your spiritual vitality, what would you look like? Would you be a robust individual -- strong and virile?

Or would you be a doddering weakling, barely able to get around?

I know you got a good laugh from the photo I showed you earlier, but let me ask you this. Is this what you look like in your inner man; is this a representation of your spiritual life?

Regardless of what Gaius may have looked like on the outside, he was a Charles Atlas type on the inside. If I was planting a church I would want several men and women on the leadership team that were just like Gaius.

In spite of of the condition of our physical health, we should continue to thrive spiritually. In 2 Corinthians Paul said that despite the physical difficulties he was experiencing he was robust in spirit. (4:7-9, 16)

**“But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.”**

This renewal only happens as we spend dedicated time with Jesus each day in the Scripture (that is how God talks to us) and in prayer (how we talk to him).

In addition John wants us to see that Gaius **had integrity**, he was consistent in his actions: <sup>3</sup>*It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth.* <sup>4</sup>*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.*

Gaius was a person whose life was congruent. What he believed (faithfulness to the truth) matched how he lived (he walked in the truth). If you were with us for the series of sermons from Matthew you may recall what Jesus said about the Pharisees.

**Matthew 23:1-3, Now Jesus turned to address his disciples, along with the crowd that had gathered with them. The religion scholars and Pharisees are competent teachers in God's Law. You won't go wrong in following their teachings on Moses. But be careful about following them. They talk a good line, but they don't live it.**

**They don't take it into their hearts and live it out in their behavior. It's all spit-and-polish veneer.” (The Message)**

The Pharisees were not people of integrity. In contrast, you could either do what Gaius taught or live as he lived. There was no difference. He had an integrated life. He did not preach cream and live skim milk. He walked in the truth.

Every parent or uncle or aunt or grandparent here this morning can identify with what John says in verse 4. *“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.”* No greater joy!

We are happy with news of good grades in school, with good reviews at work, and hearing about successful marriages. But nothing warms our hearts like someone telling us that a relative or close friend is living a distinctly Christian life. I also hear from some of you about the deep pain you experience because your children are not walking with the Lord.

What do people say about you? Can it be said of you that you are walking in the truth, living in a way that is consistent with what Jesus asked his followers to do and say? Are you looking in the mirror of scripture each day, and making changes as needed? I hope so.

Let’s look again at this relationship between John and Gaius – Gaius was not John’s child physically. John either led him to Christ, or was his mentor.

Do you have spiritual children who can identify you as a person who was a stepping stone in their path to knowing Christ?

Do you know how they are doing, are they continuing to grow, are they making disciples themselves? Their health as a believer should be a matter of concern to you, as Gaius’ was to John.

And finally, in verse 5 we see **Gaius was hospitable**. *“Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you. <sup>6</sup>They have told the church about your love. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God.*

In this period of the early church there were many traveling evangelists who were solely dependent upon the Christians in each local town to care for them during their stay. Gaius was known for the generous and faithful manner in which he welcomed and provided for these itinerant preachers.

One of the signs that a person has really been genuinely touched by God is that her resources are shared freely with others, even strangers. Gaius was faithful (loyal) with all that he had. He welcomed these traveling evangelists, many of whom he did not know, and saw to their needs while they were in town and sent them on their way with all they needed for the road.

I grew up in a pastor’s home, the oldest of seven children. My father and mother were such great examples of the Gaius style of hospitality. Many were the Sundays we had extra people at our dining table, people who were new visitors at church that day, or missionaries, or evangelists, or Christian book distributors. Mom had some magical way of stretching whatever had been prepared so that the unexpected guests had enough to eat. One Sunday the main course was chicken, and we children were all told ahead of time to only take one piece of chicken so there would be enough for everyone. As the platter of chicken was passed to the guest first, he took two pieces of chicken. My little sister was quick to clarify, “My mother said we are only supposed to take one piece of chicken.” I don’t remember how we recovered, but in the end, there was plenty of chicken to go around.

Showing hospitality doesn't limit itself to your home, it includes your wallet, your purse, your paycheck, your monthly pension, everything. Are you considerate of others with your time, your abilities, and your resources?

Some of you knew John Gee. John was an extremely generous man. He gave freely of his time, of his skills, and of his money.

More times than I can count John would catch me on a Sunday morning and hand me an envelope and say, "I've heard that so and so is having a tough time, please see that they get this, and don't tell them where it came from."

The Apostle John provides us with this stunning picture of Gaius that we can use as a model. He was spiritually vigorous, he walked in integrity, and he was hospitable. Gaius is certainly a Christian to emulate. If you stood side by side with him in front a mirror that revealed your spiritual character, how would you measure up?

Now we move to our second individual, a man named Diotrephes, an evil person, a very difficult individual. Look at verse nine with me.

*<sup>9</sup>I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. <sup>10</sup>So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church.*

The apostle John is frequently characterized as the "apostle of love" because there is a marked focus on love in his writings. But love does not ignore wrongdoing, and John was not reluctant to point out error when the occasion demanded it.

This is the first example in the New Testament of what we call a church boss – someone who tries to run the church. He may have been an elder or a deacon or perhaps a pastor, it is difficult to tell. Too many congregations have been held in the grip of these petty tyrants to regard this phenomenon as unusual. Would you believe there is such a thing as a Diotrephes Syndrome?

**"Sadly, in the Christian marketplace there seems to be an incubating epidemic of the Diotrephes Syndrome. I believe we have all known someone who, whether they were capable or not, needed to be in control of everything. From the playground bully to the micromanaging supervisor, controllers are all around us. And sadly, there are people in the church as well that are this way. Controllers come in many forms.**

**They can be elders, the preacher, or members working from behind the scenes to promote an agenda or to run the church the way they think it should be run. They usually have an inner circle, because there is strength in numbers.**

**They can manipulate what is taught, refuse to let sound doctrine be preached, and insist that scriptural interpretations be changed to meet their own criteria. And if they go unopposed, then, over time, their control can increase to the point where they cannot be effectively opposed. They may actually believe that they are acting in a faithful manner, but well intentioned or not, the damage they may cause can be irreversible." Christopher Carter**

Having served smaller congregations in the past I have had personal, very unpleasant encounters with several individuals who functioned in the position of church boss.

Some of my fellow students at seminary are not in pastorate today, partly due to the influence of men or women in the churches they served whose main goal was to make their lives miserable.

John indicates here that Diotrephes was guilty of four particularly destructive attitudes and actions. These are traits common to the church boss.

**He would not submit to the authority** of the Apostle John. John says Diotrephes would “have nothing to do with us” and was “gossiping maliciously about us.”

He unjustly accused John behind his back with wicked words, spreading harmful rumors to ruin if possible the reputation of John with this local church.

I have vivid memories of board meetings in which the church boss was opposed to a proposal that was being considered. His final comment was, “I won’t be part of a church that does that!” Since he was an influential person in the church, his comment was a death knell to the proposal.

But Diotrephes did not limit his antagonism to John; it was also directed toward others. John says that Diotrephes **withheld hospitality**; he refused to welcome the traveling evangelists who made contact with their church. Doing the opposite of Gaius who showed these folks Christian hospitality, Diotrephes closed his heart, his home, and his wallet to the needs of these ministers.

In doing so he also deprived these itinerant evangelists of the support and help they needed for their ministry to unbelievers.

A third mark against him was that **he misused his authority**; he put people out of the church who wanted to show these worthy strangers hospitality.

Possibly, these visiting preachers were a threat to Diotrephes, and so anyone who was in favor of welcoming them also became a threat.

It seems his goal was to rid the church of anyone who did not think as he did. He was a very powerful man in this church, and used his influence to promote his own agenda. As we read in a previous description of church bosses, *“if they go unopposed, then, over time, their control can increase to the point where they cannot be effectively opposed.”* This leads us to John’s harshest criticism of Diotrephes.

Diotrephes **wanted to be #1**, numero uno; “he put himself first”. He loved to be chief, the man in charge, which is a dead give-away that he was acting in the flesh. This is always the philosophy of the old nature -- me first.

Unfortunately, as we have said, there are plenty of people like Diotrephes in the church today, and they are always characterized by this attitude. The late Pastor Ray Stedman said,

**I remember reading some years ago that Dr. H.E. Robertson, an outstanding leader among the Southern Baptists and a great Greek scholar, once wrote an editorial in the denominational**

**magazine about Diotrephes. Later, the editor reported that twenty-five deacons wrote to cancel their subscriptions, feeling they had been personally attacked.**

Now let us see what John's counsel is in this situation. Notice that he did not advise Gaius to organize a split away from the church. He did not even suggest a coup to have Diotrephes impeached. Rather, he says, <sup>10</sup>*“So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing.... Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. He who does good is of God; he who does evil has not seen God. {3 Jn 1:11}*

In other words, do not follow these people who want the preeminence.

If you see somebody who is always jockeying for position in Christian relationships, always wanting to be in the public eye, do not follow him or her. They are following their own agenda and not that of God.

I do not doubt that Diotrephes was a Christian, but it was very clear that he was not walking in the truth, he was not seeing eye to eye with God. If he was looking in the mirror of Scripture, he was not doing anything about what he saw there. He was an example of what is described in James 1:22-24, –

**“Don't fool yourself into thinking that you are a listener when you are anything but, letting the Word go in one ear and out the other.**

**Act on what you hear! Those who hear and don't act are like those who glance in the mirror, walk away, and two minutes later have no idea who they are, what they look like.” The Message.**

Before we move to our next character in the gallery of Scripture, mentally go back into that room with the wall-size mirror and imagine yourself standing beside Diotrephes. Are there any similarities, any character traits you share in common? I confess that I, like Diotrephes, enjoy the limelight, I get pleasure from being the guy in charge. I struggle daily with pride and this comparison to Diotrephes is a good reminder of how my sense of self-importance can get me into trouble.

If we think of Diotrephes as being an example of a person not to imitate, then Demetrius was just the opposite; he was a fine example, a model of what is good.

John tells us that Demetrius **had an excellent reputation.**

<sup>12</sup>*Demetrius is well spoken of by everyone—and even by the truth itself. We also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true.*

Three sources give testimony that Demetrius was trustworthy: 1) Everyone who knew him spoke well of him; 2) the truth itself testified to his being truthful, a person of integrity; 3) John and his fellow apostles vouched for him too. Evidently, Demetrius was the bearer of this letter to Gaius, and was probably one of those evangelists who traveled from place to place. I delayed reading verses seven and eight until now because they describe the kind of man he was:

<sup>7</sup>*It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans.* <sup>8</sup>*We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth.*

This sounds to me like Demetrius **was obedient to the call of God** to go out. He served as an evangelist, reaching out into places where the church had not yet gone.

The Apostle John says people like Demetrius have gone out; and in so doing they have left things behind. They gave up their source of income and their livelihood, and went out to obey this calling.

Not everyone goes -- that was as true in the early church as it is today. There were some, such as Gaius, who were to stay behind to help support these men and women.

This leads us to John's final comment about Demetrius: **He was worthy of support.** Since men and women like Demetrius received no financial help from those to whom they preached the gospel (the pagans), John says to Gaius, <sup>8</sup>*We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth.* In so doing the local church members became fellow workers together for the truth.

William Barclay has written a number of N.T. commentaries, and although I don't agree with him on every point, I appreciated this comment:

**A person's circumstances may be such that he cannot become a missionary or a preacher. Life may have put him in a position where he must get on with a secular job, and where he must stay in the one place, and carry out the routine duties of life and living. But where he cannot go his money and his prayers and his practical support can go; and, if he gives that support, he has made himself an ally of the truth.**

**It is not everyone who can be, so to speak, in the front line, but every man by supporting those who are in the front line can make himself an ally of the truth.**

Wouldn't it be wonderful if, after you got to glory, God wrote "FWT" after your name, "Fellow Worker in the Truth" What a commendation to have! Are you a Fellow Worker in the Truth?

For every dollar you give to First Free at least 25 cents goes directly to support men and women who are missionaries around the world and here in Wichita.

I asked Pastor Dan, who oversees our support of missionaries here at First Free, to give me the number of those missionaries who we would say "went out from our church family".

He came up with an approximate number of 32. (If you are interested in that list, please contact Pastor Dan in the church office.)

Because you contribute to the Sunday offering does this alone make you a Fellow Worker in the Truth? I suppose it does, but there is so much more you can do. Do you know some of these missionaries personally? Do you get their prayer letters? Do you open your home to them? Do you make an effort to see them when they are back in Wichita to get a personal update and assure them of your prayers? If you can answer "yes" to some of these questions then you can really call yourself a Fellow Worker in the Truth. May your number increase!

The early church was certainly not without its problems; nor is First Free. Because we, the members of this local church are human and still have a sinful nature, we will encounter problems until Christ

comes again. As we have looked at ourselves in the mirror alongside these three very different, and yet representative, church members, we cannot fail to be challenged concerning our own walk with Christ. Are you more like Gaius, Diotrephes, or Demetrius?

The ultimate proof of the truth we profess to believe and the love we profess to exercise, will be seen neither in our words nor in our feelings but in the progressive transformation of our character, and therefore of our lifestyle, into the image of Christ. In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul promises that the goal of the Holy Spirit is to make us like Christ.

**Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.**

The challenge to us now is how much we are really prepared to let Holy Spirit change us. Is it to be my will or his? On this will rest the ultimate verdict, whether we prove to be frauds or followers. Who is at the center of our lives? Is it self with its longing to be first? Or is it Christ, enabling us to keep faithful and to continue walking in the truth? There is no issue that has greater or more far-reaching implications for the church or for the Christian.

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