

**Practical Exhortations  
From the  
Third Epistle of John**

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**Address to Young Christians  
Pasadena General Meetings  
December 28, 1963**



## The Third Epistle of John

There are three characters mentioned in this little Epistle, Gaius, Diotrephes, and Demetrius. I am sure none of them knew that they were going to get their names in the Bible. Two were faithful men that walked through this scene with such allegiance to Christ that He thought fit to inscribe their names here. They will be glad to know in that coming day that their pathway through this world was to the credit of Christ, and not to His discredit. Now, as far as Diotrephes is concerned, we will have to leave him with the Lord. "The Lord knoweth them that are His." Just because we happen to be nominally in the Meeting, it is not in itself proof that we are candidates for heaven. So, I believe there are lessons that we can draw from the fact that these three men are listed here, and certain things told us about them.

This first man, Gaius: "The elder unto the well-beloved Gaius." Now, there are some rather dark things in this little Epistle; some gross failure in the conduct of this Diotrephes, and yet we see the Apostle John, this dear, aged servant of the Lord, using that lovely word "beloved" three times—three times in this short Epistle. Oh, dear saints of God, isn't it a wonderful thing to belong to the beloved of the Lord—to be entitled to that precious address, "beloved!" It is the Lord Himself that says it by His Spirit; for the aged Apostle here is speaking in the Spirit. This, that we are reading here, is inspired. And, in addressing this

Gaius, he calls him, "well-beloved." Not only by John, but he had that character; he was "well-beloved."

"Whom I love in truth." How empty the friendships of this world! You have to buy many of the allegiances of the world. You can join this or that association, club or lodge and, if you pay your dues, you are a "brother," and your friends in the same association are going to stand by you in a certain degree. Still, how uncertain it is. But this association is one that is formed for eternity. John can say that I love Gaius *in truth*. That is what really counts. Truth—a good, sound, solid basis. You don't have to readjust that; it stands the test of the ages. It will stand the test of eternity. Form those kind of friendships, and you will never regret it.

"Beloved"—here is our word again—"Beloved, I desire in all things (I am reading Mr. Darby's translation here) thou shouldest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospers." What an encouraging salutation. I wish (not, "*above* all things;" but) "*in* all things thou shouldest prosper and be in health." Who doesn't enjoy that? Prosper—let's get on well, and be in health. We all enjoy feeling well. But, the aged Apostle doesn't leave it there. He says, "Even as thy soul prospers." That is like the governor on a piece of machinery—it keeps it from running away with itself. God has balances in connection with the truth, that we may not delight in it intellectually and then have it fail in our lives. So He has various ways of helping us in the display of the life of Christ. Don't forget that last phrase—"Even as thy soul prospereth." We don't want the first two to outrun the third.

I believe Second Corinthians, chapter 4, verse 10 will help us here. "Always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body." Notice that word, "always." "*Always* bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus." Oh, dear young folks, don't ever plan to take a vacation from consistency with that verse—"Always bearing about in the body the life of Jesus." Don't plan any of these so called good times, when the plan is, "to get together and forget that you belong to the Meeting—just forget it, we're going to have a little fun." We don't find anything like that allowed in this verse, do we? "*Always* bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body." Think of it: You and I are placed in that marvelous spiritual dignity of representing in this world our Lord Jesus Christ! Where you work—at the shop, the factory, in school, in the office,—regardless of where your level is, do those that know you best see Christ in your walk and ways? "Always . . . that the life of Jesus might be manifest in our body."

Now, God knows what failing things we are; He knows it. So He says in the next verse of this chapter (verse 11) that He is going to help us. (I say this reverently, I trust). He is going to help us do what He exhorts us to do in verse 10. "For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh." God has marvelous and varied ways of passing us through the fires of refinement in order that the truth of the tenth verse may be made good in our lives.

I am speaking to Christian young people; I take it for granted that many of you are still in your teens; some of you in your 20's. But you have lived long enough, haven't you, to find out that God comes into your life with His discipline? He comes in to check you up. He has various ways of doing it; He is an infinite God, and His measures are infinite. He knows how to deal with you, and He knows how to deal with me. But He does not just turn us loose to go on and live our lives without interfering. Oh, thank God, He interferes!

Where would any of us older believers be today if God had kept His government out of our lives? Beloved young people, we are frank to own to you that His government has been found in our lives so that we might not stray from the path, and we are so grateful to Him that He interfered with some of our grandiose plans and ambitions. We bless and praise Him for it! So, don't get discouraged if some of your nicely laid plans are spoiled, if things don't work out—don't get distressed and discouraged, and be tempted to give up, or say, "Well, it's no use, I might just as well go into the world." Oh, I beseech you, don't do that! "We which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh." *Might be made manifest.* God wants it to be seen.

Now, the verse 12—that is a test: "So then death worketh in us, but life in you." What does that mean? I take it to mean something like this: The apostle Paul says, "In the degree in which I always bear about in my body the dying of Jesus—in the degree that I do it,—I

am going to be able to help you. If I succeed in going on in the path of communion, reckoning myself to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God; if I keep the flesh in the place of death and live my life to the glory of God, I can be a help to you." "So then death worketh in us (he is speaking of himself), but life in you."

Would you like to be a help to other young believers? Do you have someone on your heart that you would like to draw nearer to the Lord? How are you going to help them? You will never do it by turning to worldly schemes and associations. You will never lead them to Christ by dangling before their eyes something worldly. Never! You will lead them to Him by showing them in your daily walk and conversation that you are enjoying Christ in your own soul; and, if death is working in you, life will be working in them. You will be acting in the capacity of the men down at the seaside, that are watching constantly over those that are in the water swimming; they are ready to go to their succor wherever they hear the cry for help. Wouldn't it be nice to be found among those that are helpers to our companions when they get tempted, tried, and tested? Wouldn't it be nice if we could be in the capacity of helpers; to go to their rescue, and have a life that backed up our invitation? If you go to help someone spiritually, and they know that you are living a carnal life, they are very apt to say, "No thanks—no, no thanks." Why? They haven't seen Christ in your life.

Now, verse 3 of Third John: "For I rejoiced greatly . . ." (That is an enthusiastic expression, isn't it?) "I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the

truth that is in thee." There is a testimony borne to every one of us by our brethren. What is the testimony borne to you in that little Meeting where you are? What kind of a testimony do your brethren give as to you? "The brethren came . . ." They are the ones that know us pretty well. You know, none of us rate much above par in our own local Gathering. Our brethren know us pretty well. So it was here, "I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee."

We can't over emphasize the importance of *the truth*. There aren't two truths conflicting. Truth is truth. There aren't two kinds, true and untrue. The terms are contradictory. *The truth*— "The truth that is in thee." Where are you going to find that truth? Here in the Word of God. But it isn't enough to have it in us (thank God if it is in us)—"Even as thou *walkest in the truth*." How are you going to get the truth in a path of indolence? You can't just, so to speak, sit around indifferently, let your Bible lie on the shelf, and expect to ripen, deepen and develop in the truth. Oh, dear young folks, learn to make your Bible your companion. Familiarize yourself with it; live in it. How I wish that when I was in my teens I had given more time to my Bible; I wish I had! Learn to saturate yourself with Scripture. There is nothing that takes its place. It is a sad thing that, in our schooling, we sometimes have to spend so many years getting ourselves filled up with so-called worldly wisdom. Actually, much of it isn't wisdom at all; basically it is error. But, here is the Book that is from God, and there is not one flaw in it. It



came from His hand. Saturate yourself with the Word of God.

“. . . The brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth.” Where are your feet? Where are you walking? Perhaps the brethren might say about someone, “Well, he has a wonderful knowledge of the Bible—a marvelous memory, and a wonderful knowledge of the Bible. But . . .” But, then what? “Well, his life doesn't seem to back it up.” Isn't that sad? We have heard things like that, haven't we? Now, here was Gaius: The brethren came (evidently he was dear to the heart of John; he must have asked them about him) and they gave a hearty testimony—“That he knows the truth, and he walks in it.” It made John so happy when he got this testimony, that he says, “I rejoiced greatly.” Wouldn't it have been nice to see him when he got that news—the expression on his face, and the joy and praise that went up? Would to God that every one of us could have a testimony like that borne to us!

“Beloved (here is our 'beloved' again), thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers (those traveling about); which have borne witness of thy charity (the word should be 'love') before the church: Whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well.” This line of things has its place, this sort of faithfulness in fellowshiping those that are out for the Lord. It will not take you to heaven, but it is a consistent thing for the child of God to show his fellowship with those that are trying to serve the Lord. He says, “You shall

do well." He doesn't say, "You will get to heaven" No, that isn't dependent on anything of that kind. But, "Thou shalt do well."

"Because that for *the* Names's sake they went forth, taking nothing from the Gentiles." (The word "his" really takes away from the weight of that verse.) Beloved, there is only one Name worth talking about—His Name! The Scriptures are filled with the exultation of *His Name*. Shame on us, as Christians, if we allow ourselves to be attached to some other name than His Name. What a dishonor it is. How far it falls beneath the standard of the Word of God to take these various names that men have seen fit to pass around and wear as a badge. How sad that is!

Now turn to Acts, chapter 4. There is one verse especially that I want to read; but we will just hastily notice several verses. Verse 7: "And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?" Here is the answer, verse 10: "Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth . . ." 12th verse: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." The end of the 17th verse: "Let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus." Now, go over to the fifth chapter (we are not giving all of the occurrences), verse 40: "And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded

that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go." Now, here is our verse (Oh, how I love this verse!): "And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for *The Name*. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach that Jesus was the Christ." Oh, how God magnifies that Name!

So here, "*For The Name's* sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles." Isn't it a sad thing that those who profess to be preaching a sound gospel, are today sending out begging appeals across the nation by the millions—right and left; asking for help, begging for money. How different that is from the pattern of the Word of God. "*For The Name's* sake they went forth, taking *nothing* of the Gentiles." God doesn't want the money of unsaved people. No, No! He cannot sanctify the money of those that have crucified and rejected His Beloved Son. What blasphemy to say to God, "I don't want Christ, but here is fifty dollars to help preach the gospel." God doesn't want that.

"We therefore ought to receive such that we might be fellow helpers *with* the truth." ("With" is the correct reading.") How important that principle is. "That we might be fellow helpers *with the truth*." There are many ways that you can be fellow helpers, professedly so. Yet beloved, is it *with the truth*? We can give here, and give there. But, do we not need to check ourselves—is it *with the truth*?

"I wrote unto the Assembly: but Diotrophes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth

us not." No, that man didn't want John or any of his representatives coming around. Why? Because it detracted from his own importance. He was the self-appointed leader in that Assembly. He was, "the elder," in his own way of thinking. Now, when we examine the Word of God, we will find that there is no such thing in Scripture as "the Elder," or "the Bishop," of a church. Search and see; there is no such thing. Yet men, like this Diotrephes, are assuming this position over and over again. And they are jealous over it. They want to be addressed by various titles that mark out their dignity, and they are offended if they do not receive these titles. Oh, beloved, why aren't we satisfied with the simplicity of Scripture? Are we willing to search our Bibles, accept what we find there, and be satisfied with it? Are any of us so lusting for preeminence and power, that we have to have some kind of artificial mark put upon us, that puts us in a place of special acceptance, and special esteem? I am sure that it is not of God. Poor, poor Diotrephes! What a character he was.

"Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good." Now, here is one that did it: "Demetrius hath good report of all, and of the truth itself." Isn't that good? And, what God hath joined together, let no man put asunder. Notice that Demetrius' good report has a double recommendation: It was of the truth itself, and of all those that knew him. I take it for granted that, when it says, "Demetrius hath good report of all," he is speaking of believers. (You see, the word "men" is inserted here.)

He, "hath good report of all, and of the truth itself." His good report was not limited to the fact that he was pleasing to his brethren, and that his personality was such that they enjoyed him. It went further than that—it was of The Truth itself. Yes, ". . . And we also bear record." John says, "I want to add my testimony. I know him, and I value him as a devoted and faithful brother. I believe that he is walking in the truth. He not only has a good report, but it is a good report in the truth. And, I want to add my recommendation to it." "And ye know that our record is true." Of course, that brings in the thought of inspiration, for John isn't just sitting down here and writing a letter. But, he is writing a letter as influenced and lead by the Spirit of God. Every word of this is inspired.

"I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee: But I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face." Thank God for the privilege of communicating with one another by letter! I believe there is much good done by letters one to another. On the other hand, I believe that we need to be on our guard as to what we put in letters. Oftentimes it is better to speak face to face about some things, than to be writing letters about them. So, the Apostle says, "I had many things to write." "Well, John, why didn't you write them?" He said, "I think not." "I will not with ink and pen write unto thee: But I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face." It is so much easier to come to an understanding if we speak face to face, isn't it?

"Peace be unto thee." That is a lovely word, peace. "The friends salute thee." It is nice to pass on the salutations of the Saints of God. Aren't you glad when someone tells you, "Your brethren from so and so sent their love to you?" That cheers your heart, doesn't it? "Our friends," or, "The friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name." How intimate that is. Don't just lump them all together, and say, "We bring greetings to you all." But, greet John, and James, and go right down the list—"Greet the friends by name." "He calleth his own sheep by name." He knows your name, beloved, and it is precious to Him. He knows you by name. "Greet the friends *by name.*"

May God stir our hearts by the affectionate appeal in this little Letter. It is warm with heart's affections. And, though it speaks some plain truth, yet it is mingled with the warmth of Christian love that appeals to the depths of our souls. Young folks, won't you surrender yourself to the spirit of this Epistle? Read it in your own home. Read it as a message to your own heart, and yield yourself to it.