

Faithful Friends, Faithful Truth

Third John 1:1–14

Third John is the shortest book in the New Testament, but it gives us a clear snapshot of what church life looks like when truth meets real people—faithful servants, humble hosts, and, sadly, power-hungry troublemakers. It is a personal letter, but it carries timeless instruction for every Bible study group and home-church.

1. A Loving Greeting Grounded in Truth

“The Elder, to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth” (Third John 1:1, NKJV).

John again calls himself “the Elder”—a title that fits both his spiritual authority and his advanced age. He writes to Gaius, a man known for steady character and consistent devotion to the truth.

“Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers” (Third John 1:2, NKJV).

This is not a blanket promise that every believer will always be wealthy or physically well. It is a warm, pastoral prayer—like saying, “I hope this letter finds you doing well.” John’s concern is whole-life health: spiritual strength, practical provision, and physical well-being.

There is also wisdom here: when the soul is flourishing—when a believer is walking closely with the Lord—life often becomes steadier, clearer, and stronger. Not every illness is tied to someone’s emotional state, and we should never condemn suffering believers. But we also cannot deny that bitterness, fear, constant unrest, and unresolved guilt can take a toll. Scripture says, “A merry heart does good, like medicine” (Proverbs 17:22, NKJV). God designed us as whole persons—spirit, soul, and body—and what we carry inside us often spills over into how we live.

2. A Pastor’s Greatest Joy

“For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (Third John 1:3–4, NKJV).

John is thrilled because Gaius is not merely familiar with truth—he is walking in truth. That phrase means the gospel is shaping his decisions, relationships, generosity, and integrity.

That is the heart of faithful ministry. A teacher’s greatest joy is not applause, numbers, or recognition—it is seeing people continue with Jesus years later, still loving the Word, still growing, still serving.

3. Love That Shows Up in Hospitality

“Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, who have borne witness of your love before the church” (Third John 1:5–6, NKJV).

Gaius served believers he knew and believers he did not know. He welcomed traveling ministers—servants of Christ moving from place to place to strengthen churches. Hospitality in the early church was not a small thing. It was ministry support. It was participation in the mission.

“If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well” (Third John 1:6, NKJV).

That phrase, “worthy of God,” raises the standard. Gaius wasn’t merely polite. He treated the Lord’s servants as people loved by the Lord. He helped them move forward, strengthened them, encouraged them, and refused to let them be a burden.

“Because they went forth for His name’s sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles” (Third John 1:7, NKJV).

These men did not fund the work of God by leaning on the world. They trusted the Lord to provide through God’s people. That is a challenge in every generation: the church must be careful about adopting worldly methods that dilute spiritual mission. God’s work done God’s way will never lack God’s supply.

“We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth” (Third John 1:8, NKJV).

Here is a beautiful principle: when you support faithful gospel work, you become a partner in it. You may not preach the sermon, but you helped the preacher preach it. You may not travel the miles, but you helped the missionary go. You become “fellow workers for the truth.”

4. The Warning: Pride in the Church

“I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us” (Third John 1:9, NKJV).

Diotrephes is the kind of man every church must be wary of: he wanted position more than truth, control more than Christ, recognition more than service. His issue was not discernment—it was dominance.

“Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words” (Third John 1:10, NKJV).

Diotrephes didn’t merely refuse John’s counsel. He attacked it. Pride often turns into slander, because pride cannot tolerate accountability.

“And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church” (Third John 1:10, NKJV).

This man used spiritual authority as a weapon. He blocked faithful servants, intimidated generous believers, and punished people for doing good. That is not leadership—that is tyranny.

5. The Call: Follow What Is Good

“Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God” (Third John 1:11, NKJV).

John brings it back to a simple test: not what someone claims, but what someone practices. A person can talk about God and still live for self. But when the life consistently produces humility, truth, love, and obedience, you are seeing evidence of God at work.

6. A Commendation: A Trusted Servant Named Demetrius

“Demetrius has a good testimony from all, and from the truth itself. And we also bear witness, and you know that our testimony is true” (Third John 1:12, NKJV).

Demetrius appears to be the one delivering the letter. John is giving Gaius a clear recommendation: “Receive this brother. He is solid. He is faithful. His life matches the message.” That is the kind of reputation every believer should desire—not fame, but credibility.

7. Face-to-Face Fellowship and Peace

“I had many things to write, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and ink; but I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak face to face. Peace to you” (Third John 1:13–14, NKJV).

There is something irreplaceable about face-to-face fellowship. Letters help. Messages help. But spiritual life thrives in real community—where believers pray together, encourage one another, and strengthen one another in the Lord.

“Our friends greet you. Greet the friends by name” (Third John 1:14, NKJV).

John ends warmly—personal affection, real relationships, and peace among the saints.

Practical Application

- Support the work of God with open hands. Hospitality, generosity, encouragement, and practical help are spiritual ministries.
- Measure your life by what you practice, not what you claim. Truth is meant to be walked out.
- Guard your heart against Diotrefes-pride. If you find yourself needing control, needing recognition, or resenting others’ usefulness, bring it to the Lord quickly. Pride ruins churches quietly and then suddenly.
- Be the kind of believer others can recommend with confidence. Aim for a life that gives “a good testimony...from the truth itself.”

A Challenge for Believers

Believer, decide what kind of name you want to have in the story of the church. In this short letter, one man is remembered for faithful love, and another is remembered for selfish ambition. Choose the path of Gaius: steady truth, humble service, courageous goodness. Refuse the temptation to compete, to control, or to be “first.” In the kingdom of God, the greatest are those who serve.

An Invitation to Non-Believers

If you have never surrendered your life to Jesus Christ, this is where it begins—not with religion, but with a living Savior.

Jesus saved us when He shed His blood on the cross for our sins. And the resurrection declares that He is God, Savior and Lord.

Turn from your sin. Call on Him with a sincere heart. Ask Him to forgive you, to make you new, and to lead your life from this day forward. He will receive you, cleanse you, and give you eternal life—not because you earned it, but because He loves you.