

3 John

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[0:00] Third John this morning, and we're going to do what I think will be a bit of a devotional in the book this morning. We are going to read the whole thing, and then what we're going to do is just pick out some key themes and talk on those that the Lord showed me over the last couple of days.

Just to give a bit of context, first of all, the letter of Third John is generally accepted to be from John the Apostle. It has been believed so from the earliest days.

In this case, the author refers to himself as the elder, we'll see, the presbuteros, which is the term that means elder, and it literally means someone who is older in age.

And we see it used that way, just if you think about the parable of the prodigal son, and it talks about the older son, presbuteros. So it does sometimes just mean literally the older in age, but it is also used in both Jewish and Christian contexts to mean leaders.

Hence why in this church we have elders. I like to think of myself as not that old, but hey. We believe that John wrote this quite late, somewhere around 95 AD.

[1:11] John indeed was the last surviving apostle, so the elder indeed. And based on the writings of Irenaeus, we believe that John moved to serve as a church leader in Ephesus.

You remember, just by way of historical context, that Jerusalem fell in 70 AD, and so this is about 20, 30 years after that. And he, at some point, moved to minister as a leader in the city of Ephesus, which is on the west coast of, or near the west coast of Asia Minor, Turkey today.

And from there, we believe that he wrote his gospel and these three epistles that bear his name. So with that, I'm going to read our letter.

So follow along if you have a Bible. 3 John. 3 John. The Elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.

3 John. Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers. 4 John. For I was overjoyed when brothers came and testified to your truth, that is, how you are walking in truth.

[2:23] I have no greater joy than this to hear of my children walking in the truth beloved you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brothers and sisters and especially when they are strangers and they have testified to your love before the church you will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God for they went out for the sake of the name accepting nothing from the Gentiles therefore we ought to support such people so that we may prove to be fellow workers with the truth verse 9 I wrote something to the church but Diotrephes who loves to be first among them does not accept what we say for this reason if I come I will call attention to his deeds which he does unjustly accusing us with malicious words and not satisfied with this he himself does not receive the brothers either and he forbids those who want to do so and puts them out of the church beloved do not imitate what is evil but what is good the one who does what is good is of God the one who does what is evil has not seen God Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone and from the truth itself and we testify too and you know that our testimony is true

I had many things to write to you but I do not want to write to you with pen and ink but I hope to see you shortly and we will speak face to face peace be to you the friends greet you greet the friends by name well there's the letter and do you ever feel like you've just read someone's private correspondence it's a very personal letter isn't it it's from man to man so let's begin with a just a word on who's who I did say last week I think didn't I that it's good to get that context who what why how when where who's who well the recipient is Gaius now Gaius was a common name and it does appear that there is more or there are more than one of them in scripture John also references two other men in his letter doesn't he Diotrephes who is upheld as a negative example and Demetrius who is presented in contrast as a positive example now I we don't know much we don't know

anything else about

Diotrephes really I at least I couldn't find anything else out about him but I have a wonderful conjecture for you all with respect to Demetrius and Gaius if you flick over to Acts 19 very quickly and then this Acts chapter 19 is set when Paul is in Ephesus and in fact the giveaway is when you turn to Acts 19 that the title is Paul in Ephesus and then if you get down to verse 23 of Acts 19 it says it's it refers to a man by the name of Demetrius or verse 24 actually but verse 23 about that time a major disturbance occurred in regard to the way the way just means the faith Christianity for a man named Demetrius a silversmith who made silver shrines of Artemis was bringing considerable business to the craftsmen and he gathered anyway he gathered the men together and there's this big hoo-ha saying the gospel is going to wreck our trade how are we going to continue to uh peddle our idols uh if people believe and accept the gospel now this is happening in Ephesus where I've just told you that John was writing from uh now obviously this is decades later um so you've got Demetrius a silversmith from

Ephesus and Paul is there preaching the gospel and if you get down to verse oh yeah verse 29 we learn that among Paul's companions were the gentleman by the name of Gaius along with Aristarchus who were Paul's Macedonian traveling companions so there is a Gaius here who's from Macedonia which as everybody knows is north of Greece on the other side of the Aegean Sea um so John is in Ephesus there's a guy called Demetrius in Ephesus and John is writing to Gaius whom and we've just learned as a Gaius in Macedonia are they the same guys it is conjecture to say that they are um and the only reason I suspect they are is because by coincidence this chapter Acts 19 came up in my daily reading yesterday and I just felt the Lord say or they just popped out the page hey look it's Gaius hey it's uh it's Demetrius it can't be a coincidence um so I don't know you can't prove it but I think they are the same I think they are the same so what we then learn then is John is writing to Gaius who is now saved he's a believer now and he's uh he's serving the Lord wonderfully and John is encouraging him but back you know a couple decades later we see him he was an idolater he made his trade from through paganism and idolatry amazing amazing I think and I do think it's quite reasonable and I think what we have here is a fantastic example of the power of the gospel the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes to the Jew first and also to the Greek as Romans 1:16 says the power of the gospel you know when there's there is this riot and poor old Gaius um gets dragged into danger by this crowd that Demetrius has stirred up and

I did find myself thinking man could Gaius have seen Demetrius could Demetrius have been the guy who dragged Gaius along I don't know I don't know but it is amazing to think and and now John is able to say hey guys Demetrius has a good testimony a good testimony and maybe even I have an overactive imagination sometimes but I thought maybe even Gaius was praying uh for the men there who were persecuting anyway as I said conjecture now if we if we stand back from the letter 3rd John then what is the reason that John is writing to Gaius what do we see and I would I saw five things um we see uh John praying for his health um he prays for his health he writes about the joy that he has in this good report got John has had a good report from the church about Gaius and he says attaboy good job and it brings John such joy to hear it uh then he commends him for his faithful service to these visiting evangelists so evidently then there are missionaries there are evangelists who are coming over to the church where Gaius is which I would suggest is Macedonia in

[9 : 59] Macedonia somewhere and Gaius is known for accommodating them and and John says good job um and then he writes he says that he has written to the church um I'm not sure which the church is um but he's written to the church um and but Diotrephes doesn't accept what we say and he says if I come to the church I'm going to call him out I'm going to call that guy out Diotrephes loves to put himself first so effectively uh John is saying to guys you you need to watch out for Diotrephes he is a bad example in the church someone who has to put themselves first to reject the authority of the apostles and then he has this command don't imitate evil but rather imitate good and then he offers Demetrius as an example um and again we have to infer from that that guys knows Demetrius and he knows him to be a commendable example and then the close I hope to see you looking forward to seeing you greet the friends so that's the the overarching uh letter so I think the primary reason for writing is to encourage to encourage Gaius to say hey I'm praying for your health and I'm praying that as it goes well with your soul so it would go well with your body um or as your spirit is um is strong I pray your spiritual health is good I pray for your physical health as well um I'm praying for you bro and then and you're doing good things you're doing well keep it up

there are those who are selfish but there are also those who do good and keep doing good

I hope to see you soon it's encouragement there's nothing that's being corrected um it's just keep going brother and I and I really appreciated that I really appreciated that because sometimes we just need that encouragement don't we we just need an encouragement to keep going to be reminded that the good that we do for others is valuable and will be remembered I wonder if Gaius was thinking man I'm not out there saving souls I'm just giving a bit of bread to people who come through my door and he might have thought man it's just a lowly work and John's like you're doing a good job and actually John writing this is scripture his name is preserved forever what a blessing what an encouragement Gaius you're doing good it's hard it's hard work it's sacrificial work but it is a good work and I found that such an encouragement uh to read and to consider and it is good for us to encourage one another isn't it now I wanted to spend a minute to look at some key words it's always good to do some word studies hey I've taken my own advice from last week it's good to do word studies and I saw a couple of words that just jumped out the page for me mostly because they're all highlighted already um but the word truth *aletheia* in the greek the word truth appears six times in this short letter and that's completely on brand for John um he John uses the word *aletheia* 25 times in his gospel 25 times in the gospel of John and the other synoptic gospels have got it a couple of times I think Matthew's got it once and um and John is like 25 times truth truth truth and again in this letter truth the first letter that John wrote it's called first John um that has that is the second most occurrences of this word in the whole of the new testament and the first is got John so John loves this word

John loves the word *aletheia* and when we think about truth what is truth as Pilate would say what is truth it's an abstract concept I thought okay I'll bite I'll look it up in the uh English dictionary what is truth 10 different definitions were presented to me I was like and we thought Greek was complex 10 definitions for truth well when we're going to study a word as I said last week one of the things that we should do is find that Greek word and I showed you last week how to do that on blue letter bible find the word and then look at how that word is used across the bible across the scriptures and in particular how does the author use it our author John of course how does he use it um or actually we could just look at our letter today how does John use the word *aletheia* or truth in the letter and immediately we see it in verse one the elder to the beloved guys whom I love in truth he loves Gaius in truth um and we also read that Gaius is walking in the truth in the truth uh we see in verse 8 that um he's as Gaius is supporting the missionaries he's doing so uh he is a fellow worker with the truth that's interesting isn't it he's working with the truth in verse 8 and then we read further down about Demetrius in verse 12 that he's received a good testimony from everyone and from the truth itself and actually you could truth is a feminine noun and so the Greek you if you translated it completely literally you would say from the truth herself um but the truth the truth *aletheia* is testifying or Demetrius has a good testimony from the truth wow so I see in this letter alone two separate aspects for *aletheia* for truth there's the concept of being in the truth and then we see this personification of truth truth although we think of it as an abstract concept truth is active here um it testifies and the missionaries work with it and it has verbs it is it's doing things it's active what does it mean to be in the truth what does it mean to be in the truth now when we look at our dictionary definitions of *aletheia* um one uh one person put this didn't write down the name apologies uh it is the reality lying at the basis of appearance or to put that in simpler terms it's when how things appear is really how things are and what I concluded is that *aletheia* has to do with authenticity it's more than just being correct in theory truth *aletheia* is more than having the right answers and good theology it is when the theology and the correct theory produces corresponding action john loves his dear brother and friend gaius in the truth and then we immediately read that john is active and he's praying for him he's praying for him the brothers came and they testified to to his gaius's truth meaning what meaning they saw and they confirmed that his deeds were being worked and they confirmed gaius's words do you see it so he's he he believes he says he believes and then they say yes i testify to it i testify to the truth because i saw his actions working out one definition i heard for truth that i think was nancy missler's is this truth is when the word and the deed become one and i thought that's good i like that so our exhortation then from this word and from in our letter today is are we walking according to the truth that is am i like gaius living in a way that confirms what i profess to believe am i consistent in in how i speak and act do we allow faith in god to determine our actions and our emotions or are we like the man in james 1 verses 5 through 8 who mixes faith with doubt and as a result he's like the surf of the sea driven and tossed

tossed by the wind a double-minded man unstable in all his ways there's an exhortation there that i saw you know am i the same man on a sunday morning that i am on a monday morning at work you know when we all wear masks in different contexts to some extent um because we need to but i think that the the exhortation is to consistently live in a way that reflects the faith that we have the faith that we sing about on a sunday morning that we have this great hope before us because we do we are exhorted to ask ourselves do i live that way seven days a week and then the truth aletheia is personalized personified sorry personified john writes as if the truth is at work the truth works the truth testifies and this is in keeping with john's style uh in john chapter 8 verse 32 um uh john writes i think didn't write down the context here in fact i'm going to turn to it john 8 32 let's go because we can john 8 32 yes jesus is speaking john 8 verse 31 now jesus was saying to those jews who have believed him if you continue in my word then you truly you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth aletheia and the truth will set you free the aletheia will set you free the truth is active the truth is the subject of the verb set you free the truth will set you free the truth is active now so who is the truth now jesus himself of course said in john 14 verse 6 i am the way the truth and the life so jesus is the personification of truth he says so good uh if you have a look at first john 5 first john 5 and verse 6 i'm gonna do a reading from verse 5 who is the one who overcomes the world but the one who believes that jesus is the son of god this is the one who came by water and blood jesus christ not with the water only but with the water and the blood it is the spirit who testifies because the spirit is the truth the spirit is the aletheia the spirit testifies the spirit is the truth we've just read about the truth testifying so jesus christ says he is the truth the holy spirit says well rather john says the holy spirit says through john the spirit is the truth amazing so god god is the truth the triune god and i and as amazing as it is i think that's what john has in mind in our in our text in in third john so when he says that uh we may prove to be fellow workers with the truth there in verse 8 we're working with the holy spirit we are working with jesus christ and i just thought wow that's amazing to think that we when we work we work with god you know it's easy to think of ourselves as as laboring on behalf of god but john is saying we labor on behalf of the truth itself on behalf of god when we um if you remember the introduction to the book of acts it says how that luke is writing in acts and he says my gospel was a record of what jesus began to do and teach and the implication is that acts is what jesus is continuing to do and teach even though jesus is off into heaven in the very first chapter because the body of christ the church is working and christ is working through the church and i just found it so encouraging to consider um and i just thought man this really takes the pressure off um service to the lord is hard work sometimes it can feel like hard work and this is true for guys and i'm going to share a bit about that in a minute um but the pressure is off because it is the lord's work not ours it's not mine and you end up with a bit of tension actually here um in second corinthians chapter 11 verse 28 paul says that there's this um quote there is a daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches oh my bro that's pressure so he he confesses and acknowledges this this challenge and this pressure and the hardship of church leaderships of leadership but then the same paul in first corinthians 3 verse 7 said that neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything but god who causes the growth so you do you see the the tension that is there there is a pressure on those who would who would serve there is it is work it is a labor but ultimately it is god's work and so all we are called to do is bring what we have and trust him and i thought that uh i think colossians 1 29 is a great summary of this tension in in there colossians 1 29 paul says for this purpose i also labor striving according to his power which works mightily within me we strive we labor hard but we work with the truth with god himself who works mightily within us anyway so that's my word study on aletheia a key word uh now one more word study the second key word i wanted to call out was love love uh this is a word that shows up in the form of beloved and love uh six times again in total um we see the adjective form agapetos which is beloved in our uh in our translation and we see uh agapeo which is the verb form you may be familiar with the noun agape so you've got noun agape verb agapeo and the adjective is agapeos you really wanted to know that sorry too much information now you will find volumes on the word agape because it is such a key word um you know i guess like aletheia it's one of the few words where it says god is love god is agape so of course it's a key word for us to understand so i can't i'm not going to bother going into a whole bunch of theory um what i wanted to highlight this morning regarding um agape and its derivatives is that it is a practical and serving love and what we see in our letter is missionaries testifying to gaius's love how do they see it it's not through valentine's cards or him saying i love you right it is because he is ministering to them he is catering for them he is providing them with

[25 : 54] accommodation he is serving them he's acting faithfully in whatever he accomplishes for them beloved you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brothers and sisters especially when they are strangers and when and they have testified to your love agapeo before the church awesome and i paused on that word accomplish i know that i said this is a word study on agapeo and it is but i did pause on the word accomplishes because i was like what does it mean what does it mean and i read um a wonderful uh dictionary from a couple of gentlemen by the name of low and nider low nider and uh it's a more modern one than strong's but it had this great definition uh for it it says it is to engage in an activity involving considerable expenditure of effort i was like oh it's hard work as i said it is a hard work sometimes service to the lord is hard work hence john needing to write this encouragement i guess it's hard work and and and they are seeing all that he accomplishes they are seeing the activity involving involving considerable expenditure of effort the love the agapeo verb verb here the verb form it involves effort it can be hard and we are called to love one another we are called to serve one another and sometimes that involves considerable effort colossians 3 turning there real quick colossians 3 verse 24 yeah colossians chapter 3 verse 24 nope 23 let's start there colossians chapter 3 verse 23 whatever you do do your work heartily as for the lord and not for people knowing that it is from the lord that you will receive the reward of the inheritance it is the lord christ whom you serve yes wow work heartily because we serve the lord and we can't out give him right the reward of inheritance you will receive the reward of the inheritance amazing similarly if you're taking notes ephesians 6 verse 7 through 8 and paul says that with goodwill with goodwill render service as to the lord and not to people knowing that whatever good thing each one does he will receive this back from the whether slave or free wow every good thing each one of us does we receive back from the lord irrespective of who we are irrespective of titles or offices slave or free whatever do a good thing from the lord he will receive it back when in eternity i think we're talking about rewards here you know what does it look like well it's going to be awesome but you know so it is biblical and right for us to speak of rewards because it's it's right there but i also wanted to stress this morning that we have already received the blessing of god's own agape um romans 5 verses 8 through 9 paul explains to us how god demonstrates his love his agape god demonstrates his own love towards us in that while we were still sinners christ died for us much more than that now having now been justified by his blood we shall be saved from the wrath of god through him it's the cross the ultimate display of agape is the cross um john said similarly in first

john 3 16 we know love agape by this that he laid down his life for us and same breath and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers and sisters service hard but we get a reward praise god and we are already way over compensated in our salvation hallelujah now but note that last passage i read there in first john 3 16 we ought to we ought to and that's a word that he used in our um letter today as well it is found in verse 8 therefore we ought to support such people we ought to we ought to hmmm um it's funny you know we often don't like to add ought to's to things um but we ought to says it um we ought to support missionaries the word ought is um it means it's a thing that is owed like a debt a necessity an obligation um i was i read through philemon recently as well i was trying to find a one chapter book for us to look at this morning and i read through philemon and in that he says i he so philemon is all about paul urging philemon to receive back this runaway slave by the name of onisimus and he says this in verse 8 of philemon he says therefore though i have enough confidence in christ to order you to do what is proper yet for love's sake i rather appeal to you and he's like i could command this but i prefer for love's sake to appeal and then later on in the letter he says to philemon he says i know you'll do even more than i ask and i don't know how to read that you know is it is it is it is it a sincere i just know you're the man and you got this and you're awesome or is it a i don't know it must be that right but you have this tension there is a an obligation in that same letter paul says not to mention that you owe me your very life he says to philemon um there is an ought to because we are saved freely by grace we owe nothing we pay nothing we contribute nothing salvation is freely given by grace received through faith but there are some obligations that fall upon believers paul says to the corinthians this in first corinthians 6 19 to 20 he says do you not know that your body is a temple of the holy spirit within you whom you have from god and that you are not your own for you have been bought with a price therefore glorify god in your body and again i was pondering on this this balance the balance of the ought to the obligation side of it plus the willing side that the fact that we are called to do it willingly um verse 11 of our text today third john verse 11 beloved do not imitate what is evil but what is good the one who does

what is good is of god the one who does what is evil has not seen god so on the one hand you have a command this is one of only two imperatives in the whole letter do not imitate what is evil but imitate what is good command you ought to do it but then he says immediately afterwards the one who does good is of god or the one who is of god does good so he says on the one hand i'm commanding you to do it but on the other hand this is just nature if you are of god you will do good and the one who does not do good is not of god hasn't even seen god command but also he just expects it to be done by nature

another passage on that philippians 2 12 to 13 paul says so then my beloved just as you have always obeyed not as in my presence only but now much more in my absence work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for it is god who is at work in you both to desire and to work for his good pleasure so again you have an exhortation keep doing it work out your salvation work it out exercise it demonstrate your salvation through your activity and your obedience and then he says immediately but it is god who is at work in you both to give you the desire to work that desire in you and make it willing make you willing and to empower the work as well all for his good pleasure for his glory amazing amazing so you have and and i think the scriptures would have us to embrace that tension there is a command an obligation and uh you know we don't get to be lazy we we shouldn't be lazy we don't get to be lazy um but at the same time it is something that we do by nature i can't remember where it is now but i remember there's a bit in acts where they say to paul hey remember the paul and it's like the very thing i was eager to do and again it's like there was a command but he was already eager to do it by nature right i think that's all i had to say pretty much um so third john is a call to service and an encouragement to service and the thing that really struck me this weekend as i read it was um that we we do work and we do labor and sometimes it's hard but we work with the truth with god himself god who is building his church god who is uniquely powerful and who can do more than we can even imagine and yes it's hard work sometimes and uh there's that bit in second samuel where where where david says how i won't offer to god worship that's free that costs me nothing but we our worship is costly and and david said i won't offer anything that isn't worship should be costly it is hard work but it's never in vain and it's always rewarded so as john did with gaius let us encourage one another let's encourage one another let's stir up one another to love and to good works now to him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works within us to him be the glory in the church and in christ jesus to all generations forever and ever amen thank you lord for these things we praise your name we thank you lord for your labor and your work on our behalf that you are at work in the church that you're at work in all of us oh god i pray that we would be encouraged to keep on to to serve you with whatever gifts whatever strength you have lent us and i pray that you would encourage us lord and that we would be encouraging one another thank you lord god for the blessing that it is you who is at work in us it's you who does the work and then you reward us it's amazing it's amazing to ponder it lord you're an awesome god you can do more than we can even imagine or think lord and we thank you that we have already been so wonderfully blessed with the the confidence of salvation and forgiveness of sins and yet how much more we have to look forward to in our salvation from the wrath to come and being in your presence forever oh praise you lord lord we encourage our souls with these words we encourage one another as we share and we we think of these things praise you
praise you hallelujah jesus name amen amen