

Samuel Alexander Mudd was born on December 20, 1833, on a large plantation in Charles County, Maryland. As a young man he attended the University of Maryland in Baltimore and graduated with degrees in medicine and surgery. Upon graduation he returned to his family home, married, and started his family.

In 1865, John Wilkes Booth murdered President Abraham Lincoln at Ford's Theater. Booth broke his leg in an attempt to escape and rode the 30 miles to Dr. Mudd's home where the doctor set, splinted and bandaged the broken leg. With Booth still in his home, Dr. Mudd went into a neighboring town and learned of the assassination of the President.

Even though Dr. Mudd claimed that he did not recognize Booth and didn't know him, the two had met on at least three occasions. Mudd was arrested and sentenced to life in prison.

But that's not the end of the story. While in prison, Mudd saved the lives of many prisoners and guards during a yellow fever epidemic. In 1869, he was pardoned by President Andrew Johnson.

Despite his good deeds, the name of Dr. Samuel Alexander Mudd is one mocked and scorned – even today. When someone says “Your name is Mud!” it means that you have lost your good name and that it will be very hard to reclaim it.

This morning, we are going to look at the third and final letter from the Apostle John – a letter where three men are mentioned by John by name. Two men have a good name, but one, like Mudd, does not, and when I speak of one's name, I speak of one's reputation – and we all have one.

As you know, people will watch you and talk about you, they will draw conclusions about who you are as a person, and like it or not, those conclusions – your reputation will precede you and follow you, but as we will see this morning, if you take care of your character, your reputation will take care of itself.

Now last week, we were in John's second letter where the recipients of the letter – Christians who were very loving and hospitable, unwittingly opened their homes to false teachers who were traveling throughout the area, and by allowing them into their homes, they were in essence vouching for them and indirectly participating in their deceptive work.

John, who understood that Christians had a desire to be hospitable, told them they must also be very discerning in their love – knowing right from wrong – knowing God's truth from a lie, and he warned them not to encourage or to endorse these deceivers who were twisting the truth and seeking converts.

So, in John's second letter – in a nutshell, the problem was showing hospitality to the *wrong* people, but in this third letter, the problem is just the opposite – it's a refusal to show hospitality to the *right* people, and with that in mind, if you have your Bible, turn to **3 John** beginning with **verse 1**.

¹The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth. ²Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers. ³For I was very glad when brethren came and testified to your truth, that is, how you are walking in truth. ⁴I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.

As we established last week, **the elder** is none other than the Apostle John. He's the last surviving apostle – the last eyewitness who walked and talked with Jesus – he's truly the old man of the church, and he writes to another man named **Gaius** who likely belongs to a sister church to the church in Ephesus, and remember the home church of the Apostle John is the church in Ephesus.

John mentions Gaius and we know nothing about him other than what we have in this letter. Gaius, whose name was the most common name in those days, was personally known by John – John loved this man, and he offered a prayer on his behalf that he would succeed and prosper and be in good physical health to the same degree as his soul was prospering. If you think about it for a moment, that kind of prayer could be seen as either a blessing or a curse, and let me explain what I mean by that. If someone prayed that your physical health was the same as your spiritual health – **would you be grateful or would someone need to call the paramedics for you?** Something to think about, **isn't it?**

Anyway, this prayer by John has caused some to speculate that Gaius may have been in poor physical health. No one knows for sure, but this may have been the case – and in spite of these possible health afflictions – or maybe because of them, Gaius' devotion to the Lord had flourished, he was deliberately and steadily walking in the truth he believed – it was real and genuine, it was noticed by others, he was highly respected, and his good reputation brought great joy to the ears John.

Now, before we move on – as a side note, I want to point out that some have taken this prayer by John and have suggested that God wants every Christian to be healthy and wealthy in this life, and if they are not healthy and wealthy in this life, then something is wrong with them spiritually.

This idea is called the "*Prosperity Gospel*" – it's very popular in some church circles these days, but it's not consistent with the truth found in God's Word. In

context, this is only a prayer by John, not some deep theological discourse we are to prescribe to, except like John, we are to pray for others, and secondly, the Bible teaches, and this life reveals, that God may use loss and suffering to accomplish His purposes. For example, just consider the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul. He was a giant of the faith – he was God’s guy to the Gentiles, and yet, all the while content in poverty and suffering from a thorn in his flesh – a health problem, which God would not take away. The truth is, God’s ways are not our ways, and sometimes – it’s only through brokenness and pain that blessing is born.

Okay, before I get too sidetracked on this, let’s look at the next few verses where John gives us a glimpse of what ministry looked like in the days of the early church. Let’s continue beginning with **verse 5**, where he says,

⁵ Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and especially when they are strangers; ⁶ 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. ⁷ For they went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. ⁸ Therefore we ought to support such men, so that we may be fellow workers with the truth.

In this passage, John describes those in the ministry as either being those who were on the move, or those in a local church who supported those on the move. Charles Swindoll has some great insights about this, and he explains that in the days of the early church, there were basically two kinds of ministers, and we might categorize them as “*pioneers*” and “*settlers*.”

The *pioneers* included traveling preachers, and evangelists, and missionaries along with their associates who proclaimed the gospel in new territories and established new churches. Often times, these *pioneers*, like the Apostle Paul for example, continued to travel to various churches, training and ordaining leaders until the congregation became self-sustaining.

The *settlers*, on the other hand, were those ministers who were responsible for the continuing care and growth of the local churches. These were the elders and the deacons, the pastors and the teachers who traveled very little and ministered to their particular congregations, and eventually, these local churches became bases of support for the traveling ministry of the *pioneers*. It was a great partnership.

At first, these young churches eagerly welcomed the ministry of the *pioneers*, as they, like infants, required constant care – but as these churches grew from infancy to the toddler stage, the churches entered an awkward period of transition from

dependence to independence, and then like teenagers today who need mom and dad for food, and shelter, and clothing but don't want them around for anything else, occasionally some of the *settlers* in these young churches resisted the outside authority and influence of the *pioneers* and refused to show them hospitality or support.

Gaius was one of the *settler* leaders of the church, possibly an elder, and he understood the need for continued doctrinal and practical guidance from the *pioneer* ministers. He acted faithfully and lovingly towards them, he felt obligated to support them at his own expense, and he treated them with honor and respect.

As a *settler*, Gaius became a fellow-worker in the ministry of the *pioneers* who were motivated to share the gospel truth about Jesus Christ – his love and hospitality towards them was commendable, he was an example to follow, but unfortunately, not everyone was as loving and hospitable as Gaius and that leads us to our guy Mudd beginning with **verse 9**. John continues and says,

⁹ I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. ¹⁰ For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, he himself does not receive the brethren, either, and he forbids those who desire to do so and puts them out of the church.

We know next to nothing about **Diotrephes** except for what we read in this passage. Apparently, John had sent a letter to the church, to be read before the congregation, but it would seem that Diotrephes, who was probably a senior elder in the church with a power base, intercepted the letter, didn't like what it said, and he trashed it.

Now, why would he do this? Well, John says that Diotrephes **loves to be first** meaning he did not share in God's purpose that in all things Christ should be first. Diotrephes, who may have started with a good name, now thinks very highly of himself, he wants to be the boss, he wants to be in the limelight, he thinks he has "seniority rights" and he will not tolerate anyone, to include the Apostle John, who might challenge his authority or question how he's running the church.

Diotrephes liked to push his weight around, he wanted to do things his own way – likely thinking the church would not survive without him, and I need to point something out that's not being said here. John raises no charges against the theological beliefs of Diotrephes. John has not branded him as a deceiver or a heretic, and he's not one who left the church to start his own – instead, he appears

to be a church leader with a bad reputation – he’s got a problem with selfish ambition and pride – it’s a spiritual blind spot for him, and it’s led him to do some awful things.

First, we are told that Diotrephes **unjustly accused John with wicked words**, or said in another way – he was talking trash about John to build himself up. Diotrephes brought empty slanderous charges against John, he spread evil and false gossip, and unfortunately, there were people in those days exactly like people in our days who believe just about anything they hear without actually checking the truth for themselves.

We are also told that Diotrephes did not **receive the brethren**. He refused any hospitality to those sent from John. He wanted nothing to do with them, he gave them the cold-shoulder, and he refused to allow them to speak in the church probably under the false pretense of guarding the truth.

He may have said to the church, *“John doesn’t understand the danger of welcoming these people into this church. We need to maintain pure doctrine here. We don’t know what kinds of errors these men may bring in. John is just a senile old man who means well, but he’s gone soft in his old age. Follow me instead!”*

So, Diotrephes rejected John, which is really crazy when you think that John was part of the Lord’s inner circle, he rejected true believers associated with John, and then he took it a step further. Using his position, he demanded that others in the church have nothing to do with these traveling ministers, and if they did, if they opposed him, they were **put out of the church**. Diotrephes refused fellowship with anyone who did not totally agree with him, and he brought his own version of church discipline against them.

The New Testament provides guidance on church discipline and it should be followed; however, in this case, Diotrephes had neither the authority nor the biblical basis for kicking anyone out of the church, but he did it anyway. Instead of using church discipline as a restorative tool – and that’s the ultimate goal, he used it as a weapon to protect himself and his power base. His selfish ambition and pride got the best of him.

The captain of a Navy ship looked ahead and saw a light in the distance. He told his signalman to send a message to the other vessel to alter its course ten degrees south. But a message was relayed back to the captain to alter his course ten degrees north. The captain was angered. He sent another message saying, “Alter your course ten degrees south, I am the captain.” Soon a message came back,

“Alter your course ten degrees north, I am seaman Jones. Immediately, the captain sent a third message, mustering all the authority at his command: “Alter your course ten degrees south. I am a battleship.” A message came back, “Alter your course ten degrees north. I am a lighthouse!”

If the captain had remained on course, he would have harmed himself and his ship, and likewise, Diotrephes was at risk of doing the same. The Apostle John had likely warned Diotrephes to repent and change his course in that previous letter he destroyed, but he refused.

Poor Gaius, who seems to be in the same church with Diotrephes probably felt alone and somewhat stressed out over the conflict, so John provides him with some straightforward advice and some much-needed support beginning with **verse 11**. John says,

¹¹ Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. The one who does good is of God; the one who does evil has not seen God. ¹² Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone; and from the truth itself; and we add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true.

In context, John tells Gaius, don't imitate men like Diotrephes. He's an unloving bully in the church with a bad reputation. He wants to be first in everything, he wants the attention for himself, and he wants things his way – not God's way – and that's abundantly clear.

John says don't imitate what is **evil**, instead imitate what is **good**, and ultimately, we should imitate Jesus; however, John knows that we need every day examples to imitate as well – godly people – role models we can point to who themselves are imitating Jesus, and John has someone in mind for Gaius – another man named **Demetrius**.

Most likely, Demetrius is the one who hand delivered John's letter to Gaius so no one else would intercept it, and although there is only one verse devoted to Demetrius, we learn that according to John, Demetrius is a man of good reputation, he's a man of truth and godly character, he's one to be trusted, he's hand-picked by the Apostle himself, and he's a role model for Gaius to imitate.

I have two points to make about that. First, we all need godly role models to follow, but we must be careful in choosing them, and secondly, we can be godly role models to follow. It's a little unnerving to think that someone may be watching and imitating us, but the reality for all of us is that people are doing just

that – most likely the children in our lives and, therefore, we need to be the best godly role models we can be, and remember that the character traits and the qualities that we want to see in others tend to be *caught* rather than *taught*, meaning the old saying of “*do as I say, not as I do*” really doesn’t fly. We have to walk the talk.

Now, in the last few verses, John concludes his very last writing, and he says beginning with **verse 13**,

¹³ I had many things to write to you, but I am not willing to write them to you with pen and ink; ¹⁴ but I hope to see you shortly, and we will speak face to face. ¹⁵ Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.

John said he had **many things** to discuss with the congregation and its leaders, things to deal with personally – **face to face**, rather than by means of a letter, or in our case a text, or an email, and therefore, he hoped to see them shortly. This had to be a great sigh of relief for both Gaius and Demetrius because John is on his way to deal with Diotrephes, presumably in the hopes of restoring a once good name.

In his book, “I Almost Missed the Sunset”, Bill Gaither writes:

Gloria and I had been married a couple of years. We were teaching school in Alexandria, Indiana, where I had grown up, and we wanted a piece of land where we could build a house. I noticed the parcel south of town where cattle grazed, and I learned it belonged to a 92-year-old retired banker named Mr. Yule. He owned a lot of land in the area, and word was he would sell none of it, giving the same speech to everyone who asked: “I promised the farmers they could use it for their cattle.”

Gloria and I visited him at the bank. Although he was retired, he spent a couple of hours each morning in his office. He looked at us over the top of his bifocals.

I introduced myself and told him we were interested in a piece of his land. “Not selling,” he said pleasantly. “Promised it to a farmer for grazing.”

“I know, but we teach school here and thought maybe you’d be interested in selling it to someone planning to settle in the area.”

He pursed his lips and stared at me. “What’d you say your name was?”

“Gaither. Bill Gaither.”

*“Hmmm. **Any relation to Grover Gaither?**”*

“Yes, sir. He was my granddad.”

*Mr. Yule put down his paper and removed his glasses. “Interesting. Grover Gaither was the best worker I ever had on my farm. A full day’s work for a day’s pay. So honest. **What’d you say you wanted?**”*

I told him again.

“Let me do some thinking on it, then come back and see me.”

*I came back within the week, and Mr. Yule told me he had had the property appraised. I held my breath. **“How does \$3,800 sound? Would that be, okay?”***

*If that was per acre, I would have to come up with nearly \$60,000! **“\$3,800?”** I repeated.*

“Yup. Fifteen acres for \$3,800.”

I knew it had to be worth at least three times that, so I quickly accepted.

Nearly three decades later, my son and I strolled that beautiful, lush property that had once been pasture land. “Benjy” I said, “you’ve had this wonderful place to grow up because of nothing that you’ve done, but because of the good name of a great-granddad you never met.”

Proverbs 22:1 says, **“A good name is to be more desired than great wealth, Favor is better than silver and gold.”**

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