

The Godly Giver

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Once again, welcome on this rainy day to Truth Community Fellowship. Coming from dry and barren southern California, I've got to tell you, I love all this rain and how green it is and all of that. I realize you may not share my enthusiasm for that gray weather but I sure do enjoy it and it's a delight to be here with you here this morning as we turn to God's word and we really and truly and finally finish the epistles of John here this morning. I'd invite you to turn to 3 John which is just before the book of Revelation, if you skip back over Jude into the book of 3 John. For those of you that are visiting, we finished a several month series on 1 John just a couple three weeks ago and we did 2 John two weeks ago and that brings us to 3 John. If there was a 4 John, we would preach it but there's not and so we are going to move on to other things in the coming weeks. In fact, let me just give you a little preview. Over the next two weeks, I want to do something completely different and do a little series called "A Refresher on the Family" dealing with marriage and parenting issues, and if you're not a parent, if you're not married yet, don't let that keep you away. This is all going to be, there is going to be something for everyone in this series and I just wanted to do something a little bit practical before we moved on to other things in God's word and so that's coming up the next two weeks and I'm really looking forward to sharing those things with you.

For today, we're going to finish up the epistles of John and deal with this letter of 3 John which is going to show us the contrast between godly and ungodly giving. The people of God are meant to support the work of God and as you think about this, let's just think for just a second about what the world has to say and I mean this in actually a positive way; normally you say the world and you're about to say something negative. Not true here. The world understands that money exposes motivations. We've got many, many phrases to acknowledge that. "Money talks. Follow the money. Money makes the world go around. Your checkbook reveals your priorities." We've all heard those things to one degree in one variation or another. The way people handle money and the way that they respond to money reveals their motivations. Money is a barometer of where your heart is at and this text in 3 John shows us this in a very clear and compelling way. It contrasts godly and ungodly givers so as to help us today support those Christian workers who actually advance the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the background to 3 John is similar to what we had in 2 John. You may remember, if you were here, that we talked about the fact that back in the first century while there were good roads for travel and common language which made travel easy, they didn't have the sophisticated system of hotels to

accommodate people who were moving from city to city and so when Christian teachers were traveling spreading the Gospel, they depended upon the hospitality of local Christians in order to accommodate them so that they would have a place to stay in order to do their ministry before they moved on to another location. This is well known as you read background books on Christian history and Bible backgrounds and things like that. They needed a place to stay. Now, along with that and for the one who was doing for hosting, believers had to use discernment as they gave hospitality to traveling teachers because just as true teachers would come and use the hospitality to advance their ministry, there would be false teachers who would take advantage of unsuspecting Christians and use their hospitality to accrue benefit to themselves. That little bit of context helps us understand what's going on in the book of 3 John here today and it's also going to help us understand how to conduct ourselves financially in the church of Jesus Christ. I'm looking forward to what the Lord has for us here this morning.

Basically what we're going to do in this message is just do a contrast between the marks of a godly giver and the marks of an ungodly giver and we're going to see the marks of a godly giver first of all. How can you recognize a godly giver? Stated differently for those of you that have aspirations in your heart to be godly Christians, you want to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, how is it that you should think about giving? How is it that you would approach giving so that even the way that you handle your finances and the way that you support the work of Jesus Christ would be a further step in the growth of your life as a believer in Christ? How can you recognize a godly giver? What do you aim at in order to be more godly in this realm of your life? Well, we're going to see four sub points under this as we get into the text.

First of all, I want you to see that a godly giver is someone who gives as he grows. The godly giver gives as he grows spiritually. Look at the first two verses of 3 John with me at this point. John introduces the letter and he says, "The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth. Beloved, I pray that in all respects," in all respects, note that, "you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers." And you can see that Gaius was a man who was a giver; he was a man who practiced this hospitality that we were talking about earlier by looking at verse 5 just to kind of set the context for you. John says to him, "Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, 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." That's just a little bit of background to kind of set the stage for us here this morning. Gaius was a man who used his earthly prosperity to advance the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He was a man who showed this kind of practical hospitality. It was an expression of his generous heart, his response of nature to spiritual things that made him want to show this hospitality and this support to the itinerant teachers who were spreading the Gospel and John recognizes and affirms him as a godly man as he opens the letter here in these first two letters.

Look at them with me again, "The elder to the beloved Gaius," he has affection for this man, "I love you in the truth," he says, "and I pray that you may prosper and be in good health," look at that phrase at the end of verse 2, "just as your soul prospers." John as the

apostle recognizes that Gaius was a man was growing spiritually and as he writes to give him instruction about giving, about hospitality, he realizes that he's writing to a man who has a godly life that undergirds the hospitality that he is showing. He is affirming him. John regarded Gaius as a brother in the Lord. He says, "I'm praying for you." It's a good thing for spiritual leaders to affirm that, to let people know, "Hey, I'm praying for you." And as we cultivate leadership in the future of our fellowship, we're looking for men who want to be prayers for the congregation. That's what spiritual leaders do. They not only are up front but they are also down on their knees in private for those that follow their ministry. And this is what John did and he lets John know, "I'm praying for you in every respect. I want you to prosper. I want you to have good health just as I know that your soul is prospering."

Now, he's about to instruct John on the nature of Christian giving and he is setting the stage, he's letting us know that he sees in Gaius a man who is growing spiritually; his spiritual prosperity included a godly pattern of generosity in his life. Here is the first thing. I'll probably say this three or four times as we go through: the first step in cultivating godly giving in your Christian life is to recognize that it's far more than the check that you deposit someplace that is a mark of godliness. The check is secondary to the priority of living a godly life. If you're living a godly life, godly generosity will blossom out of your life as part of the overall fruit of the Spirit in your life. But understand, beloved, we all need to know this and remember this, is that a check does not compensate for an ungodly character. You can't balance off sin in your life with a check in the offering plate. Godly giving is an overflow of an otherwise godly life. The godly giver is someone who is giving in the context of a growing spiritual life. That's what we see here with Gaius.

Now, secondly, and all of these themes are kind of woven together. A godly giver gives as he grows. We see that from the way John affirmed him at the opening of the letter. It's not just that he gives as he grows, secondly, a godly giver gives with obedience. He gives out of an obedient life. Look at verses 3 and 4 with me here, and I just love the exuberant, gracious nature of the way that John wrote as an apostle as a spiritual leader to this individual. He said in verse 3, "For I was very glad when brethren came and testified to your truth, that is, how you are walking in truth. I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth." Notice again for those of you that have perhaps aspirations in the future for spiritual leadership, notice the nature of the demeanor of this spiritual leader, this apostle as he's writing. He says, "I'm very glad to hear of you walking in the truth. I have no greater joy than this, than to hear of my children walking in the truth." There is just this abundance of affirmation, this overflowing bubbling joy that spills out in the way that he communicates with those that he is instructing and it sets the context for everything that follows. And he does need to instruct Gaius, he is about to give him direction and perhaps a measure of correction later on in the letter, but he doesn't just run into the correction; he doesn't just run in and straighten the situation out. He's walking in the Spirit, the Apostle John is, he's walking in the Spirit himself. There is this overflow of joy and he bathes the one he's about to instruct with that kind of joy and instruction.

Again, I just highlight that to say that as we look to the future of our fellowship, if you're new here, we've only been at this for a little over a year and so we're still developing our future and still cultivating what the future is going to be of this body of believers but I just want you to see that those are the kind of men that we are looking to attract. Those are the kind of men that we want. We don't want grumblers and people who are short tempered and abusive. People like that aren't qualified for spiritual leadership in the church of God. No, we are looking for those that out of a confidence in the goodness of God, out of a joyful walk of their own, it just spills over into their lives as well. That's the attitude. Four times in this letter you can look at the verses, four times in these 15 verses, the Apostle John calls Gaius beloved, beloved, beloved, beloved. That's how he thinks of him. That's how he addresses him.

And as he addresses him and as he talks about the issue of Christian generosity, he affirms the fact that Gaius is giving in an obedient spirit out of a lifestyle pattern of being obedient to the truth of God. "I was glad," he says, look again at verse 3 with me, "brethren came and testified to your truth." You see, John wasn't with Gaius. We know that from what we see there in verse 3. He was somehow geographically remote from Gaius but people who knew Gaius came and talked to John about him, talked about Gaius and spoke well of him. "Oh John, you should see, Gaius is an obedient, faithful Christian. You should hear what he does, John. Let me tell you." So as Christians were moving about, they brought reports to John and John heard about Gaius and it brought great joy to him. He said, "I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth." He says, "I love what I'm seeing, Gaius, out of your life." Gaius's reputation was spreading because his life was consistent with obedience to God's word. John says, "That makes me rejoice. That makes me happy."

So we see once again, beloved, that Christian giving, Christian support of Christian work, flows first from a life priority of obedience. It is not enough to write the check, you must be walking in obedience to God if your giving is going to accrue to your spiritual benefit; if it's going to be pleasing to God, there has to be a context of life obedience. My advisory committee might not like me to say this since they are kind of entrusted with a bit of the financial oversight of the work here, but we would prefer you to hold onto your check if your life is sinful. Make obedience your priority and then give out of that. We don't want your giving irrespective of your life obedience. We want you to be walking in obedience to God, walking in obedience to the Scripture, and give out of that life pattern. That's the giving that God will honor. That's the giving that God will bless and we are content to live off of the giving that comes from obedient Christians. We don't need blood money at the hands of sinners who dishonor God with their life throughout the week. That's just the nature of godly giving. It flows out of an obedient life.

You can see this in other parts of Scripture. 2 Corinthians 8 is where I would turn your attention. I ask you to turn to 2 Corinthians 8. Paul is commending the churches in Macedonia who didn't have a lot to give but gave out of an obedient heart. Look at verse 1 with me as we consider this, as we consider the priority of obedience in godly giving. Paul says in chapter 8, verse 1, "Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal of

affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality." Look, you should see in that an echo of what John was affirming in Gaius. Paul is affirming the same spirit in those churches of Macedonia. Their joy, their poverty, their material poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. This was a mark of the grace of God on those churches that they responded in that way. And Paul says in verse 3, again, you see godly Christians giving testimony to other godly Christians, Paul says in verse 3, "I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, and this, not as we had expected," watch this, this is what it's all about for you and your Christian giving, "not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God." He said they were giving out of a right heart. Their giving came in response to the fact that they had given themselves over to the ministry of the word, to obedience of God, to love for Christ. That was the overflow. They are giving overflow from a life like that. The godly giver gives with obedience. He doesn't compartmentalize his giving from the obedience of his life, he realizes that the giving follows the obedience and gives that way and doesn't view giving simply as a checkmark but as something that he loves to participate in because he loves the Lord whose work he is supporting.

The godly giver is someone who gives as he grows, someone who gives in the context of the obedience of his life. Now, thirdly, a godly giver is someone who gives in love. Who gives in love not selfishly, not reluctantly, but gives in an overflow of abundant love. Look at verses 5 and 6, "Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, 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." Now, look, John wasn't commending people for hosting folks after an evening service. That's well and good to do that. We are grateful for those that do that but that's not what John is talking about here. He's talking about that Christian hospitality that allowed the spread of the Gospel, of supporting itinerant teachers. John is saying that, "Your hospitality is essential to the Gospel ministry." And you can see the sincerity of Gaius's love in this in that in verse 5 he's doing this even when they were strangers to him. There was no pre-existing relationship that prompted this generosity at times in his life. There was no prior commitment. There was no quid pro quo with what was happening. Gaius was giving out of a generous, loving spirit that he aimed at every Christian that came into his life whether he knew them or not, and John says, "When you're acting that way, you're acting faithfully as you accomplish these things for the brethren." These people had no claim on Gaius's food and lodging and what it showed was that his hospitality was not from self-interest but based on a common love for Christ.

So as you think about the whole sphere of the way that you give in support of the Lord's work, think about it in the sense that we do this not under obligation. We don't do this out of compulsion that is contrary. Oh, this is so very important. We don't give out of a sense of compulsion that we're going to get spanked if we don't, that this is something that we have to do even though we would rather not. Godly giving comes with a generous gracious spirit that is glad to do it; that flows from an understanding of, "Oh, I've been a recipient of so much grace from the hand of our Lord Jesus Christ and others need to hear

that word and I want them to hear because I've received so freely. I want to give freely and I love the Christians that do that and I want others to hear and I want the word to go forth." And it's all just an overflow of a heart that loves, a heart that gives, a heart that obeys, a heart that is growing. That's the kind of giving that God is going to bless, not someone who is calculating down to the exact percent of everything that he's going to do and that much and no more. No, it's a spirit of gracious obedient love. God loves a cheerful giver it says elsewhere in Scripture, and that's what we see going on here.

Now, as we move on in this, as you're growing, as you're obedient and he is giving in love, watch this in verses 7 and 8: a godly giver gives with discernment. A godly giver gives with discernment and this is really crucial here. It's not indiscriminate generosity that the Scriptures call us to any more than it's indiscriminate submission to whatever teacher blows through town. There is to be discernment in the Christian life that permeates everything that you do. Discernment permeates who you listen to; it permeates where you associate; discernment permeates into your giving as well.

Look at verses 7 and 8 here. John says, speaking of those teachers that Gaius had been supporting, he said, "they went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to support such men, so that we may be fellow workers with the truth." Now, what John says about these teachers that Gaius had been supporting, they went out evangelistically and they were not depending upon the support of those to whom they were trying to minister, those to whom they were sharing the Gospel, for many probably hearing it for the first time. He said they were accepting nothing from them. They went out for the sake of the name of Christ therefore, he says, we need to support those men. Those men that gave of themselves, that went out without expecting anything by way of response from those that heard them, he said, "We need to support them because they went out for the sake of the Name, the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. They went out to honor him." So John is explaining why that support that Gaius was giving was so crucial, it's that those who teach the true Gospel would receive the support and be able to continue on in the ministry which those who give love just as much as the one who taught. In God's economy, I love this about our Lord, in God's economy, the one who supports the work is as much a worker with it as the one who teaches. There is a collective effort that we all make in this.

Look back at the book of Romans 10:14, the Apostle Paul says, "How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed?" How are unsaved people going to hear and respond to the Gospel unless someone tells them. "How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?" This is one of the great texts of showing that God uses means to accomplish his predetermined ends. Verse 15, "How will they preach unless they are sent?" Someone has to send the preacher. Someone has to support the preacher who is sent. "Just as it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!'" The preacher has to be sent and godly givers are happy to do that as part of their overall walk with the Lord.

Now, a godly giver is growing, obeying, loving, exercising discernment as he does. You see, there's a whole matrix of life attitudes, life conduct, that undergirds the giving, and

that is the priority. The giving will take care of itself if Christians are living this way. And let me just give a little obvious point of application here as it affects our life here in the body. I want you to understand something and people come in, visitors will comment on this, I hear this frequently. They say, "Wow, you guys didn't pass an offering plate. I'm not used to that. Why don't you do that?" Well, look, I want to help you understand why we do it that way. Here at Truth Community Fellowship, we have deliberately deemphasized giving at the start of our ministry so that we could communicate these priorities to you for you to understand, to embrace, to realize that we are sincere when we say that your priority is your spiritual growth; that you need to be committed to truth, the truth of God, I mean; that you need to be a loving Christian; that you need to be a discerning Christian, and that those are the priorities of the Christian life. So we don't pass a plate during our service. I'm not saying that we never will in the history that is yet to come, the history that is yet to be written, but here at the start we deliberately deemphasized giving. We don't pass a plate, we simply have an unobtrusive box at the table and that's deliberate. It's deliberate because we want to impress on your heart and on your mind the priority of your growth in godliness. We are less concerned about building a bank account and more concerned about building lives that are growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ. That's what we want for you. Implicit in that approach is the confidence that Christians will respond with the support that's necessary to sustain the work. True Christians that are growing will want to be fellow workers with the truth. We trust the Spirit of God to work that out in your life and that's why we don't feel the need to do high pressure techniques here. So that's why we don't pass a plate. It's a reminder week by week that our desire for you is your growth in godliness and we trust the Lord to take care of the giving that will flow from that. You need to give but if you're growing in godliness, that giving is going to take care of itself. So our priority is the godliness and we'll see what the Lord does with the giving that flows from that.

One final thing if you would turn back to 2 Corinthians 8 on this is, just to remember. You know, I often walk through hospitals in visitation, to do visitation and all of that and I do love to do that. If you're ever in the hospital, don't hesitate to give me a call. I want to be by your side when that time inevitably comes to some of you. But when you walk through hospitals and other places, of course, you have walls of what the big donors have done and things are named after the big donors and, you know, okay, whatever. But in the church, in the realm of the local body, in the realm of what God is doing in a local church, the names that get written on the wall of God are not necessarily equivalent with those who put the most zeros after the check. I love that about our Lord.

Look at chapter 8, verse 12 of 2 Corinthians. What is it, what is it? This should make you excited to give whatever you can give. This should make you excited to give, to realize that God views it this way that in chapter 8, verse 12 of 2 Corinthians, "if the readiness is present," if someone wants to give, if their heart is oriented toward gracious, loving, obedient, truthful giving, if the readiness is present "it is acceptable," acceptable to whom? It's acceptable to God. It's acceptable to God "according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have." So the person of meager means who gives out of a gracious, generous heart even if it's small, has given what in God's eyes is an acceptable act of obedience that he will bless them for even if it doesn't end up on the plaque

someplace and no wings get named after you at the local hospital or whatever. You see, it's all about your heart, beloved. It's always about your heart. You can't compensate for a sinful heart with a big check. And along the same lines, the blessing of God on a generous heart is not constrained by the fact that the check is small. I love that about the Lord, don't you? Don't you love the fact that his economy is a complete reverse of the way it's done here on earth? Don't you love that about him? That makes me want to give all the more according to whatever means our family has, and to realize that I don't need to feel guilty because it's not a seven figure check. No, I don't have those means. When you write a generous check out of the means that the Lord has given to you, you don't have to think, "Oh, it's not going to count for much because this is all we've got." No, no, the Lord says, "I see your means. I see what you're giving. I'll bless you for that." I love our Lord for that and that's the spirit in which we give. These are the marks of godly giving.

Now, let's transfer over and look at the marks of an ungodly giver and this will be equally instructive from the other side. The contrast here will be helpful. Turn back to 3 John with me for just a moment. The marks of an ungodly giver. What we're going to see here in these final few verses is that there was a reason why John had to write this letter at this time. There was a problem that he needed to address. There was correction that was needed here, and as we look at the marks of an ungodly giver in 3 John, we're going to see that in contrast to Gaius there was a man named Diotrephes who was ungodly, who was in the church but was hindering the work of God with his life and actions.

Look at verse 9. We are transferring, we're seeing an ungodly giver in contrast to the joy that we had with Gaius, we're going to see a heaviness as we look at Diotrephes. Verse 9 and 10, John says, "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," oh boy, this gets heavy. You see the authority side of spiritual leadership being exercised here that sinful, wicked men do not go unaddressed in the church. Verse 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." That's a mouthful but you can see by the tone of what John writes and by the expansive way in which he explains it that he's animated over what he sees here. There is an ungodly man in the midst of the church that needed to be addressed and John denounces him, he denounces him because he was interfering with the ministry of the word of God and not only that, he was hindering those who wanted to support the ministry. This guy had to go. His ticket had to be punched out of this assembly.

What can we see, what can we learn from this in a negative way as we see how John addressed him? What are the marks of an ungodly giver? Well, first of all, watch this, the ungodly giver is often marked by the fact that he has an agenda. He has an agenda. He's not there to support spiritual leadership, he's got something else that he's trying to do. And John had previously tried to correct Diotrephes but Diotrephes had rejected the instruction. Look at verse 9, John says, "I wrote something to the church," apparently an earlier letter that hasn't been preserved for us, "but Diotrephes, he loves to be first," there

is his agenda, "he does not accept what we say." He is interfering. He rejects it. Can you imagine the Apostle John and a man presumes to stand up and reject what an apostle said? The measure of this man's wickedness is beyond our capacity to count. Why would he be that way? Why would he oppose an apostle? Why would he reject instruction? I can't imagine this. I'm glad it shocks you too. Diotrephes loves to be first among them. He was a proud man who wanted prominence. Mark out that desire for prominence, that desire to be first, that desire to be elevated. He loves to be first among them and therefore he didn't want any competition. He didn't want anyone stealing his thunder. He didn't want someone to eclipse him in spiritual prominence in the church. He loved to be first and therefore he didn't accept what John had to say.

Now go back and put this in the context that we've been talking about and understand that as we understand the first century context, it gives us instruction for the 21st century. Remember that the church, early Christians, welcomed traveling itinerant teachers and supported them and sent them on their way; they gave them a base of operation so that the word could go forth. John says that Diotrephes wanted nothing to do with that. If the church welcomed in outside teachers, if the church welcomed men who would give instruction in the word of God, Diotrephes was going to lose status. His sense of elevated worth in the church would be diminished as the body saw that others could come in and teach as well. He hindered the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the sake of his own pride.

He hindered hospitality. Look at the end of verse 10, he says, "he does not receive the brethren, he forbids those who desire to do so and puts them out of the church." It wasn't enough for Diotrephes simply to keep his door closed, which he did, when he found out that others were doing it, he went to them and said, "Stop it," and then put them out of the church simply for practicing the basic elements of first century Christian hospitality which would have advanced the Gospel of Christ. This was a wicked man. You can't put lipstick on that pig and dress it up. This was a proud, arrogant, selfish man who was hindering the work of the ministry of Christ and John says, "For this reason," look at verse 10 with me again, "For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds. He unjustly accuses us with wicked words; and he's not satisfied with that." It wasn't enough for him to dispute the apostle, he had to go to all these other lengths as well. Listen, that is spiritual cancer in the local body and it's the prerogative and it's the responsibility of spiritual leadership to cut that cancer out and move it along, to send it away, because the preeminent love and the preeminent priority for a local church is the advance of truth, the advance of the Gospel. When men hinder that, they forfeit their position and they bring the force of spiritual authority down upon them. You see, John's condemnation here assures Gaius that John would publicly discipline Diotrephes for his wicked conduct when he came and it also, as he condemns Diotrephes, it helps us recognize men who are disqualified from spiritual leadership. Men who hinder the Gospel in order to preserve their status are men who are not fit for spiritual leadership. Men who bring an agenda of their own are men who need to be restrained.

I have known men in the past in other places, I'm not speaking of anything that's happened in this body, but I've known men in the past who tried to influence the doctrine of the church by promising money, large sums of money, we're talking many zeros in that

check, large sums of money if only the pastor would teach their particular doctrinal viewpoint on a particular issue. One place took the money, another place didn't. Interesting to think back on that. But here's all I want you to see for that, that's an agenda. That's ungodly giving, to try to influence the direction of doctrine with your checkbook is not right. Generosity that comes with strings attached is not acceptable giving in the eyes of God. You can't buy influence in the church of Jesus Christ. Your influence, the influence in a healthy functioning New Testament church is through the power of a godly life, the power of an example, and those who support the work need to acknowledge that, not try to short-circuit the need for godliness in their own lives by the means that God has given to them. So you can recognize an ungodly giver by the fact that he has an agenda. He is trying to accomplish something else.

Well, how else can you mark an ungodly giver? How else can you recognize him? An ungodly giver can be recognized by the fact that he hinders faithful teachers. He hinders faithful teachers. Here we see that the Apostle John had apparently sent some men to the church for ministry. He had sent them, you see this in verse 10 where we saw earlier, Diotrephes did not receive the brethren. He hindered them. They were emissaries of the Apostle John and Diotrephes says, "No, go away. You're not welcome here." Wow. Wow. Diotrephes defied the wishes of the apostle and sent those men away and so you can recognize ungodly men, you can recognize ungodly givers, by the fact that they will speak against faithful preachers of the word of God and they will put up obstacles that make ministry difficult. Mark it. You can watch for it. And sure, sure, they'll clothe it, they'll dress it up in some kind of pious thing, you know, it's the nature of spiritual hypocrisy that masks are put on so that someone appears to be someone other than what he is, but you can pierce the veil, you can get through the mask, you can look beyond the mask by seeing how a man responds in the face of faithful ministry of the Gospel. This is what we see here in verses 9 and 10. John said, "He forbid the brethren. He puts out those who want to support the faithful teachers." This man was an example of wickedness so bad, so severe, so extreme, so necessary to deal with, that the word of God 2,000 years after the fact continues to testify to the depths of his wickedness. This gives us a measure, beloved, of how seriously God views these things. It gives us a sense of the importance of being godly in our giving, godly in our support as opposed to those who take another path.

So he hinders faithful teachers, he also hinders faithful supporters. That's the third thing. We've said three things about the marks of an ungodly giver: he has an agenda; he hinders faithful teachers; and thirdly we see and we'll just barely touch on this because we've already talked about it, he hinders faithful supporters. Look at the end of verse 10 with me, "he does not receive the brethren," he hinders faithful teachers, "he forbids those who desire to do so and puts them out of the church." This was the habit of life for Diotrephes and so John says, "When I come, I'm going to deal with him. I'm going to put him out." And understand, you know, I realize that especially in this postmodern world of that we live in and, you know, confrontation are things that people naturally resist and almost think to be bad out of hand, understand why John was acting this way. Understand, pull back the veil, look into the reality of the situation and understand why an apostle would do this. It's because the truth was at stake. It's because there was

ministry that needed to happen and this single man was interfering with the whole process. Everything that was necessary for ministry to happen in the first century, this man was a barrier to it and when a man becomes a barrier to the truth of God, he forfeits his privilege of being in the church of God. That's what happens because, and this is so hard for American Christians to grasp and understand, the cause of the truth is more important than any individual. The cause of the truth, our loyalties are to the truth, right? That's why you're here. Our loyalty is to the truth and those who oppose the truth have to be recognized and sent on their way.

So, you see a godly giver, you see the marks of an ungodly giver by his agenda, by the way that he hinders the work, and sometimes doesn't even support the work. I'm sure Diotrephes wasn't writing too many whatever first century checks were, I don't know. We are all going cashless before long, I'm told, so that will not even be an issue in the future. But you know what I'm saying, a man who is opposing the truth probably wasn't supporting it out of his own pocketbook either. All of those things testify to the reality of the situation.

Well, in light of that, in light of the example of a godly giver, the example of an ungodly giver, how can we become better givers here? John gives us a couple of things to close with here. Look at verses 11 and 12. First of all, how to become a better giver? Look to the good examples. Look to the good examples. Look at verse 11 with me, "Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good." You're going to imitate, he says. Look at your example. Be aware of who your examples are. Take note of who your examples are and follow the good examples, not the evil ones because, "The one who gives you a good example is the one who is from God; the one who does evil has not seen God," there in verse 11. John encourages and, look, coming back, what's happening here at this point in the epistle is that John is bringing it back around to encourage and strengthen Gaius once more. Gaius has obviously been discouraged in the midst of this local assembly by the opposition of Diotrephes. Diotrephes had made life miserable for him. He forbid this kind of hospitality. He was putting people out of the church and here's Gaius, a faithful believer, trying to be faithful to the Gospel out of a loving, truthful, discerning heart, and he's just getting this pounding opposition from a wicked man. And so undoubtedly, put yourself in Gaius's shoes, undoubtedly Gaius was tempted to step back and give up; to stop doing what he was doing. He wanted to get away from it because Diotrephes had made it so it wasn't worth the headache anymore. It just wasn't worth the problem that it was creating, so Gaius thought. So John now comes here and strengthens him and says, "No, don't give in to that temptation."

That's what he's saying here in verse 11, "Beloved," you know, he's called Gaius beloved already in verse 2 and verse 5 and so we know that he is addressing Gaius again and so Gaius, on the brink of this temptation to give up a fruitful ministry and step away from it, John says, "Beloved, don't do that. Don't imitate what is evil, but what is good. Don't let the direction of your ministry, don't be intimidated away from doing good things in the name of Christ simply because of opposition that you're seeing." He says, "The one who does good is of God; the one who does evil has not seen God." And he says, "Look at Demetrius," verse 12. He says, "Don't back away from your hospitality. Think about

Demetrius. Remember Demetrius, Gaius?" This doesn't help us too much because we don't know anything about Demetrius but those in the first century did. After telling Gaius, "Imitate what is good," he gives him an illustration and he says, "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." Gaius was to look at Demetrius and see a good example. To be strengthened in his resolve to pursue fruitful ministry, John tells him, "Look at Demetrius and be encouraged to continue on, to persevere. This opposition from Diotrephes isn't going to last much longer so persevere in doing good. Don't bow down before the wicked one who would try to keep you from your obedience." This is really remarkable. If you love the truth, imitate good examples and refuse bad ones. That's how you play your role in the advance of the Gospel, you imitate what is good.

Now, let's take it one step further. As we think about life here in the body, we've been talking a lot about first century stuff, I know. There are a lot of good men and a lot of good women in this church for you to fix your eyes on and say, "I want my life to be like theirs." There are a lot of good people like that. Young ones, older ones, there are a lot of good examples around. So look to the good godly examples and imitate them. But going further, going further, set the resolve of your heart if you're going to be committed to Truth Community Fellowship on a long-term basis and I hope that's going to be all of you here that live less than 100 miles from the place, I want you all here: set your mark and you young people especially, those of you that are just setting the forms with wet concrete of what your life is going to look like, set your mark not only to say, "I want a good example to follow," that's step one, step two is to say, "Do you know what? What's more, I'm going to be that good example. I'm going to be that faithful Christian. I'm going to be that one who loves truth and love the brethren and is discerning and participates and supports the life of my fellowship. I'm going to be faithful to the Gospel of Christ and if I don't find an example like that, that's not going to deter me. I'm going to be that way anyway. I'm not going to wait for someone to rise up and be my mentor, I'll look for one if I can find one," but you young people, set your own path. Set your own trail. Set your own example of what a godly young man in a wicked society looks like and rise up and be that man because you can do it in the power of the Spirit.

You can do it because that's what Christ has called you to and what I say to young people, I say to all of us, I say to this young fledgling body. Look, just by the nature of providence, just by the nature of the fact that we are here in 2013 means that this is our time. This is the time for Truth Community Fellowship. I don't know what that means, I just know that we are here in 2013 preaching the word of God and so somehow that means that God wants us here and God intends to use us somehow in maybe a small sphere, maybe a bigger sphere, I have no idea whatsoever. You know, look, you guys are really faithful and I love you for it and some of you are just coming and I know you're going to be faithful, you've just found us. Look, we're not going to lose our way at Truth Community Fellowship. Our way was set out for us 2,000 years ago in the word of God and we're just going to be faithful to this word and see what God does with us.

So, beloved, as we see this Scripture, "Don't imitate what is evil but what is good," may God help us not only in our giving but in the life of our fellowship and in the lives that are forming right before our very eyes, that we're not just going to look for good examples to follow, we're going to be that exemplary body that wants to be faithful to the truth of God and individually is committed to doing that as well. That is our noble call. That is the blessing and the privileged that's before us is to set an example that others can follow. Are you with me? May God bless his word. May God bless those who are faithful.

And as we set ourselves upon that goal, let's remember grace, verses 13 through 15. Verses 13 through 15, remember the good examples that are all around us but in verse 13, we see a quiet reminder to remember grace as we do. We have no power of our own to achieve these things. We are simply saying that we want to walk by grace. Verse 13, John says, "I had many things to write to you, but I am not willing to write them to you with pen and ink; but I hope to see you shortly, and we will speak face to face." Now watch his concluding words here, "Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends by name." The apostle had more to say but he wanted to share it with Gaius personally. He says, "Let me close with this benediction, peace upon you. Peace be with you." It's the words of a grace filled heart speaking. "I long for your fellowship. Peace be with you until we see each other again." God's grace is going to be upon those who want to honor his word. As perhaps the ranks shrink a little bit, we're not intimidated by that. We see that as our opportunity. This is our time to be Christians because it is the time that God has given to us.

Bow with me in prayer.

Father, as we just contemplate the greatness of your word, we thank you for what we've seen here today. We pray that, Father, we would be the godly example and that you would give us godly examples to imitate and to follow. Lord, I pray for each one in this room and I pray for the collective spirit of this place, of this body, that we would be those marked by walking in truth; that we would be those marked by joy; that when people think of the people at Truth Community Church, all they could do would be to testify to our love. Father, we're not there yet but that's our aspiration, that's what we want to grow toward, that's what we aspire after. Lord, we want to be a church that looks like Gaius, not like Diotrephes. We want a church that people elsewhere could point to and say, "There's a good testimony." Father, we want that not for our own sake. We don't care if men notice us in that way, we just want Christ to be displayed through our individual and corporate life. That's what we are asking for, Father. We want this because we love you. We love you, our Lord Jesus, and we want your name to be seen as great. We want people to love and trust your word. We want Christians throughout this region to look at Truth Community Fellowship and say, "There is a place where we have friends. This is our friend in conviction and commitment and philosophy." So Father, help us to that end. Bless us to that end. And as we are faithful, Father, May the outworking of our faithfulness be manifested even in the way that we give and the way that we support the work that you are doing here. Lord, we love you and we want to love you more and we want to display greater degrees of faithfulness to you. Please help us to

that end so that we could always be faithful to Christ. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

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