

# TRUTH COMMUNITY

- TEACHING GOD'S PEOPLE GOD'S WORD -

## **Godly and Ungodly Giving**

3 John

GraceLife: 8/28/2011

© 2011 by Don Green. All rights reserved.

We are in 3 John so you can turn there if you have not done so already. 3 John, the final of the three epistles of John that he wrote probably when he was around 90 years old.

Now by way of introduction to our text this morning, the world has many sayings, clever statements to express how money exposes the motivations of men. Some of these you know: “money talks” “follow the money” “money makes the world go round” “your check book reveals your priorities” And my favorite, “stick a dollar in a donut and watch the dog bark at night” Okay, that’s not really one of them, I just made that up. (laughter). But don’t you think that should be just as famous as the other ones? I do.

Money exposes the motivations of men. Money explains a lot about what people do and what they consider to be important and the book of 3 John addresses this in both a positive and a negative sense. This text in 3 John contrasts godly giving with ungodly giving and it gives us a sense of direction as we support Christian workers who proclaim the gospel, it lays forth the responsibility that all of us have as Christians to support the work of the gospel, the gospel that saved us from eternal damnation. We support with our earthly means in order to see the work of God advance that underlies the text that we have here this morning.

Now going back in to the first century context of this letter in which this letter was written, Christian teachers had the ability to travel with ease because of the Roman infrastructure that was in place. We talked about this last time. The systems of roads that were in place and the common language enabled them to travel from region to region and province to province with a facility that enabled the gospel to spread rapidly was part of God’s providential preparation for the gospel, that Christ came after those infrastructural things were in place rather than before. Before it would have made it much more difficult for the gospel to spread with communication and travel advanced for that time that it made it easier for the teachers to go around and preach the gospel.

But as we said last time, there was a particular obstacle that had to be overcome. While they could travel with ease, it was not so easy to find a place to stay. The modern hotels that we know and enjoy were foreign to that environment. And so when itinerant teachers traveled about in order to conduct their ministry, they needed a place to stay with Christian believers in order to conduct their ministry--it was part of the strategic way that the gospel was spread. And this was

such an important issue that beyond the scriptures, the church leaders wrote to instruct believers on how to conduct themselves and how to care for itinerant teachers.

One first century writing says this, it was almost contemporaneous with this letter of 3 John in time, it said this: “Let every apostle, when he comes to you, be received as the lord, but he shall not abide more than a single day or if there be need, a second likewise. But if he abides three days, he is a false prophet. And whosoever shall say in the spirit ‘Give me silver or anything else’ you shall not listen to him. But let everyone who comes in the name of the Lord be received. If the comer is a traveler, assist him so far as you are able, but he shall not stay with you more than two or three days if it be necessary.”

What that document was saying at that time, it was instructing these believers on how to discern between the true itinerant teachers and the false ones. The true teachers were not looking to take advantage of the hospitality, they simply needed an overnight or two days stay in order to conduct their ministry and then they would go on so that they could continue to spread the gospel. You could recognize a false teacher by his willingness to take advantage of that hospitality, to stay longer than was necessary, it showed and exposed that his motivations were about what he could get rather than what he could give.

And so this was a very important to the first century church and it is reflected both in the scriptural and the extra scriptural writings that history has left for us. So the point of this introduction is simply to highlight that believers had to use discernment as they gave hospitality to traveling teachers. And that context helps us understand the book of 3 John because here in 3 John, John is making a contrast between the marks of a godly giver and the marks of an ungodly giver and that is going to be the structure of our message today.

## **1. The Marks of a Godly Giver**

First of all, I want to show you the marks of a godly giver. How can you recognize a godly giver? Who is it that the scriptures would affirm in their giving? How is it that we can examine our own lives even today when this cultural situation is so much different? What are the underlying principles that will help us examine our own giving to support the cause of the gospel?

Let’s dive in to the text here and look at just the first two verses to start with:

*The elder to the beloved Gaius whom I love in truth. Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers.*

I am going to give you four marks of a godly giver through the first eight verses here. And the first one is a simple point, it is the one that would be real easy to overlook and presuppose. Under the marks of a godly giver, four sub points here.

### **A. He gives**

The first sub point that I point out to you is simply this, you can know a godly giver because he gives. Now as you look at the first two verses (I'll acknowledge that that's not explicitly stated in the first two verses that I just read) but what I want you to see is this, that John regarded this man, Gaius, we don't know exactly who he is, but he was a prominent man in a local church and John is the elder that is writing to him, he regarded Gaius as a brother in the Lord. He was writing to a fellow Christian and he was writing to affirm him. He calls him beloved twice, first in the first verse "beloved Gaius" and again in verse 2:

*Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health...*

John had affection for this brother and the reason that he had affection for him was that his soul was prospering, he was walking in the truth, he showed the marks of a genuine believer and we see John praying for his material prosperity. And he prays for that material prosperity in the context of Gaius' overall spiritual growth. He says what I am really concerned about is that I see your spiritual prosperity, I see that you are growing in the truth, you are walking in the truth and you are walking in love. And because I see that, I pray that your outward circumstances would prosper in the same way that I know that your soul is prospering. But part of the spiritual prosperity which is evident from what follows in the text is that Gaius' spiritual prosperity included a godly pattern of supporting the work of the gospel—that's my point, that's a simple point, that godly giver is someone who gives.

Now, let me just step back and clarify something for you. This is probably the first message in my six or seven years as a pastor of GraceLife where I have said anything about giving. I don't have an agenda or a hobby horse on this issue. But I want you to understand my motivations in talking about it just briefly.

This is the text that the Lord has brought us to. We have gone through 1 John, we have gone through 2 John and so this is what the Lord has brought us to in order to discuss here.

Secondly, I want you to know that Phil and I do not receive any compensation for our ministry in GraceLife, this is our ministry, we like it that way. We have jobs that we support our families with, and so GraceLife is our ministry. My only point in saying that is that I have no personal stake in how you respond to this message at all—it is important for you to know that, it doesn't affect me one way or the other how you respond to the message. So I just want you to see that this is something that comes from the text of God to you today, that this is the scriptures that are speaking to you for God's motivations rather than some kind of human motivation that might seem to be beneath the surface—there is nothing like that behind here.

The other thing that I would say is that I would want many of you if not the majority, the vast majority of you to be encouraged by what this text has to say today. I know that you are givers, you are generous, I don't have access and I don't want to have access to the donation records of Grace Church, but I know that you are generous and that you give and you support and people in this room enjoy the benefits of that and I just thank God for that and I thank you and I affirm you in that. And I want you to know that that's upper most in this pastor's mind as I talk to you today.

At the same time, I also want to just acknowledge the reality that while I don't know the donation records, I know that there are a substantial number of people that are members of Grace Church who don't even make the most token of donations throughout the giving year. And that's why I want to emphasize this point that a godly giver is someone who gives and the scriptures expect us to give. God calls on us to give to support the work of the gospel with our earthly means according to our ability. He does not expect us to give that which we do not have, but it should be in your heart as a believer enough to love the gospel that saved you, to love the Christ that saved you, that as you have means, there would be an element of giving to support the work of the gospel that would be an overflow of your gratitude to God for that.

And so a godly giver gives and that would be the first point of your self-examination as the Lord brings His word to you here is, am I a giver? Am I gracious and generous? And so many of you are, I don't know who is not by name, but I just lay that before you as what the Lord would have for you here this morning from His word. So a godly giver is someone who actually gives and does not simply pay lip service to it. So that's the first point of self-examination, the godly giver is someone who actually gives.

### **B. He gives with obedience.**

Now secondly, second sub point here is that a godly giver gives with obedience. Let's look at verses 3-4 as we consider this further and I will explain what I mean by that point, he gives with obedience. Look at verse 3 with me, he says:

*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.*

Now, John here is affirming the overall pattern, the overall conduct of Gaius' life. He says you are getting a reputation my friend, you are getting a reputation among the brethren. And the reputation is one that you are a man who walks in the truth. Your lifestyle is giving testimony to your obedience. Your lifestyle shows forth the glory of walking with Christ. You walk in the truth, you obey the commandments of truth, you are a man of love and the brethren talk about you in that way. And so Gaius was a man who had a reputation amongst the believers of that time and John is affirming that and says, you make me glad, you give me joy. In a much lesser sense, that's the sense I have of being the pastor of GraceLife. You give me joy, you give me satisfaction, I am encouraged as I see you walk in the truth and you have been a blessing to my heart for many years now and I am grateful to the Lord for you. And so I can empathize, I can understand from a distance what John is saying here as he writes to this man and says I want to affirm you and your walk with Christ, you conduct your life in accordance with God's word. John says I love to hear that, I love to hear that those who are under my apostolic authority obey the truth in their daily lives so that's what make me rejoice, that just fills my heart overflowing with gratitude to the Lord for you as you walk in the truth.

Now here is my point in this context of godly giving as we are going to see in the next few verses. John is going to get more specific, he gives Gaius a general affirmation in saying you

walk in the truth and then he is going to get specific about the specific way in which his generosity has furthered the cause of the gospel. But what he starts with is this general statement of the overall pattern, the overall conduct of John's life and here is what that means for you and me.

Godly giving, godly generosity in the context of the Christian life is not first and foremost a matter of your check book or your pocket book, it doesn't start there. If you are not walking in truth, your giving does not rescue your disobedience, it does not redeem your disobedience to God. Rather, Christian giving flows first from a life priority of obedience—that's what I want you to see. You should be able to look in to your heart and say "Despite all of my imperfections, despite the fact that my sanctification rises and falls and sometimes I fall subject to temptation, sometimes I sin, my heart priority is to obey." And the pattern of your life, people should be able to look at your life and say there is somebody who is seeking to honor God with the pattern of their life. More importantly, you should be able to look in to your heart and say "I know that my heart commitment is one of obedience to God first and foremost and giving is simply an aspect of overall obedience." It is not that giving isolated of the remainder of the conduct of your life. You don't isolate giving and consider it there as John shows forth here. We consider our giving in the overall context of an obedient life

If someone has been walking in sin, my advice to them would be this. Keep your check book, keep your wallet in your pocket for now and get serious about repentance. Get serious about obedience to God and the overall conduct of your heart, the overall conduct of your life, get serious about that and then let giving come as an overflow, an after-effect of that. Because if your heart is not centered and settled and committed to obedience, your giving is not pleasing to the Lord. Your life must be obedient for your giving to be a pleasing sacrifice to the Lord.

Turn back in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 8:1-5. I want to show you a cross reference to bring this point out a little more. Paul is writing here, he is affirming the churches of Macedonia, he says:

*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 in their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality*

He said, they were in affliction, they were in poverty, but I want you to know the grace of God that was upon their lives, that in that affliction and in that poverty, they were full of joy and they were gracious and liberal in their support. He says this is the mark of great generosity, this is the mark of Christian giving. And then he gives personal testimony to those churches in Macedonia, he says:

*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, for they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.*

They had presented themselves, they had presented their lives to the Lord as a living sacrifice, they said “Lord, my life belongs to you. I am your servant and your slave. I want to simply obey you in all of my life.” And it was from that comprehensive heart attitude that their giving came forth. That’s what I mean when I say godly giver gives with obedience, he gives out of a lifestyle that is obedient in all areas. Let’s put it this way, he doesn’t try to compensate for sin and disobedience out of pockets of his life by giving money as though that would cover it up, as if that would compensate, that would balance the scales in his favor somehow. No, the obedience comes from heart, fully surrendered to Christ, fully loving Christ, fully loving the people of Christ and then the giving comes out of that context, it flows from under that umbrella, you might say. A godly giver gives with obedience to Christ and that is the mark of his life.

Let’s go back to 3 John here as we continue to develop this contrast between godly and ungodly giving. Third sub point here,; we saw he gives with obedience.

### **C. He gives in love**

Thirdly, he gives in love. Look at verses 5-6 with me, he says beloved, third time that John is calling him beloved:

*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.*

And so there were these itinerant teachers that were strangers that came and spent a brief period of time with the church where Gaius was at and they were the recipients of his generosity, they were the recipients of his goodness. And then once they had finished their ministry there, they went on out and talked about Gaius before other churches, before other believers they testified and said this man loved them so much, this man was so gracious and generous in his hospitality. And so Gaius, while he was giving out of love and simply seeking the need that was in front of him, the Spirit of God through the testimony of those who received his generosity took and spread it like wild fire as they went out and taught and were overwhelmed by his goodness and love and generosity, they went out and talked about it.

John here in verses 5-6 affirming that. He says I have gotten the word back, the word has gotten back to me, Gaius. And these brethren are coming and telling me what you have done and I just want to affirm you, you are being faithful.

Don’t you want to be on the receiving end of that kind of affirmation from Christ for being faithful, for being obedient? You are showing love. He goes on in verse 6 and says:

*You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God.*

What he is saying there is, as you receive them and give hospitality to them during their time with you, just remember to send them on in a manner worthy, provide for their next leg of their journey—that’s part of the generosity and the hospitality, and John just affirms him in that.

What I want you to see here is that when John says that you are acting faithfully when you accomplish things for the brethren, especially when they are strangers, he is talking about something that is so much more than simply having people over for dessert after the evening service—there is more to it than that in this context. Gaius' hospitality was essential to gospel ministry. This was not simply social love that he was showing, this was the support that was essential to the spread of the gospel at that time. He was supporting itinerant teachers who proclaimed the truth and they could not have their ministry without that kind of support from someone--Gaius stepped up.

And what I love about this and what is searching to us, what causes us to see a model to aspire after on our own, Gaius did this for strangers, he even did for people he did not know, these teachers would just show up, Gaius did not know them, but he welcomed them in to his house. They had no pre-existing relationship to claim Gaius' food and lodging, this was not the context of a friend calling upon a friend, this was a Christian stranger, coming to the door and Gaius said come on in, I'm glad you are here, let me bring out the best that I have for you.

Here is what you need to see, his hospitality was not based on self-interest. There wasn't anything earthly material for him to get out of this. He was going to give his goods and they were going to go on to another place of ministry. Gaius' act of love was an act of self-sacrifice, one that he was delighted to do, one that he probably didn't even think about as self-sacrifice because his heart was so motivated by love for the brethren, love for the gospel, love for wanting to see it spread. His giving was given in love, it was given in the context of relationships that he developed that showed an expressed love to other people, based not on what they could do for him, but based on a common love for Christ, the common love for the gospel. Gaius' attitude was, you are here in the name of Christ, then what I have is yours. Gaius gave in love, he gave in obedience. And finally, what John calls us to in the context of godly giving:

#### **D. He gives with discernment.**

The fourth sub point: A godly giver gives with discernment. Look at verses 7-8 here, he says:

*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.*

John here is making explicit what I have been hinting at and foreshadowing all along here. John explains why the hospitality of Gaius was so crucial. He says we give with discernment, we give so that those who teach the true gospel may receive the support and be enabled to conduct their ministry. These Christian workers went out and the objects of their ministry were Gentile unbelievers, they were being evangelistic, seeking to minister to Gentiles who had not heard the gospel. And what John says is that the objects of their ministry are not supporting them, nor should they. We are here to proclaim the gospel to you as a ministry to you. We don't want your money, we want you to give your hearts to Christ, and that's the way good evangelistic should be. I appreciate our church when visitors come in, we say just put in your registration card, we don't want any money from you—that's the way it should be done, that's the right way to do it. And you see textual support for that, biblical support for that from here. These itinerant

teachers accepted nothing from the Gentiles, but what that did was that they were still in need for their support. And so the whole, the gap as it were that came from the objects of the ministry, Christians who loved the truth, who knew those men to be teaching the truth stepped in to the gap in order to support them and enable the gospel ministry to go forth—that’s the way that it works. These Christian workers received support from other Christians and it is our duty as Christians, yours and mine, to support the work of the gospel—it’s not for others to do.

In God’s economy, you participate in the work of the truth when you support the work. Look back at Roman’s 10, I want you to see this as well. There are different roles for us in the body of Christ to play. Some people preach the truth, others support the truth, without either one, it can’t happen. Paul makes this clear in a series of questions in Romans 10, beginning in verse 13, he says:

*Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved...*

Then he says and how this ministry happen, how can it take place. Verse 14:

*How then will they call on Him whom they have not believed...?*

If they are going to be saved like you and I are, if you and I share the benefits of Christ’s saving work, we have been born again, we have been born to a living hope through the resurrection of Christ, we can’t keep that to ourselves, can we? That thought is repulsive. No, if there are others who don’t know the truth, who have not yet received the gospel, it should be the burning zeal of our hearts to see them hear as well because this is too good to keep to ourselves—right?

And so we go out, we obey the Great Commission, we proclaim Christ to the nations. Paul says how are they going to call on Christ if they haven’t believed on Him:

*And how will they believe in Him whom they have not heard...*

It’s not just that God appoints people for salvation through His decree of election, they have to hear about Christ before they can be saved. And he said at the end of verse 14:

*...how will they hear without a preacher.*

Someone has to go and tell them. They can’t look up at the sky and see the stars and say “Oh, I know what the gospel is.” I know there are people who say “Oh, if you are in a remote island and you just have the stars and creation, then God will save you through that.” That’s not true. General revelation cannot save anyone, they must have a preacher if they are going to hear the gospel and be saved. That is why the burden of missionary action has animated the church for so long—they have to have a preacher.

And now for the purposes of our text here in 3 John, look at verse 15:

*...how will they preach unless they are sent.*



Someone has to send them, someone has to affirm them, send them out, authorize their ministry and someone has to support them so that that can take place. What I want you to see is that those of us who stay here while others go out, if we are supporting their work, we are as much a part as if we have gone and traveled the ocean ourselves and I affirm you for that, I thank you for your work of sending people, your generosity that makes these things happen. You are an instrumental, indispensable part of spreading the gospel throughout the world, even if you never leave the Los Angeles Southern Basin—God bless you for that. That’s what John says to Gaius here in 3 John. And look at the word that he uses here in verse 8, he says:

*Therefore, we ought to support such men...*

There is the obligation of godly giving so that we may be fellow-workers, side by side, arms joined together, not geographically, physically joined together, but spiritually joined together, contributing different aspects to the same common enterprise of seeing the gospel proclaimed to those who do not know it—fellow-workers in the truth, John says in verse 8, and so, the emphasis here is that there is that joined support, and they went out for the sake of the Name, the true name of Christ, they were proclaiming the truth, it was the true gospel that they were proclaiming and those are the men (here’s the point) John says those are the men that we ought to support. We don’t indiscriminately support every person who asks for our help in the name of advancing religion. I happily walk by the guys in white coats in Stater Brothers as they solicit whatever they are trying to get me to give to them.

No, we give to support the truth, we give to men that we know, we give to men who have proven themselves to be those who handle the truth with accuracy—we support those men. The preacher has to be sent and those who have the means to send should give with discernment and support those men who are worthy of it. And so that gives you the freedom, the capacity, prerogative, the opportunity, the responsibility to be discriminant in how you give, to evaluate these things and to not feel pressure from every person who in the name of God asks you for support, but to say “No, I’ll give to those that I know. I’ll give to those whose doctrine is right, I’ll give with discernment.” That’s what a godly giver does, he takes the resources that the Lord has entrusted to him. If the Lord has given us the resources and entrusted to us, then we have a responsibility to use it as He would have us do, and He would have us do that in terms of supporting the truth. Godly givers are happy to do that as part of their overall walk with the Lord, part of their overall love for Christ—they will love to do that.

Now, just a closing point as we talk about the marks of a godly giver, just to remind you that God measures your faithfulness, God rewards you according to your faithfulness not according to amounts. God measures faithfulness not by the amount that we give, but by our willingness to give in proportion to our means. 2 Corinthians 8:12 says:

*If their readiness to give is present, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.*

No one who is in meager means should feel guilty about not giving according to someone who has more extensive means. The question is an honest look at “what do I have, here is what I can

give out of that. I want to give, if I had more, I would give more, but I don't have more, so here is what I have." And understand that in God's gracious condescension toward His people, He says I'll bless, that, I'll honor that, I will reward that as much as the guy who gives 50 times as much because he has greater means. God is looking for your faithfulness, God is looking for your love, God is looking for your obedience, God is looking for your commitment to truth and you give out of that context is that what we are saying—according to what you have not according to what you don't have. And if you are ready and willing to give, God says I accept that and your act of sacrifice for the sake of truth is acceptable to me, it pleases me and I will bless you for it—that's the marks of a godly giver.

## 2. The Marks of an Ungodly Giver

Now, the issue in the first century was that there was a contrast just as there is today. There is a contrast and I want to show you the marks of an ungodly giver by contrast here in the time that we have left. The marks of an ungodly giver—this is a little bit ugly, ungodly and ugly you might say. Because in contrast to Gaius that John had been affirming through the first eight verses of this letter, John now has to turn and denounce and rebuke a man named Diotrephes who refused to do this, he was not a godly giver, he actually hindered the ministry of the gospel from his position of his leadership in the church. Look at what John says about him in verses 9-10, he says:

*I wrote something to the church that 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 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.*

There is a whole lot packed in there that we are not going to be able to spend adequate time on. But I just want to draw out some marks of an ungodly giver by way of contrast so that you can have discernment so that you can examine your own heart in these matters of giving. What can we say about an ungodly giver?

I will put it like this and I think there are three sub points here that marks an ungodly giver:

### A. He has an agenda

First of all, an ungodly giver has an agenda. Look at what John says:

*...Diotrephes loves to be first among them, he does not accept what we say.*

Now John obviously had previously tried to correct Diotrephes. Diotrephes did not accept what the ministry of John was, he rejected the instruction. Diotrephes loved his prominence in the local body and that's why John could say he loves to be first among them. Diotrephes wanted to be the man up front, not because he was gifted to do that necessarily, not because he was motivated by a great love to glorify Christ and to proclaim truth to the brethren, he wanted to be

seen as a prominent one. Any underlying spirituality was a matter of no consequence to him as long as he seemed to be the prominent one. And so, when the church welcomed traveling teachers, Diotrephes would lose status. If someone else came in and was honored, Diotrephes did not like that because he did not want to see someone else detracting attention that was coming to him. And so John says that he hindered them, he would not receive the brethren, he forbid those who were in the church who wanted to receive them and he put them out of the church. He had an agenda, and his agenda was about himself, it was about seeing himself in prominence. And John writes to Gaius and assures him that he was going to publicly discipline Diotrephes for his wicked conduct. And this condemnation here helps us recognize men who are disqualified from spiritual leadership, it helps us recognize the marks of an ungodly giver. Someone who has an agenda, who has to put himself forward over and over again is someone who is not qualified to be in spiritual leadership. Spiritual leaders do not hinder the gospel in order to preserve their own status.

I have known church leaders in the past, not someone here at Grace Church, I have known church leaders who were outspoken about their desire to consolidate power so that they can rule without interference and they have strategies for how they are going to do that. That sounds a lot more like Diotrephes than it does Gaius, doesn't it? How can I consolidate power? When you hear someone talking that way, talking about how they can have more control, more influence, the alarm bell should be going off in your mind. And you are not always going to have a position of strength to be able to address it and resolve it, but just be discerning about that and listen for that.

I have known others in the past who tried to influence the doctrinal content of teaching and say "I will give you a large sum of money if you will teach my view of this particular doctrine." That's an agenda that has nothing to do with supporting the workers of truth, it is all about simply trying to expand your influence through the means that the Lord has given to you. When someone's generosity comes with strings, we are looking at the mark of an ungodly giver, someone who is trying to manipulate through money that which they can't do through strength of their own character and moral authority—watch out for people like that because they are around. That's why the scripture records this for us and we just have to realize that that's not acceptable giving in the eyes of God. We have discernment for those who are like that and we check ourselves and make sure our motives are pure, that we are free from that kind of agenda setting, that kind of pride and prominence of position. There should be those times where we are delighted for our generosity to be unknown to anyone just for the sake of proving that there is no agenda attached to what we give.

### **B. He hinders faithful teachers.**

Now, secondly, an ungodly giver hinders faithful teachers. The apostle John had apparently sent men in to this church and we see this in verse 10. He says Diotrephes does not receive the brethren. John says I had sent these men, by apostolic authority I had sent them because I wanted them to proclaim the truth and Diotrephes interfered, he wouldn't let them in to the building so to speak. Diotrephes openly defied the apostle's wishes and turn those brethren away and would not receive them so that they could conduct their ministry as John had instructed.

And as he speaks about Diotrephes, he says he accuses us with wicked words, he doesn't receive the brethren that we send and he forbids those who would try to assist those who we did send. Diotrephes was simply hindering faithful teachers, you could expand it and say he was also hindering faithful supporters. He was in the way when someone was trying to do gospel work—no, you can't do that here. He threatened those with excommunication—“If you help him, there is going to be consequences against you.”--that was the habit of his life.

What I want to say is when the spiritual leadership becomes aware of men like that, they should be removed from influence. You and I should make sure that we are not like that and we should have the discernment to recognize men who are operating with an agenda, hindering the gospel. And for those that have leadership responsibility, when they see that happen, those men need to be removed—that's what John is saying “I'm going to publicly discipline him.” –They hinder faithful teachers, they hinder faithful supporters.

There is an amusing little story from prior generations about this particular passage and about this man, Diotrephes. A.T. Robertson was a great scholar at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Early on in his ministry, he wrote an article in a Baptist magazine about Diotrephes and was just explaining these things about ungodly giving and the ungodly influence and how to watch out for men like this and how to deal with men like this and condemning the whole thing—he was just explaining scriptures. What is funny is that the editor of the magazine later told him that 25 church leaders had cancelled their subscriptions because the editor had published an article that personally attacked them. Think about that. He was just expounding scriptures and 25 men who he had never met took it personally enough to cancel their subscriptions—“How could you say that about me?” Speaking of dogs that bark at night, you throw a stick in to a pack of dogs and the one that gets hit barks—that's what happened there. And as we expound these things, the men that are like this get hit by it and they react against it and their reaction is the sign that the word of God has found its mark and that the rebuke was properly applied for the word of God by the spirit of God to their own hearts.

If you are rebuked by any of the things that I have said here, I pray that you would repent of that and not react against the word of God in it, but just say “Wow, this is exposing something in my life that I need to change. God, I am so sorry that I have fallen in to that kind of self-centered, self-promoting approach to life. God, I want to repent and become godly in the way of how I approach things.” That would be a mark of the truth of your salvation if you are convicted about those things, that you would repent not react against it and justify yourself, but just repent, just turn away from it and bring forth the fruit of godly living.

### **3. How to Become a Better Giver**

Well, final point here, we looked at the marks of a godly giver, the marks of an ungodly giver (I've said there would be three, I collapsed them in to two) The ungodly giver has an agenda, he hinders faithful teachers and he hinders faithful supporters, he is always in the way of people who want to do ministry—that's the mark of an ungodly giver.

First of all, look for the good examples that are around you. If you are in GraceLife, trust me, there are a lot of good examples sitting in this room right now. Look for the good examples, look at verses 11-12, he says:

*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. Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone and from the truth itself and we have our testimony and you know that our testimony is true.*

He calls on Gaius to imitate the good examples that he sees around him. He says don't be discouraged, don't be negatively influenced by the bad example of Diotrephes, but imitate what is good around you. Let me point someone out to you, here is Demetrius who has a good testimony from everyone. It is possible that Gaius was tempted away from his good hospitality in light of the opposition that Diotrephes was showing. He felt the pressure and John says hang in there, don't give up, don't give way before wicked men. Look at Demetrius, look at him and see that his life is an example to follow. And so if you love the truth, cultivate the attitudes of the godly giver by imitating good examples and don't be intimidated by the bad examples that are around you, don't be discouraged when you see professing Christians who are unfaithful and self-promoting, don't let that discourage you from being the kind of man or woman that God has called you to be—that's how you play your role in the advance of the gospel.

Finally, how can you become a better giver, not only remembering the good examples, but remember grace. Remember God's grace as we look at the last three verses here as we close. John says:

*I have many things to write to you, but I am not willing 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.*

That apostolic benediction is simply an expression of God's grace to the man who received this letter, it is an expression of God's ongoing grace toward us today—peace be with you. Grace and peace from God our Father, the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember the grace of God as you are pursuing this life. The warmth of Christian relationships, the vertical dimension of God's grace shows in these personal greetings and it is a reminder to us that our labor and our giving and our support of Christian work is not in vain—God sees it. This is an inspired apostolic benediction, he says I want to see you shortly, we will speak face to face, be at peace, greetings to you, all of it in expression of grace of God to those who are faithful in their walk, faithful in their overall walk, faithful in their giving.

Which one are you, godly or ungodly? I thank God for those of you that are godly. Those of you that are ungodly whom I don't know by name, I am not up here with an agenda, but if you see and are convicted by this and you realize how far you fall short, come to the grace of God, come to the throne of God and let Him transform your attitudes on these things so that your life going forward would be marked by the kind of Christian generosity that is worthy of the name of Christ who was generous with His life blood, all the way to death for your sake.

Let's pray. *Father, we thank you for this text which we have gone through far too quickly. We thank you that you are gracious and good Father and that you don't expect that in our giving which we are not able to give, you are willing to bless us according to our willingness to give. So I thank you for your gracious condescension toward us and I pray for those who are here Father that faithfully give. I pray that they would have a sense of joy and affirmation and Father, just a sense of encouragement that their generosity is not lost on the accounts of heaven. Father, bless them and encourage them still more.*

*And Father, for those of us that need the rebuke of this passage, May you find us turning away from sin and bad attitudes toward that which would please you. Sanctify all of us through this teaching. Sanctify all of us through your word because your word is truth. Lord, I just command this blessed group of people that love you, I command these beloved brothers and sisters in Christ to you and I pray that you would bless their weeks that lie ahead. May you prosper them, both in health and in material things and in their soul Father. Prosper them throughout all of their life so that they would know the goodness of God and be encouraged to continue and persevere in their walks with you. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*