

### **ONE HIT WONDER: 3 JOHN**

**<sup>1</sup> The elder, to my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth. <sup>2</sup> Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well. <sup>3</sup> It gave me great joy when some believers came and testified about your faithfulness to the truth, telling how you continue to walk in it. <sup>4</sup> I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth. <sup>5</sup> Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers and sisters, even though they are strangers to you. <sup>6</sup> They have told the church about your love. Please send them on their way in a manner that honours God. <sup>7</sup> It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. <sup>8</sup> We ought therefore to show hospitality to such people so that we may work together for the truth.**

**<sup>9</sup> I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will not welcome us. <sup>10</sup> So when I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, spreading malicious nonsense about us. Not satisfied with that, he even refuses to welcome other believers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church. <sup>11</sup> Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God. <sup>12</sup> Demetrius is well spoken of by everyone—and even by the truth itself. We also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true. <sup>13</sup> I have much to write you, but I do not want to do so with pen and ink. <sup>14</sup> I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. <sup>15</sup> Peace to you. The friends here send their greetings. Greet the friends there by name. 3 John 1-15.**

John was able to extend praise to Gaius because he had heard how he was doing through traveling teachers. We talked about this a bit last week. It was very common in that day for Christian teachers, evangelists, and pastors to travel around from town to town. They would go from village to village – encouraging, leading, and ministering to the churches. They would be sent out for that task, often directly by one or more of the apostles. That’s how the message of the Christian faith and the expansion of the church was taking place in the first century.

Since it was a traveling ministry, it was common and even necessary for them to stay in the homes of believers. Not every town had an inn, and even if it did, no Christian minister would ever want to stay there because they had very bad reputations in those days as being glorified brothels. It was a part of the culture of the early Christian church, in the name of love and hospitality, to provide housing and food to traveling teachers and pastors. Then, during their stay, they would serve the church through their teaching. Before they left, the church would provide them with the resources they needed to travel to the next church. It was a good and wonderful thing.

However, it could break down. This is what John is having to deal with in this letter. Good and godly men and women being met with a lack of resources and support. In other words, they were sent by an apostle like John, but then some rogue leader there refused to let them teach because he didn’t want to be under anyone else’s authority.

John is forced to confront the importance of serving traveling teachers. Investing in the mission of the church so that it could expand and grow. **“Dear friend, you are being faithful to God when you care for the traveling teachers who pass through, even though they are strangers to you. They have told the church here of your loving friendship. Please continue providing for such teachers in a manner that pleases God. For they are traveling for the Lord, and they accept nothing from people who are not believers. So, we ourselves should support them so that we can be their partners as they teach the truth.” (III John 5-8, NLT)**

John is very specific in his teaching and his praise. Gaius and others in the church are serving these traveling teachers. That was the good, right and strategic thing to do even if they were strangers. Their generosity wasn’t tied to giving because they knew someone, or were in on something, or were a part of something. No, they gave out of duty and responsibility to the needs of the cause. It wasn’t about them; it was about the mission.

John makes two other things clear: If Christians don’t support Christian ministry, then who will? When Christians do support the mission, they are partnering with that mission. We’re playing a part in that ministry. It’s not just about giving an offering; it’s not just about giving online. You become a part of what that enterprise is doing.

That’s why we partner so closely with our Trust. I don’t know if you know how much amazing work our Trust does. They offer Transitional Housing for those who are homeless or who are living in unsafe or overcrowded situations. They offer a free budgeting and financial mentoring service. A weekly food bank is running from our church, every Friday. And finally, in close cooperation with our church; an Op Shop, an Op Shop café, Mainly Music & a Friendship group also run here during the week.

Well, that was what John had to say to Gaius about the importance of serving the needs of the church and its mission. But then John gets to the heart of what prompted the letter: **“I wrote to the church about this, but Diotrephes, who loves to be the leader, refuses to have anything to do with us. When I come, I will report some of the things he is doing and the evil accusations he is making against us. Not only does he refuse to welcome the traveling teachers, he also tells others not to help them. And when they do help, he puts them out of the church.” (III John 9-10, NLT)**

Here John tells Gaius that he has written to the church about this. He has tried sending travelling teachers to the church, but Diotrephes has stood in the way. Even worse, those folks who have tried to do the right thing have been put out of the church by Diotrephes. We don’t know all the details, but we are told here by John that Diotrephes liked to be the one in charge, the one controlling things, the one who is always first. So instead of welcoming traveling teachers, even ones sent by the apostle John, he rejects them.

He sets himself up as being in complete charge and complete control. Further, if anyone challenges that, he kicks them out of the church. I wish I could tell you that stories of leaders gone awry in matters of power and control are rare, but they’re not. You don’t answer the call to ministry because you simply want to lead others. You answer the call so that you can serve others. When that involves leadership, it’s about being a servant-leader, leading in a way that serves the church, not serves yourself. But here, with Diotrephes, you have a petty,

insecure, power and control-oriented person who was threatened by John and any other leader.

John is very clear about what is motivating this: He wants to be first. He is motivated by personal ambition. In the Greek, that phrase “loves to be the leader” is in the present tense, which means it literally reads that “he is always loving to be the leader,” “always loving to be first.” The result? Anything related to John and his leadership is rejected; letters, emissaries, and anything else! Diotrephes must be the boss; he must have things go his way. He won’t submit to, or acknowledge, anyone else. That wasn’t all, he was simultaneously engaging in a smear campaign, calling people up, visiting them, to plant seeds of doubt, mistrust, suspicion and outright accusations and slander against John. So, he wasn’t just trying to build himself up, but tear others down. Specifically, John.

John makes it clear that he knows what is going on, and when he comes, he will address it head-on. Too many leaders fail to confront things like this, situations like this, people like this, and even organizations themselves will turn a blind eye to this. So good for John! The way John phrases it is interesting. He will bring it out into the light, make it known to others, let people see it for what it is.

This tells us that Diotrephes was hiding his bad behaviour behind a veneer of spirituality. He had some people seeing him as the good guy, as the one protecting the church from people like John and the teachers he was sending. That it was only his voice, his teaching, his leadership that was good, sound, and godly. Leaders like this can create a terribly toxic culture. Attempting to brain wash those around them, and throwing out members of the church if they can’t be brainwashed.

Diotrephes himself was probably so self-deceived, so cut-off from Christ, that he probably wasn’t in touch with his own agenda either. It’s easy to be self-deceived. He gave in to a particular attitude, like spiritual pride, or greed, or control. He had kicked Christ out of that area of his life. So, in their self-deception, they really can think they are the spiritual ones. Diotrephes probably thought John really was the bad guy, but that’s because he had quenched the work of the Holy Spirit in his life. He had given in to rebellion against authority, he had given in to pride.

So, while he’s talking a spiritual line, that’s not what is motivating him at all. He just wanted to control things and to be in charge, which is why John reminds Gaius about how to read people like that. It’s a straightforward litmus test. **“Dear friend, don’t let this bad example influence you. Follow only what is good. Remember that those who do good prove that they are God’s children, and those who do evil prove that they do not know God.” (III John 11, NLT).**

John’s litmus test? Judge them by their fruit. If they do good, it’s a reflection that they really are one of God’s children. If they do evil, then it shows they don’t even know Him. The fruit you look for is the fruit of the Spirit. Is there love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness and humility? Unfortunately, Diotrephes was far from God. He was arrogant, prideful, egocentric, conniving, lying, deceitful, petty and slanderous. John had a different picture of leadership; one that came from spending three years with Jesus; with a man who said, “I did

not come to be served, but to serve." A man who, on the night before his death when John was with him, got up and took a bowl and towel and went from man to man, including John and washed their feet.

**<sup>14</sup> And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. John 1: 14.**

**<sup>9</sup> Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all. Mark 9:35.**

**<sup>42</sup> Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. <sup>43</sup> Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, <sup>44</sup> and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. <sup>45</sup> For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Mark 10: 42-45.**

John was following the leadership style and character that was given by Jesus. Then John ends by saying he has sent another traveling teacher their way, Demetrius, who is bearing the letter of John in hand. John reminds Gaius to continue to do the right thing by such men. Take them in, house them, feed them, let them in turn serve and feed you and then provide what they need as they go on to the next church.

So, we are left with a situation where John is trying to work with a congregation, a house church that is being led by a man who has rejected his pastoral authority. John is unable to visit and so sends letters and representatives. The problem of leadership by distance was common among early Christian leaders.

The most striking way John deals with this conflict is his willingness to speak personally with Diotrephes. While he cannot be there, he sends a letter. However, when the opportunity presents itself, he will come personally. Clearly, the situation is serious. Paul took the same risk when he went to Corinth. **<sup>2</sup> So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you. 2 Corinthians 2:1.**

The evidence in 2 Corinthians suggests that he was asked to leave the church against his will. Those in charge decided he was not welcome. Fortunately, through mediators such as Titus, the church repented and Paul returned, nevertheless such confrontations incur high risk. John in my opinion has done the right thing. He has continued to communicate with those in the church, he has counselled his courier's, and he will talk deeply with Gaius when he gets there. He knows God is with him and he wants this church to grow in both love and truth.