

## Love Letters: Character of Christ (III John)

++Charlie Brown's friend, Linus, told his big sister, Lucy, that he wanted to be a doctor when he grew up.

Lucy couldn't believe her ears. "You, a doctor!? That's a laugh! You could never be a doctor! You know why? Because you don't love mankind!" Immediately, young Linus countered, "I do too love mankind! It's people I can't stand!"

++While that may be from a comic strip, it may hit close to home for many of us.

++This third letter from John is about just that - people: people of integrity, people with no integrity, people who are good, people who are misled, people who others can count on, and people who can be counted on to only get their own way.

++There are three people that John mentions in this letter, and I believe they give a glimpse into some examples for life in Christ and the church.

++As we listen, identify for yourselves which of these three men you would want to be "identified" as: A Gaius, A Diotrephes, A Demetrius?

++I want to look at each section of the letter and break down the character of each of these men that John includes in his letter.

### ++A person selflessness (Gaius)

++1 This letter is from John, the elder. I am writing to Gaius, my dear friend, whom I love in the truth. 2 Dear friend, I hope all is well with you and that you are as healthy in body as you are strong in spirit. 3 Some of the traveling teachers recently returned and made me very happy by telling me about your faithfulness and that you are living according to the truth. 4 I could have no greater joy than to hear that my children are following the truth. 5 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. 6 They have told the church here of your loving friendship. Please continue providing for such teachers in a manner that pleases God. 7 For they are traveling for the Lord, and they accept nothing from people who are not believers. 8 So we ourselves should support them so that we can be their partners as they teach the truth. ++ Why is this letter important? Because the spirit can take a letter written from one man to another and make it inspired to teach us something about the

character of God. If that doesn't explain the creativity of our God, I don't know what does.

++This "Gaius" to whom the letter is addressed is someone that is a man of selflessness and service.

++Listen to the way that John describes him:

-my dear friend (v. 1) *agapetos* (4x)

-strong in spirit (v. 2)

-faithful (v. 3)

-living in truth (v. 4)

-caring (v. 5)

-loving friend(v. 6)

++Gaius is a man who puts others first

++In Jewish, culture taking in strangers is part of cultural law.

++Exodus 22:21 states: "You must not mistreat or oppress foreigners in any way. Remember, you yourselves were once foreigners in the land of Egypt."

++This law was put in place to protect those "outsiders" living among the Tribes of Israel. They lacked protection and safety, and were easy targets of persecution, robbery, etc.

++Here, John is commending Gaius for his hospitality to those who are "traveling for the Lord"

++Remember that John warned against it in his previous letter--for those who were antichrists.

++His faithfulness to God is on display when his heart lives the law of the Spirit, not just his actions.

++This same understanding continues right into the New Testament: those traveling among churches and teaching are doing so with peril and danger lurking around every corner. The Christians (namely Gaius) are commended for following the heart of the law, not the law itself. Jesus spoke of true believers follow the heart of the law, not only the actions of the law.

++Gaius is a man selflessness, taking the needs of others and meeting them.

++The original seal of the colony of Georgia (1733) depicted a mulberry leaf, a silk worm and a cocoon. The seal bore the Latin phrase *Non sibi sed allis*, "not for us but for others."

++This idea that all we do is done in the service of others is paramount in the life of a Christian--with Christ being the exemplar.

### ++A person of selfishness (Diotrephes)

++9 I wrote to the church about this, but Diotrephes, who loves to be the leader, refuses to have anything to do with us. 10 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.

11 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.

++When my family was reading through the Daily Devs this week, I asked them to describe the two men mentioned at the end of the letter to which Sophie said, "Diotrephes is toxic," and Toby quickly chimed in with "...and Demetrius is awesome."

++We'll meet Demetrius next, but they are right.

++Diotrephes *is* toxic.

++Modern use of the word toxic among younger generation-someone who is negative, mean-spirited, loves to play down someone else's abilities and achievements

++That's what we have here with Diotrephes - a toxic member of the church who wants to be in charge, who doesn't want anyone listening to anything that anyone else has to say.

++This selfishness is toxic within the community of the 1st Century church, and modern-Diotrephes is toxic within the community of the 21st Century church.

++He "loves to be the leader" - uh, oh.

++Does this sound at all like Christ? -

++25 But Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. 26 But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. 28 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:25-28)

++Consider Paul's direction to the Philippians regarding selfishness:

++3 Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves.

4 Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. 5 You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. (Phil. 2:3-5)

++The character/attitude of Diotrephes has no place in the kingdom, the church, or in the life of a believer

++Rick Warren says: "Babies by nature are completely selfish. They think only of themselves and their own needs. They are incapable of giving; they can only receive. That is immature thinking.

Unfortunately, many people never grow beyond that kind of thinking."

++But let's end this on a high note: Demetrius

++A person of selfsameness (Demetrius)

++12 Everyone speaks highly of Demetrius, as does the truth itself. We ourselves can say the same for him, and you know we speak the truth.

++Selfsameness means "the quality of being identical"

++Identical comes from the word "identity"

++When our *identity* in Christ is fully realized, our thoughts, actions, and lives will be *identical* to His.

++That's the process of sanctification

++I told our small group on Wednesday night that this letter from John to Gaius was really an HR letter- it was a letter of recommendation for Demetrius.

++Demetrius was a man that emulated truth-his life proved it out, John attested to it and everyone who knew him could say the same.

++His way of life was "truth"

++Truth flows from and out of us--it speaks for us!

++Think back to Phil. 2:5 "you must have the same attitude that Christ had"

++When we live like Demetrius, we don't have to tell others--others see it. More importantly, Demetrius lived like Jesus in this world - or better, he let Jesus live through him so clearly that it was evident to all.

++Telescopes-see through to see the finer details.

You don't see the telescope, you see the image that it is magnifying.