

3 John 1:11-15

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/3john/3john-1/3-john-111-15/>

John finishes his letter by reminding the church to imitate good, not evil, for doing good is of God, but doing evil is disobedience to God. John commends a man name Demetrius to the church and concludes that he hopes to see them soon in person to speak about other matters.

After pointing out the bad deeds done by Diotrephes, John exhorts the church: *do not imitate what is evil, but what is good*. John had stated earlier that it was good to receive the brethren who were ministering the gospel for the name of Christ in a manner worthy of God (verses 5-8). That was *good*. But Diotrephes was not only refusing to do this himself, he was also putting people *out of the church* who received them, which is *evil*. John states that *the one who does good is of God; the one who does evil has not seen God*. Those who receive the brethren who are ministering for the name of Jesus are doing good and are of God. But Diotrephes is doing *evil*, so he *has not seen God*. The phrase *has not seen God* does not infer that those who do good will have a vision where they can see God with their physical eyes, and those who do *evil* will miss out on such a vision. The word translated *seen* is sometimes translated “take heed.” That is likely the sense here, that anyone who does evil is not heeding God, because God does not do evil, nor does He direct or tempt anyone to do evil (James 1:13).

John now introduces a new character, *Demetrius*. John asserts that *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*. John does not explain who *Demetrius* is, but by inference it would seem that *Demetrius* would have been someone unknown to the church to whom John is writing, which necessitated this character reference from John. John testifies that *Demetrius* is respected by all who know him. And John states that *we add our testimony*. John again uses plural, which infers that this comes from a group, and John is emphasizing that he is not doing what he is criticizing Diotrephes for doing, namely elevating himself above other authorities and ordering people around.

John is part of an authority structure; he is speaking on its behalf. It is clear that John really learned the lesson Jesus taught, that if you want to be first, you become the servant of all (Mark 9:35). John has come a long way from the time when he prompted his mother to ask Jesus to make his brother and him first above the others (Matthew 19:20-21). Jesus taught that if you see faults in others, it means you have the fault yourself (Matthew 7:3-4). It seems likely that this error of Diotrephes to desire to be first of all was particularly apparent to John, since he had the same trait inherent in his nature. It is clear here, however, that John had learned to deal with his own negative tendency. He did not use his authority as an apostle, but rather appealed to the truth. He invited rather than commanded. And he appeals to a plurality of authority.

Demetrius could have been one of the brethren ministering for the name of Jesus that John admonished the church to support in a manner “worthy of God” (verse 6). He could also have been the messenger who brought the letter. John states that Demetrius’ character can be verified not only by a *good testimony from everyone* as well as from John’s own testimony. It is possible

that this Demetrius is the same person as in Acts 19:24, who created a massive amount of trouble for Paul. If so, it marks an amazing turnaround.

Demetrius' character is also validated by *the truth itself*. John here is likely appealing to objective facts; "you can check out the data for yourself, and you will find that Demetrius' character is excellent." In this manner, the word translated "truth" is used similarly to its meaning in Luke 4:25, when Jesus says:

"But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land;"
(Luke 4:25)

Here in Luke 4, Jesus is simply recounting some historical facts. It seems likely John is using the word *truth* the same way: "You can listen to us or check out the facts for yourself." This is consistent with John going out of his way to behave in a manner directly opposite of Diotrephes. John appeals to the church to make a good decision based on truth and love, rather than asserting his authority in order to command them.

This is all completely consistent with the instructions to elders given by John's fellow apostle Peter, who was also one of the twelve:

"Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory."
(1 Peter 5:1-4)

In this passage Peter makes it clear that elders are to share authority in a plurality, rather than having one person that is the first among them, as Diotrephes desired to be (verse 9). Peter further makes it clear that the goal of the elder is to shepherd Jesus' flock among them, the local church, without seeking personal gain. They are to seek only the approval of Jesus, the Chief Shepherd, who will judge His under-shepherds, the elders.

The Greek word translated "elder" is "presbýteros." This word use is common in the gospels to describe leadership within the Jewish culture. Those who are to head the church as authorities are also called by the Greek word "episkope," which is translated "bishop, visitation, office, position, leadership, and overseership." It seems clear that both words are used to describe church leaders, and that church leaders are to shepherd the flock together, and that they will be accountable to Jesus for how well they shepherd. A chief part of shepherding is protection. In this letter, John is exercising his responsibility as an elder to protect the flock, the local church, from bad leadership. There is no doubt that this letter would have created conflict. But John does not place his own comfort above the welfare of the sheep, the local believers. He exposes himself to conflict and criticism in order to advance the genuine welfare of those under his care. The word "pastor" comes from the Latin translation of "shepherd."

John planned to visit this body in person in a short time. He apparently cuts his letter short, seemingly to urgently confront the bad leadership of Diotrephes. This shows how urgently people should act in order to counter bad leadership. John states *I had many things to write to you, but I am not willing to write them to you with pen and ink*. The fact that John *is not willing to write* the things he has to say *in pen and ink* could also mean that he does not think he can adequately convey what he has to say through the means of a letter. It is difficult to express tone and intent through the written word. So, John states *but I hope to see you shortly, and we will speak face to face*. Further instruction is needed. But it is apparently not so urgent that it must be addressed immediately. John intends to continue the conversation person to person.

John now closes the letter, saying:

Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.

The saying *Peace be to you* could be a typical greeting using the Hebrew word “Shalom.” John closes this letter, where he initiates a conflict to stand for the truth, by wishing for peace. Peace is the desired state, where all is in harmony, and working according to its design. Leaders who lead for their own gain, who do not follow the truth must be dealt with and stopped, or true peace is not possible. True peace is when people choose voluntarily to serve a common mission. True peace, “shalom,” is not a possible companion of tyranny.

John says *the friends greet you* and asks the letter’s recipients to *greet the friends by name*. The first part of this saying likely means that the church’s friends who were with John send their greetings. It could be that John’s use of “we” and “us” means that he is expressing a sentiment shared among this group of friends. The second part probably refers to John’s friends in Gaius’ church. John seems to desire to express particular warmth to them by asking that each of the *friends* be greeted *by name*.

With this the letter ends. It seems the Holy Spirit chose to include this letter in the New Testament to make particular emphasis of the importance of servant leadership in the church, and to make it especially clear to self-serving leaders that they will pay a price before Him for self-serving leadership.

Biblical Text

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 add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true.

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. Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.