

3 John / “Fruit Follows Faith”

Jonny Kiedrowski | 3 John

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If you were to think back to the dawn of the usable internet, it would probably be around 1998. Because that's when Google started. From its most early days Google had a motto. Did you know that?

It started off their code of conduct and policy documents. It was an expectation they had of staff. It was written on the walls. It was the wifi passwords for the busses they have on the campus. It was just three words but in those early internet days they were a guiding light in a sometimes dangerous and new Wild West. And this phrase, this motto, was considered so novel it appeared in every interview with the founders.

Now maybe your company has a good culture, but like normal people don't know your company motto. But regular people new this one. At least they did at the time. Do you remember what it was?

“Don't be evil”

This was their motto for 20 year and then, in 2018, it wasn't. It was gone. Is google evil now? I don't know. Maybe. But the once scrappy startup had some pretty good words they lived by, and now... they don't. They've forgotten them.

Christians have words to live by too That's why we open God's word together each week. We expect God's word to speak to us in ways we need. And 3 John is going to give us words to live by today with some examples to consider. And it's funny, but google's former motto was really close to something we'll hear today. Whereas Google used to say “Don't be evil”, John says:

3 John v. 11

11 Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God.

Today we're looking at the shortest book in the bible. In the original greek it's only 219 words! My mom sometimes writes text messages longer than that! But don't let the length of a document determine how you value it. Even in the small books, God's word speaks truth we need to hear. We don't want to move on from these words the way Google moved on from theirs.

We encounter warning labels all the time. Tiny bits of truth that say: Do this at your own risk, or this product was made in a facility with peanuts, or these Christmas lights contains chemicals known to the state of California to cause cancer and birth defects or other reproductive harm. These labels become white noise to us. Unless, of course. you're allergic to shellfish and it will kill you. Then you look at every warning label closely.

Church, be warned. sin will kill you. Making room for it will kill you John says: whoever does evil has not seen God. Today's passage is short, but this warning label has eternal implications.

Today we're going to see that the truth of the Gospel produces good fruit that blesses others and exposes the state of our hearts before God.

1. We are Known for the Actions our Faith Produces (1-4)
2. Faith Produces Fruit, Both Good and Bad (5-10)
3. Our Temporal Imitations have Eternal Implications (11-15)

So turn with me if you're not already there to 3 John.

3 John v. 1-4

1 The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.

2 Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul. 3 For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. 4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

We're four verses into this and we already know so much. In just the first two verses we see that Gaius is double beloved. We know that, to John, Gaius is a beloved friend. And we know some of the reasons why. Gaius is an encouragement to John. John rejoices greatly when he hears about Gaius. He's like a proud Dad.

In verse 4 he says *"I have no greater Joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth."*

And while John and Gaius are friends, it's easy to assume that in the context of this letter, John's good opinion is not just his own. He's rejoicing greatly because others see this faith in action. This faith that Gaius demonstrates.

In v. 3 he says *"the brothers came and testified to your truth as indeed you are walking in the truth."*

And this is the first point that we see today.

1. We are Known for the Actions our Faith Produces (1-4)

2000 years removed, We know almost nothing about the Gaius of 3 John, but I think we know some of the most important things about him. We know he was walking in the truth This is how John speaks of being a follower of Christ. Walking. Walking in truth. Walking in the light.

1 John 1:7

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another (God and us), and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

2 John V. 4 says

I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father

We know that Gaius, he was walking in the truth. We know that Gaius' faith made an impact and left a lasting impression on those that encountered him. A little later in the text we see that he wanted those who didn't know the gospel to hear it and respond to it in faith. And he supported, in a sacrificial way, the workers who were being sent out. These are the things we do know. So even now, we rejoice greatly in the work that the Lord did in Gaius' heart, because all of us in this room today who by faith believe in the Gospel of Jesus, we believe because of God's work through a long list of Gaius'.

And this is what Gaius is known for. A faith that worked itself out in front of others.

It wasn't just a private thing or merely an internal affirmation of truth. His faith in the gospel showed up.

Where does what you believe about God show up? Does it show up in your language or how you spend your time and your money. Does it show up in how you treat others? The answer to all of these questions is yes. Yes whether you think it shows up there or not. What you believe about God will show up in all of these places. And you will be known by others in this way.

But do you believe right things about God? Is your faith for eternity found in Christ, but your faith for today found in you, in your strength, in your will? Your ability to get things done? We are known for the actions our faith produces, either for the glory of God or for the glory of ourselves.

What is the object of our faith? That's the important question.
Is our faith in God, or in ourselves? And this brings us to our next point.

Faith Produces Fruit, Both Good and Bad (5-10)

Starting at v. 5

We begin again with an affirmation of a beloved friend. I'm sensing a pattern.

5 Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, 6 who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. 7 For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. 8 Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.

9 I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. 10 So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.

So now we've encountered, maybe, why John wrote this letter. There's a conflict. A conflict in a church. We now have two characters on two very different paths. A good example, and a poor one.

In preparing for this sermon, I wanted to know what some other resources thought about Gaius and Diotrephes. I like the videos produced by the bible project. It's a youtube channel. But I was watching a video they made about 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John - and knowing I was preaching on this text I was kind of hoping for a little wisdom nugget. And finally the video gets to 3rd John and all they say is:

"Don't be Diotrephes" and then they move on.

I'm going to try to do a little better here. Because we don't just have a letter about a bad guy causing a ruckus. We have what Diotrephes is doing in contrast to what Gaius is doing. And we also, in a little aside from John, get an important insight into why Diotrephes is doing what he is doing.

In v. 9 John says *"Diotrephes, who like to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority"*.

So there's a pride issue here and problem with authority. Now I know Montanans don't struggle with pride or have a problem with authority so this may not apply to us today. That's joke based on 7 years of observation as an outsider.

We all suffer from pride and the havoc it produces in the blind spots of our hearts.

Sinful pride is having more faith in yourself than in God. It is believing that you can accomplish more by following your ways than you could if you followed God's ways. It is believing that you know better than God. So let's see what we can see in this contrast that John sets up.

Like I said, faith produces fruit, both good and bad. It depends on what the object of your faith is.

In v. 5-8 We see Gaius - **bearing fruits of life**

and in v. 9-10 We see Diotrephes **bearing fruits of death**

In v. 5 we see Gaius humbly, faithfully, as John puts it, walking in the truth. He has faith in Christ and in the transformative power of the Gospel. I say humbly because Gaius is continuing to submit himself to doing good even though there are two uncomfortable realities in his world right now: complete strangers are showing up at his door in need, and Diotrephes is kind of a punk. Gaius' life would probably feel a little easier if he didn't have either of these things to deal with.

Following Jesus is not always the most comfortable option, but experiencing hardship and difficulty for Christ's sake isn't just an honor and an act of worship - it's actually joy producing

In the book of **James 1:2** it says

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

and Jesus in **Matthew 5:11-12** says

11 "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

As much as we may not want to admit it, I think we often confuse God's blessing with material comfort or the absence of conflict. But God doesn't promise us comfort outside of himself.

Psalm 73:26

*My flesh and my heart may fail,
But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*

The scripture are bursting with this kind of language, That God himself is our portion. He is our supply. When other things fail, and they will, he will not.

God doesn't promise peace outside of himself either
Ephesians 2:14 says that *Jesus himself is our peace*

This is how John knows that Gaius is walking in the truth - Because he has faith in God even when it is uncomfortable and seeing this, others are encouraged by it.

Remember back in verse 3, the brothers reported back to John, they testified that Gaius is faithful. Walking in the truth. And now in **v. 5-7**

5 Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, 6 who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. 7 For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. 8 Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.

We started with Gaius double beloved and now he's triple beloved has double the good testimony from others. People are being encouraged in their faith because of Gaius and all Gaius is doing is following the example that Christ gave for how the Gospel will spread in this early stage of the church. He's being faithful.

In Luke 10:1-9

10 After this the Lord (Jesus) appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. 2 And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. 3 Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. 4 Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. 5 Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' 6 And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. 7 And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house. 8 Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. 9 Heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'

Some are sent and some send.

Gaius is one of these son's of peace that Jesus is talking about. Supporting the spread of the Gospel to the gentiles, to unbelievers, at a cost to himself. Gaius is sending them on their journey in a manner worthy of God because he's following the teaching of Jesus.

Sometimes we can wonder "What is God's will for my life?" We make this complicated, don't we? I like to imagine that things weren't so complicated for Gaius. He read the scriptures and tried to be faithful and in this instance he did what they said and his faith bore good fruit. Because of that he was called a "fellow worker for the truth".

As a church, at Sovereign Hope, we want to grow corporately in our support of global missions. We take the great commission of Jesus in Matthew 28:19 seriously, where he says:

19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

We, also, want to be counted as fellow workers for the truth.

If you were at our business meeting a couple weeks ago, you know this already, but not only are we giving more from our general budget to missions than we ever have in the 7 years since I've been here, but we've outlined a goal to increase our giving to gospel work around the world by 1% of our budget every year.

Putting what we believe about God into action.

It's because of Gaius, and people like him, and churches with people like him, bearing good fruits of faith, that the Gospel spreads to the ends of the earth as global workers bear good fruits sharing its good news.

The news that Christ alone has done everything required to save sinners and restore us to God. That the only reason we can come near to God is because Christ humbled himself and left his throne of glory and came near to us. The message, the good news of Jesus, that he took all the punishment that we deserved for our sin, and yet Christ has lavished on us everything that he deserved as a reward for his sinless life and perfect obedience. And now, in Christ, we can stand holy and blameless before God, adopted as if we were firstborn sons with an eternal inheritance. All of it given as a gift through faith.

This what compels Gaius to be faithful. This is what compels us to be faithful. The message that God was faithful when we were not.

And believing this, Gaius is bearing fruits of life because of his faith in Christ. And the gospel goes forward

But In verses 9-10 we see Diotrephes and fruits of unbelief and death

V. 9-10

9 I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. 10 So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.

In this section, I don't feel the need to pick apart everything that Diotrephes is doing and look at it with the same thoroughness that we looked at the example of Gaius. Diotrephes was a bad dude. The bible project is right: Don't be like Diotrephes.

What makes this even more uncomfortable is that, this isn't just some guy making a scene. He's, most likely, a part of this church and he might even think that he has right motives for what he is doing. But we know he is wrong because he is trying to stand in the way of the spread of the Gospel.

We don't know exactly why he's doing this.

In V.7 John write that the people coming to Gaius for support are not wanting to be a burden to the Gentiles that they are coming to preach to. Is Diotrephes upset that the Gospel is being preached to gentiles, is he upset that people who are different from him are being saved? Is it that he thinks this is a waste of time and resources, like the church has more important things to do? Is he upset because this is his area of influence and ministry and he doesn't like that someone else is sending people to help?

We don't know. But we know that Diotrephes' prideful need to be right has led him to sin spectacularly. We should heed this warning: Diotrephes was inside the church and this is how he ended up.

Later today we'll be celebrating the Lord's supper and is right and good to examine ourselves before taking part in it. Today, in a unique way, the scriptures have brought to our attention the sin of pride. Pride not only kept Diotrephes from being effective in ministry - His pride hindered others from being effective. He sinned against God and he sinned against others.

Has your need to be right led you to sin in your actions? Has a sense of self-importance led you to sin in inaction? When it comes to clear commands of God have you said in your heart, "I don't need to do that, I have other, more important things to do."

Have you, like Diotrephes, sinned against someone at church that you call a brother or a sister in Christ? Before you take part in communion today, it would be right for you to make efforts to be reconciled to them. Repent and believe. Believe that as we confess our sins, that God is faithful and just to forgive them. And in doing so, you will walk in the truth.

I said earlier that in Gaius we had a good example and in Diotrephes a poor one. I want to quickly contrast Gaius' Fruits of life with Diotrephes' fruit of death

Fruits of Life (5-8)

- 1) Gaius has faith in Christ, He is walking in the truth
- 2) Others are Encouraged by the fruit of Gaius' faith
- 3) Because of Gaius, the Gospel is enabled to be spread
- 4) Gospel workers are supported

And Gaius in this letter is affirmed for what he does with truth he believes

Fruits of Death (9-10)

- 1) Diotrephes has faith in himself - This shows that he has been deceived
- 2) John (and Gaius and the Church) are discouraged by Diotrephes pride and wicked nonsense
- 3) Because of Diotrephes the spread of the Gospel is hindered
- 4) Gospel workers are maligned and unwelcome

Diotrephes is rebuked for what he does with lies he believes

These two figures are presented for us to consider today. In Christ we will be more like Gaius, and in our flesh we will be more like Diotrephes. This is our warning label.

As we approach the end of this letter, John continues his work in contrasts

Look at **verses 11-15**

11 Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God. 12 Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself. We also add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true.

13 I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink. 14 I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. 15 Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends, each by name.

At the end of the letter, the now quadruple-y beloved Gaius is given a command.
"Do not imitate evil but imitate good."

And that's because

Our Temporal Imitations have Eternal Implications (11-15)

Let me ask you a question: At any point in your Christian walk have ever operated as though this life that we are living right now, in this time on earth, is like a waiting room for heaven?

You accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you prayed a prayer, maybe you even got baptized but functionally it made little difference?

You come to church on Sunday, but Monday through Saturday belonged to you.

Prayers were either panicked pleas for relief or a continual stream of asking for forgiveness for sins and temptations you never planned on fighting against.

Worship was good if the music was cool.

Preaching was good if you stayed awake.

The service was good if you were home in time for the game.

Events were good if your friends were there.

And your Bible was good if it stayed closed because your life is so busy that you have no time to consider what it might have to say.

Have you ever operated this way?

I know I did. After 14 years of full time ministry and meeting with all sorts of people, I don't think that my experience is that unique. I was in and around church. I knew the right answers, I did the right things when the right people were looking, but in my heart, I was pursuing my goals, my comfort, my pleasure, and the glory of my name through sinful pride, sensuality and deceitfulness.

I was in the church, but I was not saved.

We read today that

Whoever does evil has not seen God.

I was an evil doer.

It's sounds so dramatic, right? But it's the truth.

I didn't really care about responding to the Gospel with good works. My coming to Jesus effectively turned into a license to sin continually without the fear future eternal consequences.

But what we do now matters. This life is not a waiting room.

But we need hearts changed by God, we need the help of the church, and the courage that Christ's example provides to walk in faith.

Our big idea for today was that

The truth of the Gospel produces good fruit that blesses others and exposes the state of our hearts before God.

Those who will see God imitate good. This is why as a church we promote and talk about and resource discipleship and why we want to help one another grow in faith and follow Christ in all of life.

Proverbs 27:17

17 Iron sharpens iron,
and one man sharpens another.

I want to encourage you today, if there is someone in this room that you think is someone you'd like to imitate. You see the work of God in their life and you know you need help, what's stopping you from picking their brain? From asking them "How do you do this?"

Not, "how do you do all these things?" Doing many things can just be another trap where pride shows up as if God owes you for your good works. Instead what you should want to know from a Christian who's a little bit further along than you is "what do you believe about God that turned you into what you are today?"

Because if you walk out of here today and all you have heard is : Do the things that someone like Gaius did, then I have failed.

We can imitate what Gaius did. We can imitate what John did. The Apostle Paul calls us in 1 Corinthians 11:1 to imitate him as he imitates Christ. We can do a lot of things and still miss the point because we don't just want to do what Gaius did, we want to believe what Gaius believed
That's how we want to imitate.

Don't imitate works. Imitate faith that works. Don't just read your Bible more, believe that your Bible contains the very word of God and it is there for you so that you might hear from him. Don't just serve more, instead see how Christ served you in the gospel and let the overflow be a response that blesses others.

We want the faith that Gaius had because fruit follows faith.

The fruit follows faith.

I honestly don't know if I came up with that or heard it someplace else, but it's true.

Fruit follows faith. Not the other way around.

Gaius believed that Christ was worth it. Imitate him in that way, because he is. Being a follower of Jesus is worth hardship and loss of comfort and awkward conversations. Imitate him. Following Jesus awkwardly and uncomfortably is better than comfortably coasting through life, hoping there's a heaven at the end. We don't often coast towards good, do we?

John finishes his letter with an introduction to Demetrius, who is probably the stranger who has delivered this letter to Gaius.

What do we know about Demetrius?

Well, he's a lot like Gaius.

V. 12

12 Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself. We also add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true.

Gaius and Demetrius seem to me to be good examples of what Jesus talks about in Matthew 5:16

In **Matthew 5:16**, Jesus says

Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

May we be counted with them - lights shining in the darkness, joined in mission so that others might know the hope of Jesus in the Gospel, operating each day in a grateful response to the grace we've received in Christ. And may our lives be imitable and encouraging to others in the faith not just because of what we do, but because of what we believe.