

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, November 13, 2024 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study



THAT YOU MAY KNOW – A STUDY OF 1, 2 & 3 JOHN *The Prosperous Soul* *3 John 1-14*

“¹ The Elder, To the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth: ² Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers. ³ For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. ⁴ I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. ⁵ Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, ⁶ who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well, ⁷ because they went forth for His name’s sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles. ⁸ We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth. ⁹ I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. ¹⁰ Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church. ¹¹ Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God. ¹² Demetrius has a good testimony from all, and from the truth itself. And we also bear witness, and you know that our testimony is true. ¹³ I had many things to write, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and ink; ¹⁴ but I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak face to face. Peace to you. Our friends greet you. Greet the friends by name” – 3 John (NKJV)

BACKGROUND AND SETTING FOR 3 JOHN:

(1) **Title = 3rd John** - The epistle’s title is “3 John.” It is the third in a series of 3 epistles that bear the Apostle John’s name. Third John and 2 John present the closest approximation in the New Testament to the conventional letter form of the contemporary

Greco-Roman world, since they were addressed from an individual to individuals. Both 2 and 3 John are the shortest epistles in the NT, each containing less than 300 Greek words, so as to fit on a single papyrus sheet (cf. v. 13).

- (2) **Author = The Apostle John** - The author is the Apostle John. He describes himself in v. 1 as "*The Elder*" which conveys the advanced age of the apostle, his authority and his eyewitness status especially during the foundational period of Christianity when John was involved with Jesus' ministry (cf. 2 John 1). Notice that again, like the book of 2 John, the book of 3 John does not directly name its author. The tradition from the earliest days of the church has been that the apostle John is the author. There have been occasional doubts raised by those who thought it possible that this was written by another disciple of the Lord named John, but all the evidence points to the author as John the beloved disciple who also wrote the Gospel of John.
- (3) **Date = A.D. 90-95** – The precise date of the epistle cannot be determined. Since the structure, style, and vocabulary closely approximate 2 John (v. 1 [cf. 2 John 1]; v. 4 [cf. 2 John 4]; v. 13 [cf. 2 John 12]; v. 14 [cf. 2 John 12]), most likely John composed the letter at the same time or soon after 1 & 2 John, ca. A.D. 90–95. As with 1 and 2 John, the apostle probably composed the letter during his ministry at Ephesus in the latter part of his life.
- (4) **Place of Writing = Ephesus** – John was most likely the Bishop of Ephesus (the pastor) at the time of the writing of this 3rd letter... the place from which he wrote 1, 2 and 3 John. Ephesus was a strategic city in John's day and boasted a very strong and tactical church for the spreading of the gospel. The church was planted by Paul in his first missionary journey across Asia Minor. Ephesus was said to be the gateway to the ancient world. All commercial trade and travel passed through this city. For this reason many cultures, and ideologies (both religious, pagan and secular) could be found in this area. The church at Ephesus and the surrounding area became very susceptible to false religions and false teachers.
- (5) **Recipient(s) = Gaius** - Third John is perhaps the most personal of John's 3 epistles. While 1 John appears to be a general letter (perhaps even a circular letter) addressed to congregations scattered throughout Asia Minor, and 2 John was sent to a lady and her family (2 John 1), *in 3 John the apostle clearly names the sole recipient as "the beloved Gaius"* (v. 1). This makes the epistle one of a few letters in the NT addressed strictly to an individual (cf. Philemon). The name "Gaius" was very common in the first century (e.g., Acts 19:29; 20:4; Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 1:14), but nothing is known of this individual beyond John's salutation, from which it is inferred that he was a member of one of the churches under John's spiritual oversight. John is writing with his usual strong emphasis on truth to this much-loved brother in Christ, Gaius, a layman of some wealth and distinction in a city near Ephesus. He highly commends Gaius' care and hospitality to his messengers whose mission was to take the Gospel from place to place, whether they were known to him or were strangers. John exhorts him to continue to do good and not to imitate evil, as in the example of

- (6) **Purpose = Christian hospitality** - As with 2 John, 3 John focuses on the basic issue of hospitality but from a different perspective. While 2 John warns against showing hospitality to false teachers (2 John 7–11), 3 John condemns the lack of hospitality shown to faithful ministers of the Word (vv. 9, 10). Reports came back to the apostle that itinerant teachers known and approved by him (vv. 5–8) had traveled to a certain congregation where they were refused hospitality (e.g., lodging and provision) by an individual named Diotrephes who domineered the assembly (v. 10). Diotrephes went even further, for he also verbally slandered the Apostle John with malicious accusations and excluded anyone from the assembly who dared challenge him (v. 10). In contrast, Gaius, a beloved friend of the apostle and faithful adherent to the truth (vv. 1–4), extended the correct standard of Christian hospitality to itinerant ministers. John wrote to commend the type of hospitality exhibited by Gaius to worthy representatives of the gospel (vv. 6–8) and to condemn the high-handed actions of Diotrephes (v. 10). The apostle promised to correct the situation personally and sent this letter through an individual named Demetrius, whom he commended for his good testimony among the brethren (vv. 10–12). **So the historical and theological theme and purpose of 3 John is the commendation of the proper standards of Christian hospitality and the condemnation for failure to follow those standards.**
- (7) **Interpretive Challenge = The person of Diotrephes** - Some think that Diotrephes may either have been a heretical teacher or at least favored the false teachers who were condemned by 2 John. However, the epistle gives no clear evidence to warrant such a conclusion, especially since one might expect that John would have mentioned Diotrephes' heretical views. The epistle indicates that his problems centered around arrogance and disobedience, which is a problem for the orthodox as well as the heretic.
- (8) **Practical Application = 3 practical applications from 3 John**

3 Practical Applications from 3 John :

1. **The importance of walking in the truth of the Gospel** - Hospitality, support and encouragement for our fellow Christians are some of the main precepts of the teachings of Jesus, and Gaius was obviously an outstanding example of this ministry.
2. **The importance of showing hospitality to those who are servants of the gospel (ministers)** - We should also show hospitality to those who minister the Word, welcoming them into our churches and homes. Those who are servants of the gospel deserve our support and encouragement.
3. **The importance of being discerning of those whose words and actions line up with the Gospel** - We also need to be careful always to follow only the example of those whose words and actions are in line with the Gospel, and to be discerning enough to be aware of those such as Diotrephes whose behavior is far from being like that which Jesus taught.

An Outline of 3 John:

Part 1 - The Commendation Regarding Christian Hospitality (1–8)

Part 2 - The Condemnation Regarding Violating Christian Hospitality (9–11)

Part 3 - The Conclusion Regarding Christian Hospitality (12–14)

This is a true story from missionaries in Macau, China 1987. These missionaries were told through their translation, talking with two courageous young Chinese women who slipped across the border into China each week from Hong Kong. From there they mailed dozens of Bible correspondence courses each week. If they had been caught, they would have been imprisoned. The missionaries, through their translators, asked these young women if they had ever heard of the “health and wealth” or “prosperity” teaching. They had not. The Chinese women asked what that was. When explained to them that some in America were teaching that it is God’s will for all of His children to be healthy and wealthy, these young women shook their heads and laughed softly. They said, **“I don’t think that Christians in China would fall for that!”**

But many American Christians and now many in other countries have fallen for this unbiblical teaching. One of the main texts used to support it is found right here in our text in... 3 John 2, **“² Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.”** What is this passage saying and promoting? Is it teaching something akin to the “Healthy, Wealth, and Prosperity Gospel” of our day? And what is that?

THE HEALTH, WEALTH AND PROSPERITY GOSPEL

A recent survey finds an increasing number of churchgoers in the United States subscribe to beliefs associated with the prosperity gospel. **“In the last five years, far more churchgoers are reflecting prosperity gospel teachings,”** says Scott McConnell, executive director of Lifeway Research, **“including the heretical belief that material blessings are earned from God.”** The problem, as McConnell points out, is not with the idea that God provides material blessings (all good things provided to God’s children come from him [Rom. 8:32]) but with the false teaching that we do anything to earn such favor. Here are nine things you should know about the prosperity gospel.

9 Things You Should Know About the Prosperity Gospel:

(1) The prosperity gospel goes by many names and brands –

Other names for this movement:

- 1. Prosperity gospel** - The prosperity gospel is an umbrella term
- 2. Health and wealth gospel** – Some times referred to as the “health and wealth gospel”
- 3. Name it claim it** - Also known as the “name it and claim it” theology.
- 4. Word of faith** - Many people will recognize its most popular brand, the “Word of Faith” movement.

It's a contemporary Christian movement that has garnered both a massive following and considerable controversy. This doctrine teaches that God wills the financial prosperity and physical well-being of his people and that faith, positive speech, and donations to select Christian ministries can increase one's material wealth and health. As **Stephen Hunt** explains, "The doctrine of the assurance of divine physical health and prosperity through faith is at the forefront of this expression of Christian faith." It means that "health and wealth" are the automatic divine right of all Bible-believing Christians and may be procreated by faith as part of the package of salvation, since the atonement of Christ includes not just the removal of sin, but also the removal of sickness and poverty.

- (2) **The prosperity gospel has its roots in the occult movement known as New Thought** - The New Thought movement is a spiritual philosophy that originated in the United States in the late 19th century. While not explicitly Christian, it was influenced by Christian ideas, as well as by Eastern philosophies, metaphysical traditions, and the emerging fields of psychology and self-help. **The movement focuses on the power of positive thinking** (the belief that positive thoughts manifest positive outcomes, while negative thoughts bring about negative circumstances), the law of attraction (the idea that since "like attracts like," visualizing and focusing on desired outcomes will attract those circumstances into one's life), and the belief that the mind has the power to heal the body and attract prosperity. New Thought incorporates elements of Christian mysticism and Scripture but interprets them in a metaphysical context. Phrases from the Bible like "Ask, and it will be given to you" (Matt. 7:7) are often interpreted as affirmations of the law of attraction. However, New Thought also incorporates ideas from Hinduism, Buddhism, and other Eastern philosophies, making it a syncretic spiritual framework.
- (3) **The 'father of the prosperity gospel' was a faith-healing preacher from Oklahoma by the name of Oral Roberts** - The man who could be considered the father of modern prosperity gospel teaching is Oral Roberts. Born in 1918 in Pontotoc County, Oklahoma (I pastored a church in Pontotoc, Oklahoma – FBC Allen), Roberts rose to prominence in the mid-20th century and played a significant role in shaping modern Pentecostalism and charismatic Christianity. He grew up in poverty and struggled with tuberculosis as a teenager. He claims he decided to dedicate his life to Christian ministry after being miraculously healed during a revival meeting. His ministry was one of the first to realize the potential of television as a medium for spreading the gospel, and his programs reached millions of viewers. The faith-healing evangelist became so influential that he started his own school, Oral Roberts University. At the height of his influence, Roberts oversaw a ministry that brought in \$110 million in annual revenue.
- (4) **The Word of Faith movement helped spread the prosperity gospel** - While Roberts was one of the first to combine New Thought principles with faith healing, the most prominent evangelist of the prosperity gospel—and the father of the Word of Faith

movement—was Kenneth E. Hagin (1917–2003). In 1962, Hagin founded Kenneth Hagin Ministries to spread his teachings, which emphasize speaking words of faith as a way to manifest health, wealth, and other blessings. One of his most influential ideas was his distinguishing between the *logos* (the written Word of God) and the *rhema* (the spoken or revealed Word). He argued that *rhema* is the means by which believers activate God’s promises. As Russell S. Woodbridge says, “More than any other factor, the Word of Faith movement was the vehicle responsible for spreading prosperity teaching across the United States in the late 20th century.”

- (5) **The concept of seed-faith is a cornerstone of the movement** - The doctrine of seed-faith posits that financial giving—particularly to ministries that promote prosperity gospel preachers—can be likened to planting a seed that will eventually yield a harvest of blessings. You sow a financial “seed” into a ministry as an act of faith and, in turn, God will multiply that seed in the form of various blessings, which could be financial prosperity, physical healing, or other forms of favor. Essentially, it represents a transactional relationship between the believer and God, facilitated through a financial gift. Roberts articulated the seed-faith concept using a threefold model:

3-Fold Model of the Oral Roberts Seed-Faith Concept:

1. **Plant a seed** - Give something valuable (usually money) as your seed to a ministry;
2. **Expect a miracle** - Have faith your act of giving will trigger divine intervention
3. **Harvest the miracle** - Receive the divine blessings in a manifold manner, often expected to be in material or financial forms.

- (6) **Television was the primary tool that helped to spread prosperity gospel teachings** - Televangelism—the practice of using television to broadcast religious services and programs—began to flourish in the 1970s and 1980s with the deregulation of broadcasting and the expansion of cable television. Many of the most famous televangelists were associated with the prosperity gospel movement and its teachings. Roberts was one of the first to use the medium to attract large audiences. His pilot and chauffeur, Kenneth Copeland, also became one of the most notorious (and wealthy) prosperity preachers. Roberts and Copeland paved the way for the televangelists who became famous in the 1980s, including Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker, Benny Hinn, Pat Robertson, Robert Tilton, and Fred Price. In the 21st century, the most prominent prosperity gospel leaders got their start before a televised audience, including Joel Osteen, Creflo Dollar, Joyce Meyer, T. D. Jakes, and Paula White.

- (7) **The prosperity gospel discounts what the Bible teaches—especially about wealth and suffering** - Many Christian scholars and ethicists argue the prosperity gospel’s focus on material prosperity undermines the teachings of Jesus, who emphasized humility, compassion, and the normalcy of suffering. “I don’t know what you feel about the prosperity gospel—the health, wealth and prosperity gospel—but I’ll tell you what I

feel about it,” pastor John Piper told a gathering of more than 1,000 college students in November 2005. “Hatred.” In 2014, Piper outlined six keys to detecting the prosperity gospel:

Dr. John Piper's 6 Keys to Detecting the Prosperity Gospel:

1. An absence of a serious doctrine of the biblical necessity and normalcy of suffering -
2. An absence of a clear and prominent doctrine of self-denial -
3. An absence of serious exposition of Scripture -
4. A failure to deal with tensions in Scripture -
5. Church leaders who have exorbitant lifestyles -
6. A prominence of self and marginalization of the greatness of God

(8) Prosperity gospel beliefs are common among American churchgoers - A 2023 study from Lifeway Research finds...

- More than half (52 percent) of American Protestant churchgoers say their church teaches that God will bless them if they give more money to their church and charities
- One in four (24 percent) American Protestant churchgoers strongly agreed with this teaching.
- In a 2017 study, only 38 percent of churchgoers made that same claim.
- Churchgoers are more likely today than in 2017 to believe God wants them to prosper financially (76 percent vs. 69 percent)
- And that they have to do something for God in order to receive material blessings from him (45 percent vs. 26 percent).
- Today, three in four churchgoers (76 percent) believe God wants them to prosper financially
- Including 43 percent who strongly agree.
- Fewer (45 percent) believe they have to do something for him in order to receive material blessings from God
- With 21 percent strongly agreeing.

(9) The prosperity gospel is a false gospel - In a 2015 article for The Gospel Coalition, the Christian ethicist David W. Jones explained five theological errors of prosperity gospel teaching:

5 Theological Errors of the Prosperity Gospel:

- (1) **The Abrahamic covenant is a means to material entitlement -** The Abrahamic Covenant is a cornerstone in the theological and redemptive framework of the Bible. It reveals God's initiative in grace, His commitment to redemption, and His plan for a people through whom He would bring about His purposes for the whole world. The covenant with Abraham is a covenant of grace, making a separate nation out of Abraham and his descendants, leading to the promised Messiah Jesus²

- (2) **Jesus's atonement extends to the "sin" of material poverty -**
- (3) **Christians give in order to gain material compensation from God -**
- (4) **Faith is a self-generated spiritual force that leads to prosperity -**
- (5) **Prayer is a tool to force God to grant prosperity -**

Christian ethicist David W. Jones, "In light of Scripture, the prosperity gospel is fundamentally flawed," Jones said. "At bottom, it is a false gospel because of its faulty view of the relationship between God and man. Simply put, if the prosperity gospel is true, grace is obsolete, God is irrelevant, and man is the measure of all things. Whether they're talking about the Abrahamic covenant, the atonement, giving, faith, or prayer, prosperity teachers turn the relationship between God and man into a quid pro quo transaction."

Again, one of the main texts used to support it is 3 John 2, "*Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.*" Ignoring the fact that the apostles and many Old Testament prophets, not to mention Jesus Himself, were poor and persecuted, the proponents of this false teaching brazenly appeal to the greed and selfishness of their spiritually naïve audiences.

They are those of whom Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 6:5, "*... Who suppose that godliness is a means of gain*" (see also, 2 Pet. 2:14-15). If these false teachers would bother to read 3 John 2 carefully, they would see that it really pronounces a curse, not a blessing, on them! John is praying for his friend, Gaius, that he would prosper and be in good physical health to the same degree as his soul actually was prospering. It's worth pondering... if someone prayed that for you, would it be a blessing or would we need to call the paramedics?

At the very least, it's dangerous when a Christian's material prosperity gets ahead of his spiritual prosperity. Paul warned 1 Timothy 6:9-10, "*But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.*"

The apostle John said (v. 4), "*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.*" (not, "prospering financially"). He was talking about his spiritual children, of course. But, Christian parents should be able to say about their children, that their greatest joy is to hear that their children are walking in the truth. Sadly, I've known of Christian parents who are ecstatic when their children land top-paying jobs, but they don't seem to be as happy if the kids decide to be missionaries. Our main prayer for our children and for every Christian should be that they have prosperous souls. John describes for us here the prosperous soul:

KEY TRUTH FOR 3 JOHN: The prosperous soul walks in the truth and love, submits to apostolic authority, and imitates godly examples

Like 2 John, this one-page letter was written from “the elder,” whom conservative scholars agree is the aged apostle John. Unlike 2 John, which I believe was written to a local church, 3 John is written to an individual, Gaius. We know nothing about this man (or the other two individuals mentioned in this letter) except what we learn here. He was a faithful Christian leader in a local church that was under the care of the apostle John.

In this church, a self-willed, power-hungry man, Diotrephes, had grabbed power. He openly attacked the authority of the apostle John, he denied hospitality to traveling Christian workers, and he even excommunicated those who defied him by offering hospitality to these workers.

Gaius, however, to this point had resisted the strong-armed tactics of Diotrephes. He had given hospitality and financial support to these traveling missionaries. John encourages Gaius to continue doing so, and he commends to him Demetrius, who was probably the bearer of this letter. John assures Gaius that he will deal publicly with Diotrephes when he visits the church in the near future. I’m sure that it would have been interesting to have a box seat to watch the fireworks when that happened!

The three characters named in the book provide us with three keys to pursuing a prosperous soul...

3 Character in 3 John That Teach 3 Keys to a Prosperous Soul:

- (1) **Gaius** = A prosperous soul walks in the truth and love (3 John 1-8)
- (2) **Diotrephes** = A prosperous soul submits to apostolic authority (3 John 9-10)
- (3) **Demetrius** = A prosperous soul imitates godly examples (3 John 11-12)

THE PROSPEROUS SOUL WALKS IN THE TRUTH AND LOVE (*Gaius, the beloved example 3 John 1-8*)

“¹The Elder, To the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth: ²Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers. ³For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. ⁴I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. ⁵Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, ⁶who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well, ⁷because they went forth for His name’s sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles. ⁸We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth” – 3 John 1-8 (NKJV)

As in all of John’s writings, truth is a central concept in 3 John. He mentions it in verses 1, 3 (twice), 4, 8, and 12, plus the word “true” in verse 12. As we’ve seen, John’s greatest joy was to hear of his spiritual children walking in the truth.

Why did the aged apostle hammer on the truth so often?

3 Reasons for John's Common Emphasis on Truth:

- (1) **Concern of error creeping into the church** - One reason was that he was the last living apostle, and he saw numerous errors creeping into the churches.
- (2) **Jesus emphasized truth in His earthly ministry** - Also, the Lord Jesus had repeatedly emphasized the truth in His earthly ministry. In John 1:14 (see also, 1:17), John testified that Jesus was “full of grace and truth.” In John 3:21, “he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.” In John 4:23 & 24, Jesus explained that the Father seeks those who “worship in spirit and truth.” In John 8:32, Jesus said, “and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” In John 14:6, Jesus claimed, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.” Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as “the Spirit of truth” (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). He prayed (John 17:17), “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.” Jesus told the skeptical Pilate (John 18:37), “For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.” So truth was a huge emphasis in Jesus’ ministry, and therefore, too, in the life and ministry of the apostle John.
- (3) **The importance is theological and moral truth and error** - Contrary to the current postmodern philosophy that denies absolute truth in the spiritual realm, the Bible clearly affirms that there is theological and moral truth and error. This truth centers in the person and work of Jesus Christ, who is the God of truth in human flesh. Since God is the author of truth, whereas Satan is the author of spiritual lies (John 8:44), God’s people must know and obey the truth as revealed in God’s Word.

Gaius prospered in his soul because he walked in the truth (v. 3). Also, those who had visited Gaius reported back to John of Gaius’ love before the church (v. 6). As we’ve seen, truth and love must always go together. Gaius’ good example teaches us four things about these essential virtues, truth and love...

4 Truths About the Essential Virtues of Truth and Love:

- (1) **To walk in the truth implies knowing the truth** - Gaius didn’t accidentally stumble onto the path called “truth” and just as accidentally stay on it. No one in this world under the dominion of the father of lies and deceit, walks in the truth accidentally. It requires deliberate purpose and effort, both to understand the truth and to walk in it. The huge emphasis on truth in John’s writings teaches us that *truth matters!* How a person thinks about God, man, salvation, and life determines how that person lives. A person with false concepts in these areas will live differently than the person with a biblical view in these important matters. Since Jesus Himself is the truth and since God’s Word is truth, Satan works overtime to undermine the truth about the person and work of Christ and the truth of God’s inerrant Word. But there is an inherent danger as we grow in our

knowledge of the truth. Paul said (1 Cor. 8:1), *“Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up”* (my translation). If Satan can’t prevent us from knowing the truth, then he tries to get us puffed up with pride over how much we know that others don’t know. We would be wrong to conclude that we should remain ignorant so that we can stay humble! But, we should always remember that anything we know of the truth is only because of God’s grace. If He had not been gracious, we would still be in spiritual darkness.

- (2) **To walk in the truth implies growth in the truth** - Twice (vv. 3, 4) John mentions *“walking in the truth.”* He does not say that we should sit and rest in the truth, but rather that we should *walk* in it. Walking implies steady movement in a purposeful direction. It requires discipline and effort. Walking is not as quick as running, but if you keep at it, walking will get you where you’re going. After warning about the danger of being carried away by the error of unprincipled men, Peter commands us (2 Pet. 3:18), *“but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”* You will not grow in the knowledge of Christ by accident! You must purpose to walk in the truth, studying to learn and then apply God’s truth to your daily life.
- (3) **Growth in the truth should always result in love** - As we’ve seen, truth and love are not opposed to one another. John affirms (v. 1) that he loves Gaius in truth, which means, in the sphere of the truth about Jesus Christ. In verse 6 he affirms that Gaius, who is walking in the truth (v. 4), is also known for his love. Sometimes, people who are big on the truth use it as a club to wail on those who don’t agree with them. Or, those who emphasize love are soft on the truth; they end up being nice when they need to stand up for the truth. But since God is the God of truth *and* love, godly people will be characterized by *both* truth *and* love. Sometimes, love requires confronting a person who is in theological or moral error. Presumably, Diotrephes did not teach the errors of the heretics, or John would have said something about that. But, Diotrephes was a self-serving, unloving man, and John hits him very hard for these sins. We must assume that the apostle of love was acting in love towards this sinning man. Of course, love not only confronts sin. Also...
- (4) **Love manifests itself in practical good deeds** - A delegation that returned from visiting Gaius had testified of his love. Gaius had welcomed them into his home, even though they had been strangers to him before their visit. He had treated them *“in a manner worthy of God.”* When they left, he loaded them with supplies for their journey and with money for their mission work. His love was not just talk. It showed itself in treating others as he himself would wish to be treated. Being hospitable is one qualification for being an elder (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8). But all believers are commanded to *“pursue hospitality”* (Rom. 12:13). We are to be a people *“zealous for good deeds”* (Titus 2:14). Biblical love isn’t just feeling the warm fuzzies; it is practical good deeds. John writes of these missionaries (v. 7), *“For they went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles.”* These missionaries were not *“peddling the word of God”* (2 Cor. 2:17), receiving donations from the unbelievers that they were seeking to reach. John says (v. 8) that God’s people should support such workers, and in doing so, we become fellow workers with the truth of the gospel that they proclaim. One practical

way for you to show Christ's love by good deeds is to help support missionaries who go out for the sake of His name. The prosperous soul walks in the truth and in love.

THE PROSPEROUS SOUL SUBMITS TO APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY (*Diotrephes, the bad example, 3 John 9-10*)

“⁹ I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us.¹⁰ Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church.” – 3 John 9-10 (NKJV)

Diotrephes did not submit to apostolic authority (he did not accept what John said, v. 9). Rather than being a prosperous soul, Diotrephes was a destitute soul. His negative example gives us four characteristics of the destitute soul that we need to avoid if we want to have prosperous souls:

4 Characteristics of the Destitute Soul: (*Which we need to avoid if we want to have a “prosperous soul”*)

- (1) **The destitute soul loves to be first** - Diotrephes *“loves to be first among them”* (v. 9). Therein lies the explanation for the majority of church problems down through history! People want to be first. As I said, Diotrephes' theology was orthodox. If it had not been, John would have condemned him as a heretic. His problem was not his theology, but rather his personal ambition and pride that led him to oppose even the apostle John. He probably had reasons for his opposition. He may have said to the church, “John doesn't understand the danger of welcoming these traveling teachers into this church. We need to maintain pure doctrine here. We don't know what kinds of errors these men may bring in. John is just a senile old man who means well, but he's gone soft in his old age. Follow me! Don't receive these teachers into your homes. If you do, we'll have to put you out of the church.” Diotrephes may have had the truth, but the only person he loved was himself! *Counter-punch truth: A prosperous soul puts Christ and others ahead of himself or herself*
- (2) **The destitute soul uses gossip and slander to run down his opponents** - Diotrephes unjustly accused John and his delegates with wicked words. He barred these traveling teachers from the church because he wanted to be the sole authority and leader of the church. He wanted everyone to look up to him, not to Jesus Christ. It threatened him if people learned from others, and so he used gossip and slander to criticize even the apostle John. Gossip is sharing information (which may be true) with those who have no business hearing it. The gossip uses it to bolster his status: He's in the know! Or, he uses it to prejudice people against someone. Slander is using partial truths or flat-out lies to damage someone's reputation. Often the slanderer will say something that is partly

true, so that he can claim that he spoke the truth. But it was not the *whole* truth, and sharing it misled others to believe something false about the person. The name, *devil*, means *slanderer*, so it is a serious sin! ***Counter-punch truth: A prosperous soul doesn't tear others down, but builds other us***

(3) **The destitute soul uses relationships for power** - Diotrephes did not receive the brethren and he forbade those who desired to do so, putting them out of the church. Why didn't Diotrephes welcome these godly Christian workers? Because he did not value people and relationships. Rather, he *used* people to build or protect his power base. If you didn't go along with him, he would force you out of the church, no doubt under the pretense of keeping the church pure. That's exactly how the world operates. The way to move up in the world is to build relationships with powerful people. You do favors for them so that they owe you in return. You play one person off of another, all in an attempt to put yourself in a powerful position. But it leads to poverty of soul, not to prosperity of soul. ***Counter-punch truth: A prosperous soul does not use others for his or her own personal gain***

(4) **The destitute soul bullies others through intimidation** - If people in the church didn't agree with Diotrephes, he bullied them into compliance or he put them out of the church. He had the power to do it. It was church politics at the worst! Again, how like the world! The world writes books on how to get what you want and how to win by intimidation. It runs TV shows with a supposedly successful, but ruthless boss, whose trademark line is, "You're fired!" As Jesus said (Mark 10:42-44), the "rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all." Positively, the prosperous soul walks in the truth and love. He submits to apostolic authority, which we now have in the New Testament, seeking to serve rather than to be served. ***Counter-punch truth: A prosperous soul does not take advantage nor manipulate others***

THE PROSPEROUS SOUL IMITATES GODLY EXAMPLES (*Demetrius, the good testimony, 3 John 11-12*)

"¹¹ Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God. ¹² Demetrius has a good testimony from all, and from the truth itself. And we also bear witness, and you know that our testimony is true." – 3 John 11-12 (NKJV)

In verse 11, John again addresses Gaius, exhorting him not to imitate what is evil (the bad example of Diotrephes), but rather what is good (the positive example of Demetrius). Whether Diotrephes was a genuine believer or not, we cannot tell, although John says, ***"the one who does evil has not seen God."*** But Diotrephes was in the role of leader of a Christian

church. He must have had some sort of following, or else John would not have written this warning. The point is, we all need godly examples to follow, but we must be careful in choosing those examples. Even those who are recognized Christian leaders may not be good examples to follow.

How do you discern whether a person is worth imitating or not?

3 Ways to Discern if a Person is Worth Imitating:

- (1) **The fruit of their life** - Look for the fruit of the Spirit in his or her character. Look at his deeds (v. 11). Are they in line with the fruit of the Spirit or the deeds of the flesh?
- (2) **The reputation of their life** - Then, look at the person's reputation. In the case of Demetrius, everyone testified that he was a godly man. "Everyone" obviously means, "everyone in general." Diotrophes, I'm sure, would not have testified of Demetrius' good character or deeds. But those who are walking with God will agree about the godly character of a godly man.
- (3) **The consistency of their life** - Also, John says, "the truth itself" bore witness to Demetrius' good character. This means that his life was consistent with the character qualities and moral standards of God's Word. Rather than being domineering, as Diotrophes was, Demetrius was a humble servant. Rather than being self-centered, he practiced biblical love. Further, John added his testimony to Demetrius' godly character. If a man walks with God, other godly leaders will acknowledge that fact.

When you find such godly role models, imitate them! As I've said before, **I have found more help spiritually by reading the biographies of godly men and women than from any other source outside of the Bible itself.** None of them were perfect, of course, but all of them have shown me in practical ways what it means to walk in the truth of God's Word. I highly recommend that you read the lives of these great saints from the past. (There is a bibliography of Christian biographies on the church web site.)

CONCLUSION

The story is told of a Texas millionaire who wanted to be buried in his Cadillac. So when he died, the undertakers dug an enormous grave and placed the Cadillac on a huge lowering device. They dressed the corpse in his sportiest clothes, put a cigar in his mouth, seated him behind the steering wheel, and set the speedometer at 80 miles per hour.

The mourners gathered around the grave. As the unusual coffin slowly sank into the ground to the appropriate words of committal, a millionaire friend of the deceased brushed a tear from his eye and sighed, "Man, that's living!"

But, of course, it's not living—it's death! True prosperity is not to live as a millionaire and be buried in your Cadillac. True prosperity is to be rich toward God (Luke 12:21). True prosperity is to have a prosperous soul. The way to that eternal prosperity is to walk in the

truth and in love, to submit to apostolic authority as revealed in the New Testament, and to imitate godly examples. Then it may be said of you, “Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers.” And your pastors will have great joy to hear that you are walking in the truth.

Some Simple Truths on How to Prosper Your Soul:

- (1) **Study the word of God (2 Timothy 2:15)** – *“¹⁵ Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”*
The bible (word of God) is the manual for a successful living on earth. Studying the word of God gives you the wisdom keys for success in life. It gives you access to the creator’s mindset that helps you not to tow the wrong path. It reveals your own success path and teaches you how to maintain and increase your success stories. Studying the word of God is rubbing minds with the only wise God. It shows you how to prosper in all things including your health.
- (2) **Pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17)** – *“¹⁷ pray without ceasing.”* Prayer is a two-way communication with your maker. You talk and listen to Him, and He talks and listens to you. It is spending time with the Almighty God. As you do so, His nature rubs off on you. You tend to think, talk and act like Him, as such prospering your soul. As your soul prospers, everything that is possible with God becomes possible with you because your faith in God increases.
- (3) **Seek first the kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33)** – *“³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”* This is to put God first in all you do; it is to make your soul (will, intellect and emotion) God-centered. Making the things of the Lord a priority in your life makes Him to put you and all that concerns you on His priority list. Seeking first the kingdom of God causes every other thing to be added unto you. You seek the kingdom of God first through soul winning, serving in the house of God, giving for the spread of the gospel of Christ, showing the love of Christ by giving to the poor and helping the needy, etc.
- (4) **Walk in love (Ephesians 5:2, Romans 12:21)** – *“² And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.”* And in Romans 12:21, *“²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”* Love is of God for God is love. Therefore walking in love is walking in God. Your soul prospers as you walk in love towards God and man, you will not sin against God or your fellow-man. Walking in love attracts the goodness of the Lord to you and repels the works of the enemy. The devil can’t survive where there is love and so can’t operate against you.