

3 John

Sermon preached by Phil Kayser at DCC on 2021-03-07

Introduction - Background

Who is Gaius?

Last week I pointed out that both 2 and 3 John were personal letters written to the head of a household. 2 John was written to a single mom with a very broken family. 3 John was written to Gaius, a man who appears to have suffered a major loss of money and health. Scholars deduce this from three facts. First, John prays that he may gain health, which implies that he didn't have it. He prays that he may prosper, which implies he needs that prayer. Second, John has to tell Gaius about some bad stuff that has been happening with elder Diotrephes at the church, which implies that Gaius hasn't been to church in a while. Otherwise, why would Gaius have to be informed of that fact? That further implies that he lived far enough away that his health prevented him from making the trip to church. Third, this is further confirmed by the fact that Diotrephes had excommunicated several people in verses 9-10 for engaging in exactly the same hospitality that Gaius had given, yet Gaius was not under discipline. So some scholars have deduced that he probably lived far enough away from the church that his health problems prevented attending and also prevented him from even hearing about things right away.

A 3 minute overview

Let me start by giving a three-minute overview of the whole book so that you can see the context. As I mentioned, verses 1 and 14 show that this was a private letter to an individual just like 2 John had been. This particular letter was intended to encourage the continuation of proper hospitality (in verse 8), to thank Gaius for the hospitality that he has already shown (in verses 3,5, and 6) and to vindicate the name of Demetrius as being a candidate who was worthy of hospitality (in verse 12). So he is introducing yet another missionary that Diotrephes has rejected and that John is asking Gaius to help.

John had sent out some missionaries (in verse 6) accompanied with an explanatory letter to Diotrephes, who was perhaps the lead elder of the church that Gaius was connected to (verse 9). However, Diotrephes rejected John's letter (verse 9), refused to extend hospitality (v. 10), and actually kicked people out of the church if they extended hospitality to these missionaries (that's also in verse 10). John chalks up all of this abusive behavior to pride and arrogance (verse 10).

Why would pride and arrogance enter in? Some commentators have tried to read between the lines based on his name. Diotrephes is a very rare name used only by aristocrats in the first century, and they have made a conjecture that he was socially considered so important as an aristocrat that he was not about to submit to a peasant like John. That was socially beneath him. Whether that is the case or not (and it is a conjecture), the text is quite clear that Diotrephes is an abusive and prideful elder. He stands as a warning of what pride can

do to any of us elders. I've got a bunch of Dilbert cartoons on the back of your outlines that illustrate the bad leadership issues that John confronts.

In any case, John was concerned that this abusive overreach on the part of Diotrephes might completely dry up hospitality in that church. Just in case Gaius himself might be tempted to stop serving when he finds out Diotrephes' orders, John shows that Diotrephes has no authority whatsoever to give such commands and John gives three witnesses to the integrity of these missionaries. And he promises that as a representative of presbytery, he will make sure that Diotrephes comes under church discipline. Leaders who abuse the sheep must be dealt with. Sadly, in many churches they are not. They continue to abuse with very little accountability.

But the very fact that John expects Gaius to extend hospitality even though he is poor in health and in finances shows how critical hospitality is to Christianity. It complements 2 John in that respect. So that's kind of a brief overview of the book as a whole.

The two main issues - abusive leadership and hospitality

The heart of the chiasm of this book is not leadership; it is a call for continued hospitality.¹ I was planning to focus on leadership, but since hospitality is the main theme, I decided that even though this would involve me in repeating ideas I have preached on before, that I would look at this book through the eyes of hospitality.

Defining terms - entertainment versus hospitality (φιλοξενία)

The Bible treats hospitality as an absolutely essential characteristic of all Christians. Let me repeat that. The Bible as a whole (not just 2 and 3 John, but the Bible as a whole) treats hospitality as an absolutely essential characteristic of all Christians. For example, when Romans 12 lists out the characteristics that should be present in every believer's life, Christians understand most of them as being essential, but they slide over this one - that Christians must be "given to hospitality." He defines a true Christian as being given to hospitality. Is that true of you? It is certainly a requirement for officers in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. People should not even apply for the offices of deacon or elder if they are not given to hospitality. It is my belief that no stranger should be able to enter the doors of our

¹ An article at the Chiasmus Exchange states: > So much of 3 John is arranged chiastically that the absence of it in the discussion of Diotrephes seems almost deliberate. Apart from the Opening (v. 1) and the Conclusion (vv. 13-15), the body of the Letter consists of brief chiasms and parallelism, except for vv. 9-10, which deal with Diotrephes: v. 2 (chiasm); vv. 3-4 (parallelism); vv. 5-6 (chiasm); vv. 7-8 (chiasm); vv. 9-10 (Diotrephes); v. 11 (chiasm); v. 12 (parallelism). Perhaps the disruption of the rhythm of the Letter is intended to reflect the disruption caused by Diotrephes.

Urban C. von Wahlde, *The Gospel and Letters of John: Commentary on the Three Johannine Letters*, vol. 3, *The Eerdmans Critical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 250.

churches without receiving a warm welcome and some heart warming hospitality - not just from the elders, but from each member. 1 Peter 4:9 commands believers, "Be hospitable to one another without grumbling." So even our *attitudes* need to be conducive to hospitality. Hebrews 13:2 says, "Do not forget to extend hospitality, for by so doing some have unwittingly extended hospitality to angels." I could go on and on with many more proof texts that stand as a background to this book. I'll repeat that statement one more time. The Bible treats hospitality as an absolutely essential characteristic of all Christians young or old. So don't write off this sermon as being irrelevant; it relates to you.

And before we dig into this marvelous book, let me define a Greek word that occurred in each of those verses I read from Paul's writings. The Greek word for "hospitality" is φιλοξενία. The Greek word is written under that first picture in your outlines. It's made up of two Greek words: *phileo*, which is friendship love, and the word *xenia*, which is the word for stranger. That may seem like an oxymoron because the first word describes a comfortable relationship of very close friendship and the second word speaks of the exact opposite - a stranger - someone whom you do not know. But put together, φιλοξενία means hospitality. And it's a shame that the NKJV translates it twice in the book of Hebrews as "to entertain." In my books, entertainment and hospitality are quite different. They both have their place, but they are quite different. The word φιλοξενία refers to making someone who is a stranger to your home no longer a stranger - he is welcomed in to see the real you.

Now, contrast that with entertainment. Entertainment is opening your home to somebody who is a stranger to your home and doesn't know what the inside looks like on a day-to-day basis. So there is some similarity. He may get invited once a year on a very special occasion when you have had a chance to really plan for something special, but he's still a stranger to what your home is normally like. And he remains a stranger when he leaves your home. The only people who see the real home is your immediate family or maybe some of your closest friends. You could entertain a person several times and he might still be a stranger to your home - which contradicts the meaning of the word.

Let me try to paint a picture of at least some of the nuance differences between entertainment and the real meaning of this word - where the person sees the real you. In my mind, entertaining is putting on a big production that is exhausting. It might involve the fine china, cloth napkins, and food designed to impress, but which took you all day to prepare. The carpet got cleaned because you would be embarrassed for the guests to see how dirty it had become. And maybe you even bought some new furniture. And perhaps you have arranged to have the kids sent to a baby-sitter or to grandma's house because you don't want them to accidentally spill anything on the guests or to exhibit their normal bad behavior in front of the guests. Everything about the evening is designed to impress and show the stranger how you have everything together, and thus it is difficult to relax. And it's an artificial environment; it's not your real home. To the guests it is not a close-friend-relationship but rather a special-occasion-relationship. Those are both OK, but they are different. So that's the first word picture - the picture of entertaining. You can't afford to do that too often or you would wear yourself out.

But when you extend hospitality (φιλοξενία), a person who is a stranger to your home very quickly becomes a friend and at ease in your home. You make him feel relaxed. That's the

meaning of hospitality. This word implies that you are inviting people into your life, with all of its messiness. You might be leading the guests into your living room and have to kick some toys out of the way. But you are relaxed and focused on relationship. And the guest relaxes and he begins to feel like he is at home.

Now that's not to say that there isn't a place for entertaining and putting on a big spread on certain occasions. That's great. We love doing that too. We love doing both. But the day-in and day-out hospitality that God calls all believers to be involved in is a much more down-to-earth and real experience.

When you look at all that the Bible includes under the concept of hospitality, you see that it covers a broad range of things. In modern terms it could cover anything from sending a card to someone to cheer them up and make them feel wanted to having someone over for a meal. It could be as simple as making people feel at home when they come to church (that's a kind of hospitality), or it could be much more time consuming and costly in providing board and room for a couple of weeks. To one extent or another, every Christian is called to some kind of hospitality, though obviously some may be more gifted at it.

In verse 5 of 3 John Gaius is commended for his faithful hospitality to brethren and strangers alike. And for the rest of the sermon I want to open up three things that are involved in faithful hospitality. I probably should have numbered these points differently, but the three characteristics are listed in Roman numerals II, III, and V. It must flow first from the heart. Without a hospitable heart, hospitality loses a lot. Second, it must be self-giving or self-sacrificing. It is a giving of yourself. Third, it must be discerning. We can't naively give hospitality to everybody. And of course, 2 John dealt with that as well. So let's dig into those three points.

Faithful hospitality flows first from the heart (vv. 1-4)

First, faithful hospitality flows from the heart. Too often Christians wait for other conditions to be fulfilled before they extend hospitality. They want to have more time, more money, more help, or better health, better furniture, better dishes, etc. They are always hoping to extend hospitality at some time in the future, but other things get in the way. One thing or another puts off the hospitality that they want to engage in. In contrast to those reasons for procrastination, the Bible says that the primary pre-requisite is a change in the inner man and how we view this subject. God's grace gives us a love for connecting with people in this unique way. It's not just a change in our outer circumstances. If you have the heart, it doesn't matter what your circumstances are, you will find a way to be hospitable - guaranteed.

We can see this in Gaius' life in that he didn't have health or wealth (v. 2 with vv. 9-12)

We can see this in Gaius' life in that he didn't have health or wealth or supportive leadership or other outer helps. Verse 2 says, "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers." I preached an entire series of sermons

on Christian prosperity that started with that verse. So there is a lot packed in there. But I just want to highlight one thing. The fact that John prays that Gaius might gain health and prosperity implies that Gaius had been in poor health and was not particularly wealthy. Yet he engaged in hospitality any way because his *heart* was healthy. His soul was prospering so much that it automatically overflowed in hospitality. Gaius has a prospering soul. "I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, *just as your soul prospers.*"

We can see this negatively illustrated in Diotrephes (v. 10)

The next obstacle was that the elders didn't model hospitality. How do I know that? Well, verse 9 says, "I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us." Diotrephes was not modeling hospitality. There was an atmosphere in the church that was hostile to hospitality, and verse 10 makes that clear. It says of Diotrephes (the pastor), "he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church." The church had become an ingrown clique.

We can see it in the ways Gaius got around his obstacles (vv. 3,5-8)

Third, we can see it in the ways that Gaius got around his obstacles. John rejoiced in the sacrificial hospitality that Gaius had previously engaged in in verse 3. He praises him for his faithfulness in hospitality in verse 5. And in verses 6-8 John heard testimonies from others of Gaius' hospitality. People were blown away with how welcoming this man was. So Gaius somehow managed to work around his limitations.

Of course, John wisely sees these things as limitations and prays that they may be removed. Praise God. But his lack illustrates the fact that it was his heart that was the key to whether hospitality would occur or not.

I love Karen Maines book, *Open Heart, Open Home: The Hospitable way to Make Others Feel Welcome and Wanted*. But the first part of that title captures the most important ingredient of Gaius' hospitality - *Open Heart, Open Home*. It's not till our hearts are wide open that our homes will even feel wide open when people visit. This past week the elders and deacons were doing self-examination of our leadership in this church using the book, *Lead*, by Paul David Tripp. It's a great book. I highly recommend it. It's fantastic. And I was struck by a phrase he used for approachability. He said, "Humility is about firing your inner lawyer..." I had never heard that expression before. I love it. The inner lawyer is always giving excuses for why we are the way we are. The inner lawyer always has great excuses for why we are not wrong. It almost always wins the cases. But we need to fire that inner lawyer of self-vindication, self-serving, pride, self-focus, excuses, etc. And I would say the same is true of the inner excuse maker for why we are not doing hospitality. Fire the inner excuse maker and open your heart.

Faithful hospitality is self-sacrificing in its expression (vv. 5-10)

The next characteristic of faithful hospitality (this is Roman numeral III) is that it is self-sacrificing in its expression. It's a giving of ourselves. Of course, that immediately makes some people not interested. They are selfish. But Scripture indicates that everyone who has tasted of God's grace begins to have this servant heart.

And what is cool about that is that you can still extend hospitality even when you don't have any money. In fact, the sacrificial nature of hospitality becomes even more obvious when we are poor. God sees it in a highlighted way. Anyway, we can see this characteristic in verse 5-10.

Let me illustrate how you can have this sacrificial heart even when you have nothing. When you are in a hospital bed, you probably don't feel like being hospitable, but if God has changed your heart into a heart of hospitality (that's the previous point), you will want to sacrificially put aside for a moment your pain, misery, complaining, and other uncomfortable symptoms in order to be somewhat pleasant when others visit your room. Your heart will move you so much to this next point of sacrificial giving that nurses, doctors, and visitors will notice your welcoming demeanor and smile. They will want to come to your hospital room. Why? Because there is something infectious about your hospitable demeanor. But it would take the sacrificing of your feelings for a person to be that way. That's why I say that there really are no exceptions on this issue of hospitality unless you are in a coma.

Not seeking anything in return (v. 5)

So let's dig into this point. This book gives four illustrations of hospitality's self-sacrificing nature. Verse 5 says, "Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do, for the brethren and for strangers." Let's focus on the strangers part of that sentence. Strangers are unlikely to be in a position to pay you back. You are sacrificing without seeking anything in return when you extend hospitality to strangers.

And this was true even of the brothers that Gaius had extended hospitality to. They were not acquaintances of Gaius but missionaries that had been sent by John. He had probably never seen them before. Verse 9 says that a letter had been sent by John to introduce them to the church, but Diotrophes would have nothing to do with John and apparently destroyed or conveniently lost the letter. We are not certain exactly why Diotrophes did not accept them, but Gaius was extending hospitality to cast offs, and unknown at that.

As we saw last week, this interchange shows limits to church authority. But here it illustrates that Gaius didn't extend hospitality in hopes that they would return the favor. There is probably no way that these traveling missionaries *could* return the favor.

Love (v.6)

The second evidence of its self-sacrificing nature is found in the Greek word for love. Verse 6 says, "Who have borne witness of your love before the church." The word used for "love"

there is *ἀγάπη* - self-sacrificing love. People will quickly sense when we are extending hospitality because it is expected versus when we do so out of love. The first is focused on the task and the latter is focused on the person. Let me illustrate using the sisters, Martha and Mary, in the Gospel of John. Martha was entertaining and was flustered because she was focused on the tasks that were not getting done. Mary had caught the essence of hospitality - the reach of the heart toward the *person*. Now obviously both need to have sacrifice, but when sacrifice flows from love for a person, it is a sacrifice joyfully entered into because of God's grace. But again, it reinforces the first point - that it is a heart issue.

Worthy of God (v.6b).

A third subpoint is that it is God-centered in its focus. It is done as if you were doing it for God Himself; as if you were inviting God over for dinner. You would do a quality job, wouldn't you? You would be willing to put a lot of work into having Jesus over for dinner. That would be so cool. Verse 6 goes on to say, "If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well, because they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles." Well, if we engaged in hospitality in a way that is worthy of God, that would really transform hospitality, wouldn't it? I like to think of myself as serving Jesus (who indwells the guest) when I give hospitality. Jesus said in Matthew 25, "inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." Did what? Fed the hungry, gave drinks to the thirsty, took a stranger in, clothed the naked, visited the sick, visited those in prison. Those are all different kinds of hospitality. The point is that both Jesus and John tell us to do it as if doing it to God; in a manner worthy of God. That's a high standard for hospitality.

We represent God to the world, and He is a God of hospitality and generosity. John in his gospel records how Christ came into the world as a stranger and how the world did not receive Him. But it goes on to say that He overcame the world and received *them*. He is a great model.

Work (v. 8)

The last example of the self-sacrificing character of the hospitality that we see here is the simple fact that hospitality takes work - good old fashioned work. And laziness is one of the things that keeps people from being hospitable. It takes the Protestant Work Ethic to be good at hospitality - a willingness to be tired. Verse 8 says, "We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become *fellow workers* for the truth."

Now, there is a boatload of other things in that verse, but I am just going to focus on the two words, "fellow workers." Labor is involved because we are workers, but O what a glorious labor it is because it is labor that will count for all eternity. I love the first word in that phrase, "*fellow workers*." By extending hospitality to these brothers that John had sent, Gaius shared in their labors. That's what "fellow workers" means. Matthew 10:41-42 says something similar. It says,

Matt. 10:41 He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. 42

And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward.”

You know, one of the things that gets me excited about extending hospitality to missionaries and giving money to missionaries is that it enables me to share in their labors and thus share in their rewards. I don't have a body that can climb mountains, but when I support Peter Hammond I am sharing in his ministry, I share in his rewards.

I remember the incredible disappointment that one man had when I refused a gift that he was trying to give to me for one of my missions trips. I knew he was poor and I just didn't feel right about taking that gift. But he would not take no for an answer. He was almost in tears, telling me that I was robbing him of the privilege of sharing in my labors and sharing in my rewards. It just blew me out of the water and changed my life. I had never thought like that before. Here was a poor man that hungered to share in as many people's labors as he could because it was his way of serving the Lord. And in an instant I was a convert to the exciting idea of being a fellow laborer. I saw a whole new perspective on giving. It changed the way I give.

I love to give. When I was younger I loved hospitality, but there were other ways that I used to be somewhat stingy. I considered it being frugal. But I now see all kinds of strategic ways to give to the Lord. I love the three tithe concept of the Old Testament, which amounts to giving 23.33% every year - because the third tithe is once every three years; it's saved up. I long to bless the Lord by giving to others. I love to work for others. I love to extend hospitality to others. Is it work? Yes it is. But because I am doing it for the Lord, it's a totally different kind of work. It gives my wife and I great joy. We were sometimes criticized for how much hospitality we did at Davenport day in and day out, with people thinking that we somehow had a martyr complex. Nothing could be further from the truth. We loved to do it. Now, if others wanted to take turns extending hospitality, we weren't selfish; we would let them do it, and let them invite us. But for us it was sort of like what the KJV says of the household of Stephanus, we are addicted to this ministry.

When you extend hospitality to each other, you share in other people's labors and receive of their rewards. Even the giving of a cup of cold water in His name will by no means lose its reward. Doing dishes, ministering to the sick, and stacking chairs after the worship service are all acts of service that God delights in and they are a sharing in the labors of others. You women who serve your families so selflessly can find new joy if you serve even your family in a way worthy of God - even though that doesn't quite count as hospitality. But it is related and also receives a reward. And let me tell you - this work that often is extended day after day (sometimes without thanks) is something that God smiles with approval on. You can be sure that He doesn't forget. We are fellow workers for the truth. There is a purpose and a goal in what we do. And if this sermon achieves my goal of stirring every individual (including children) to hospitality, I will be thrilled.

A Negative example - Diotrephes did not have any of the above traits

Now, I have already mentioned that Diotrephes was the exact opposite; he didn't have this self-sacrificing character. He was a negative example. I sometimes use every verse of this

book to teach interns the difference between abusive leadership and approachable leadership. But let me just apply one facet of verses 9-10. He says,

3John 9 I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. 3John 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.

John treats the root of the problem as being self-serving pride in verse 9. Pride led on to malicious slander, a refusal even to associate with those whom John had sent, and finally trying to fit everyone else into the same pattern he had set for himself. He didn't want to be alone in his sin. It is amazing how one person can have a negative influence on others. Scripture makes clear that "bad company corrupts good morals" (1 Cor. 15:3). We do influence each other for either good or bad by our examples. How much more so when the person is a person of influence or a leader in the church. People will excuse themselves from hospitality on the ground that the pastor or elders are not doing any better than they are.

So we have seen thus far that faithful hospitality flows from an open and ready heart more than it does from opportunity or from resources. When your heart is gripped by hospitality, you look for the opportunities. Secondly, it is characterized by self-sacrifice - a giving of your life for the building up of others. And lastly, it is discerning; it is not naive.

Faithful hospitality is discerning. (vv. 11ff)

In what it is patterned after

It is discerning first of all, in what it is patterned after. John was worried about the longterm effects of Diotrephes on Gaius. He warns Gaius to be careful about whom he imitates. Verse 11 says,

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.

It is natural for us to imitate and follow those whom we look up to. But what do you do when leaders aren't hospitable? You don't wait for them. You be a leader in hospitality even if they are not. Even if you are not qualified to be an elder or a deacon, you can serve in more powerful ways than they might. But don't let the lack of hospitality in other churches stop you from leading the way.

And thankfully, our elders and deacons love hospitality. We have made it a goal to try to encourage a culture of hospitality in this church. And sometimes it starts by inviting people to your house over and over without getting any invites yourself. But it does eventually catch on. So it is discerning first of all in what it is patterned after.

In how it was ministered

Second, it was discerning in how it was ministered. In verse 12 John says,

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. (v. 12)

It appears that Gaius may have wondered about the advisability of welcoming Demetrius. Perhaps he had been spoken evil of by Diotrephes and others had been spreading the false rumors about his character. We don't know. But whatever the source of the hesitation, John sets his mind at ease by bringing forward three character witnesses in defense of Demetrius. John vouches for his good character, all men who knew Demetrius could vouch for his good character and the truth that was manifested in Demetrius' life was clear testimony to his godly character.

Now, just the need to bring up those good character witnesses reminds us of John's admonition in 2 John that we must not extend hospitality to those who are under church disciplines; those who are heretics. Indeed Paul warns against leeches and says that they should not eat unless they work. We cannot presume upon someone else's hospitality. On the other hand we should not be too quick to judge who should be rejected from hospitality, especially not by following one man's opinion.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would urge all of us to seek to improve our serve when it comes to hospitality. Make that a goal for 2021. Obviously you can read books on the subject, but there is no better way of learning than by doing it. We may not all be able to extend it in the same way. If we do not have a home, you can invite people out to a picnic lunch, or do what Trevor sometimes does - invite them to the camping site for hot dogs and fellowship around the fire. Be creative. People who can't invite others to their home still have a church home and we can make people feel welcome to the house of God. Hospitality does not mean that we have to put on a big spread. In fact, some of the fondest memories I have of hospitality were occasions where I was served at the hands of poverty stricken Ethiopians, and Chinese farmers, and Indian Dalits. Jonathan and I didn't know what some of the lumps we were eating might be, but we gratefully received those dishes as tokens of love. It was the best they had.

There are several other beautiful applications that could be made from this book, but I hope I have dug deep enough on at least this one central theme that all of us will be encouraged to imitate Gaius and be given to hospitality. May it be so Lord Jesus. Amen.