



Speaker:  
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## Faulty Leadership

Series: John's Letters • 15 of 15

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Today we're looking at John's third and final letter—at least, the final one of the ones that we have preserved for us.

Last time, we looked at his second letter. And as these messages go onto the internet they require a title, and the title of last week's was *How to be Inhospitable*. I chose a major theme from John's last letter, which is that we should shun all those who come to us teaching false doctrine. I said that as long as they come in the role of teacher we are to refuse them and not show them hospitality. An uncommon aspect of Christian behaviour. And from this there are three benefits. The three reasons, or benefits, are the following:

1. When we reject such false teachers, we are testifying to them. By having nothing to do with them, we testify to them that we believe as a body that they are false teachers and hopefully it will give them cause for thought.
2. It's a witness to onlookers. So if I escorted someone out of the church building and told them they were not welcome, it would be a good example being set to the people in the church. Perhaps visitors will see how error will not be tolerated. Perhaps neighbours in the street might see someone turning up to your house and watch as they get turned away. And that will have an effect on them.
3. It's a good way of sowing discouragement into the souls of those people. We *want* them to be discouraged. We want the structure of their false religion to come crashing down.

And so we employ that extreme behaviour towards those people. And yet I did add that, should those same people contact you in a spirit of humility and repentance and be genuinely seeking, then you should welcome them with open arms. And we'd be joyful as they sit amongst us and we provide hospitality to them and share the gospel with them.

Today's final letter is to an individual person, Gaius. Now I'm led to believe that "Gaius" was the most common name in the Roman Empire. It's like somebody being called John Smith and trying to work out which John Smith it was. There are several people with the name Gaius in scripture. Unfortunately, even with just those two or three individuals it is not possible to ascertain that it was one of those. But that is not of great importance within the letter.

There are elements that we found in the previous two, unsurprisingly: love and truth. They are there in all the letters. In this one, this final letter, it continues with the theme of hospitality. We saw in the last letter how certain people were not to be shown hospitality. Here we have somebody being commended for their hospitality towards genuine followers of Jesus who were proclaiming his gospel. But this letter also gives us an example of someone who practiced an improper type of shunning whereby he was refusing hospitality in the way that John described in his last letter, but to the wrong people!

Let's delve in as we start this final letter. It's addressed to Gaius, who John says he loves in the truth. And then there is a desire by John. It says he wishes above everything that Gaius would both prosper and be in good health. The same levels of health as he had in a spiritual way.

Now, what does he mean by prosperity? He means for Gaius to have an income. That he would have enough of an income to look after himself.

We want those basic things, do we not, like food, water, clothes and shelter. And I don't think for one second that John wished Gaius to be a millionaire. He also of course wished him to be healthy in his body. The spiritual health of Gaius was okay. But a lack in one of the other two could be a problem. If a servant of God was struggling with the basic things in life, or if they were on a sick bed, it could distract them and hinder their ministry.

You will be aware by now that there is a sect within professing Christianity which promotes something called a "Prosperity Gospel". This is a movement that emerged from within Pentecostalism, for the most part. And we have seen have we not that they have gone about formulating a message. And they built it in the wrong way. The wrong way to build up a model, a system, a set of beliefs, is to decide what your belief is *then* go to the scriptures and see if you can find any verses that can possibly make it look as if your argument is valid. We sometimes call those things "proof texts" because we are going to the Bible to try and prove a belief that we already have.

That sounds to some like it's a reasonable way of developing doctrine, because we are searching the scriptures. Friends, it's the wrong way round. We start with the Bible. We read it. We allow *it* to speak to *us* and tell *us* what good doctrine is. It is very easy to come up with the most bizarre theories about anything and go to the scriptures and find one or two verses that seem to add weight to your bizarre claim. Instead we need to look at the whole Bible. We need to let scripture interpret scripture. And if we do that faithfully, it will filter out all the nonsense and stop us from developing such wrong doctrines like the Prosperity Gospel. This gospel uses Old Testament texts, which are believed by many to be instead describing an idealized, restored Israel. (Many Reformed people use those verses as figures for the gospel age. That is, they speak figuratively about the age of the Gospel in which we live.)

So then, the Prosperity Gospel teaches that it is God's will for us to be prospering—by which they mean wealthy—and also being in good health all our lives. And that if neither of those are true, well that cannot be God's will. If you thought about this for some time, you might be drawn to certain scriptures which say something different. You may recall perhaps individuals in the Bible who God deliberately sent ill health or disability to. Perhaps he may have even brought them to the to the brink, where they just about had enough food and water to live on, to teach them some lesson of some kind.

Let me read this from Proverbs chapter 13 verses 7 to 9. "Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die. Remove far from me vanity and lies, and **give me neither poverty nor riches**. Feed me with food convenient for me, lest I be full and deny thee and say *Who is the Lord?* or lest I be poor, and steal and take the name of my God in vain." So there are two extremes to be avoided: we are not meant to be rich and we're not meant to be poverty-stricken either. We hope and pray the Lord will situate us somewhere in the middle.

With the issue of health we should be cautious. If there's an unbeliever with some illness, and for the reasons of love or some affinity you have with them, you decide that you want to pray earnestly to God. It could be a relative who you love. And so you pray for them, earnestly, that they would be healed. Let me suggest this to you. As you pray for that loved one's health and prosperity and easy

career through life, is it not the case that you are clearing the path that leads to their destruction? Proverbs has just told us that when someone is full, that is wealthy and well, the more likely they are to ignore God, to have nothing to do with him. It's true. Why else would Jesus say there are not many rich men who enter the kingdom. It's not many. What does it say in Revelation, in the church of Laodicea's letter? They were criticized because they were saying in their own hearts, *Well, we're rich. We have this and we have that...we don't have need of anything!* And they became **cold** towards God. This is what happens.

So I think we should be cautious before we just launch in and pray for an easy life for unbelievers. Perhaps we should be praying that the Lord will leave them with the disability, leave them alone until they finally surrender to God and repent. I mean honestly: what use is it if they live a happy, carefree, godless life of health and wealth only to die and go to an eternal hell? And then you, out of love, **have made it easier for them**. Friends, I am not saying to you that you should not pray for people to be better. You will pray for them as you are burdened. I am only asking you to exercise caution with the prayers for healing.

We see that John had said that Gaius is in any case healthy in a spiritual way. He says in verse 2 that his soul prospers, and in verse 3, it's explained what that prosperity is. There was truth in Gaius. Truth in him. And also he walked according to that truth. John's telling us that *Gaius held the truth and the truth held him*. That's what it should be like for us. Remember in 2 John there is a command from God that we walk in truth.

John says in verse 4 that this is his greatest joy. Joy! It's his greatest joy to witness other people walking in truth. Not just believe in doctrines but allow these to imprint on their lives and guide them in how they act and speak and think. John's joy.

We also spotted in verse 4 the term "my children". What John's saying is "Gaius, it was great to hear that you are adhering to the truth and you're walking in that truth. I'm so happy because I just love to see my children act like that." You see, John is saying Gaius is effectively his *child*. And it could be because of simple affection, but it could also be that Gaius was a convert of John's. Perhaps through direct evangelism by John or through an indirect method like a letter Gaius had read from John. Listen to what it says in 1 Corinthians chapter 4 and verses 14 and 15. Paul says, "I write not these things to shame you but, **as my beloved sons**, I warn you. For though you have ten thousand instructors in Christ, you have not many fathers. For in Christ Jesus. **I have begotten you through the gospel.**" Paul says that *I fathered you* in a sense, through preaching the gospel. It's like these converts that are saved through your ministry become like sons—you cherish them.

And this section now in verses 5 to 8: we look at Gaius's faithful hospitality. It says he was faithfully entertaining them, both the brethren and even people he didn't know. People would testify to Gaius's charitable, Christlike nature. And so he's commended there. And we get here a glimpse into another aspect of New Testament Christian life and can learn a few things from it. What can we learn from these few verses?

1. We see that this hospitality to believers is expected of us, whether those people are known to us or not. You might think that well, are you asking us to take in any Tom, Dick or Harry into our homes who turns up at our door? If someone knocked on your door and asked for a bed for the night and some food, well, depending on the circumstances, you might either risk it or phone the police! I don't know. But in what circumstance would we reasonably take in a stranger? Well, I'll give you an example from a few weeks ago. A friend of mine was traveling across the country and emailed me and asked if there was any chance he could

stay in mine one night and then be up early and off again. And I said, “Absolutely. Of course you can.” He came, and we had great fellowship. And during that time of fellowship, he asked me if I’d consider giving a night’s accommodation to somebody else, who I didn’t know. He commended this brother. He knew him. And so from my point of view that recommendation from a brother who I trust was good enough, and I immediately said “Yes!” So I phoned the guy and we made arrangements. And so there’s a circumstance where we might take in a stranger, as well brethren we know.

2. What else can we learn? Well, we can learn that (in verse 6) if we entertain people by having them and feeding them and giving them a bed for the night, we ought to send them on their journey fully refreshed. And by giving them food and water and rest and some Christian fellowship, you are re-energizing them, and you send them on their way refreshed. Verse six sounds a little awkward. It means these people, if you send them forward on their journey, you’re doing well if you **do it in a manner worthy of God**. We are to look after these people and send them on their journey in a manner that is worthy of God.

You have to remember folks that when a Christian comes to you, and you maybe have them in your homes, this is a child of the living God! You should show them the respect and love that you would show Jesus himself if he came to your house. That’s our obligation.

3. What else do we get from here? We noted that they took nothing from the Gentiles. Now, the Gentiles would have been unbelievers and that is what is meant. We don’t beg from the world to fund our exploits. You know, there were in ancient times travelling teachers who would go about with whatever the latest ideology or religion was. And they would maybe drop hints, I don’t know. But they would get money. People would give them money. Perhaps if the people were superstitious they would give them money so that no bad luck would come their way. Perhaps this is why when “Jehovah’s Witnesses” so called go to people’s houses that some people automatically go and give them some money. Maybe it’s hedging their bets—just in case, you know? *I’ll be nice to these religious people—they might have the right religion—and then I’ve got all the bases covered*. Well these ancient teachers would go around, and I’ve read the account of one boasting that when he when he got home he had sackfuls of money from going around with his false teaching. Christians are not supposed to be like this. We don’t beg from the world. And I’d suggest to you that we be ultra-cautious with that collection plate, that we make sure that we never find ourselves thrusting a collection plate under the nose of a visitor if they are known to not be believers. What a terrible impression that has often made on the world.

However, having said that, if unbelievers willingly offer to contribute to the work of the church, then we take it. We just take it. We’re not compromising our principles by doing so. If it’s willingly given we take it. Did not Jesus accept a glass of water from an unbelieving woman? Did the Hebrews not take money and clothes and jewellery from the unbelieving Egyptians? So if God’s stirs up the world to throw money our way to help us in our gospel endeavours, then we take it.

4. Another thing we find from this little section is that God has ordained that the church should support its workers. Let me read from 1 Corinthians and chapter 9 and verses 13 and 14: “Do you not know that they which minister about holy things live off the things of the temple? And they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live off the gospel.” It is of course the duty of the church as a whole to financially support the workers, whether they be pastors,

evangelists or missionaries. It is the church's job to support them as they are able to. So God has ordained this, and it's obvious from what we've just read. This is an ancient principle of God's.

5. Here's another thing from here connected with this. In verse 8 it uses the term "fellow helpers". Fellow helpers. It means that whenever the members of a church give of their own substance to the workers of the gospel., they are involving themselves in that very campaign. If you make a contribution to a pastor of a church, you are fully involving yourself in that ministry. You are fellow helpers. You are seen as being alongside them. And although not everyone is cut out for being a missionary or a pastor, insofar as you help those people you enter into their ministry with them. You're involved. Jesus says here in Matthew chapter 10 and verse 40 and 41, "He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward, and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward." It's a statement of an equality that is quite astounding. That someone who supports in practical, material ways the missions of the church will be looked on in the same way as those evangelists and pastors themselves. Friends, never underestimate that involvement in the ministry.

What is all this about, these issues, these commendations? They're about missionaries. Missionaries of what? **Missionaries of the gospel.** What is the gospel? **It is a message of the good news that salvation is come to this world.** Who is the gospel about? **It's about Jesus Christ,** the wonderful Jesus Christ, who went and died on a cross for his people to take all their sins and claim them as if they were his own.

And it says in verse 7 why they went out. *For his name's sake.* For his name's sake. You know, if we translated that more literally it would say, "For the sake of the name." Not his name: THE name. What is the name? THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST. It is a marvellous name. It not only identifies him; it also tells us wonderful things about his characteristics, his wonderful characteristics. No wonder then that it is said that he has "a name which is above every name". What a saviour!

If you look at verses 9 and 10, we see this next issue with Diotrephes. There's a problem here. We have John saying that "I've written to the church where Diotrephes was in leadership. I wrote to them but Diotrephes would have nothing to do with us!" It may well be that John wrote a letter to them and it was immediately destroyed—thrown on the fire perhaps by Diotrephes.

He was not only refusing to listen to John; he was turning missionaries and preachers away. He would not show them any hospitality. And when he found out that people in the congregation were sympathetic to these travellers, and *were* willing to show them hospitality, he had them thrown out! He was disfellowshipping those who were sympathetic. As if that wasn't bad enough, he also slandered the Apostle John. And perhaps he was showing his contempt for all the apostles. As I said earlier, he was turning people away in the exact fashion that John told us to in his second letter but the wrong people.

Why? Why this extreme behaviour? I want to propose to you one idea. You have to remember that with the final writings of the Bible, with the apostles dying, the apostolic age was coming to an end. There was therefore a change in the way churches were governed. The system of apostles having the oversight of churches all over the place would obviously have to come to an end. If the churches believed—which is quite right—that the apostolic office would be coming to an end, then who was to have the oversight?

The churches had been told that they should appoint leaders elders and deacons from amongst them and that they would rule. So, what happened, which is quite natural, is that there had to be a figurehead. There has to be someone who is regarded as, if you like, being in charge. If you've any experience of committees, you will know that a committee without a chairman would not work. There needs to be someone who takes charge and makes decisions about how the meeting will progress. And it's the same in churches. We have a natural inclination towards having maybe several leaders but having one who is "in charge"—the one who is the figurehead of the church. And so back in the early church as the elders were being appointed in churches there would arise quite naturally one of those elders that would be perhaps more gifted in preaching and so we would have a chief elder—sometimes called the "teaching elder", the one who does most of the teaching. That man would be the figurehead of that church. And so when the letters were sent out in the Book of Revelation to the various churches in Asia Minor, they were addressed to the "angels" of each church. The angels are the messengers of each church, and it's possible that this was referring to the *pastors* of each church. But certainly we know for sure that there was a tendency to have a pastor.

What I think possibly happened back then was this. Let me try and give the benefit of the doubt to Diotrephes. Let's say that he knew the apostolic age was coming to an end. He knew that the churches would have to be autonomous. They would be in unity with other churches, but each local church would need a rulership—an eldership that ruled well. And they would need a chief elder. Someone to look to, to be the chairman, the final arbiter on decisions in the church. And perhaps Diotrephes thought *We need to be setting this up, and I'm constantly being told what to do by John. And he's sending these people.* And maybe he just got sick of the interference as he saw it, and perhaps he thought that he should then start to separate himself from them, and tell the missionaries to go.

At best, Diotrephes's behaviour would be regarded as very unwise. But he did more than that. He showed a lack of humility and a lack of love in his dealings with the apostle. I mean, why didn't Diotrephes reason with John like a brother? If what I proposed was possibly true, Diotrephes could have approached John and said, "Look, John. We love you. We recognize your authority as an apostle. But the time of the apostles is ending. We need to stand on our own two feet. And it's not helpful when we receive preachers and missionaries and we get these letters off you all the time. We need to be left alone!" Now, had Diotrephes said anything like that, John in his charity would have reasoned with Diotrephes and perhaps explained why, for the time being, he should remain as the authoritative voice over the church.

But Diotrephes didn't do anything like that. He was on very shaky ground in what he did, and it is possible that he was not a believer at all. That's maybe the view of most people who read this book. We shouldn't jump to conclusions. But as we've seen, if people act in these ungodly ways, they should not be thinking of themselves as believers. They should think there's something wrong that needs fixing.

What else can we say about this? We see that in here is an example that shows us that **faulty church leadership is real**. It was something back then, and it is it something that will carry on in the future for as long as there is a church. Faulty church leadership.

Leaders—like elders and pastors—do things wrong. Not always. Maybe hardly ever. But they will all make mistakes.

- They will make bad judgments
- They will institute practices which are not Biblical

- They may teach doctrines which are not founded on the scriptures
- There may be an emphasis in their preaching which doesn't reflect the emphasis that we see in the Bible
- And they may even show a lack of wisdom in discipline. And discipline is something that the church is meant to submit to!

So you have this bizarre situation with Diotrephes, where the leader who they're supposed to submit to is telling them to have nothing to do with these other Christians over here. An appalling judgment by Diotrephes. And it happens today. It happens today.

Have a look at this in Titus Chapter 1. This is the description of a leader in the church (or what they should be). Titus Chapter 1 verses 8 and 9. A leader "...should be **a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate**, holding fast the faithful word as he is being taught." High standards! It is said that we know when there is a great fault in a country's regime when good men go to jail. And there have been times in the past when our country has put godly, Christ-like men in jail. It is a sign that something is fundamentally wrong. And when we get an example like this where leaders in churches are disfellowshipping or even expelling good Christian men from their congregations, there is a serious fault. A lack of wisdom and lack of spiritual maturity.

John says that this bad judgment of Diotrephes he's going to make known if he visits. Did John get round to visiting? I don't know. But if he visited, he planned to expose all this. You see he could send all the letters he wanted, and they could all go in the bin. But if he turns up then Diotrephes won't be able to do anything. John could just march in there and say his piece to the church, and hopefully himself discipline Diotrephes and get him thrown out. Paul says in 1 Timothy, in the fifth chapter, that the leaders who sin, the elders who sin, you should expose in front of everyone—make their sin known because it's very serious.

Let's move on to verses 11 and 12. We have another one of John's famous black and white statements. "Beloved, don't follow that which is evil—follow that which is good. He that does good is of God; he that does evil is not of God." Clear enough? And he gives us an example of a guy called Demetrius. He commends Demetrius as a godly man. (Maybe Demetrius was the one who was delivering this letter by hand.) But there's a high standard set by John—very black and white. It's almost as if our aim is to be 100% perfect in doctrine and practice! Well friends, that is **exactly** what our target is. We are meant to be 100% sinless. Perfect in doctrine and completely without blame in all our practice. Please don't be tempted to laugh and say that it's unrealistic. It is what God has asked us to do. Let's not laugh in his face and claim we're not able to do it. If we're not able to do it—and who is, who has ever been—we don't answer back to God. We own up to our deficiency and we go to God and say sorry, ask for forgiveness and ask for help.

Our closing remarks then, verses 13 and 14. Very similar to 2 John. John says to them, "This is so nice, writing to you in this letter, but I so want to see you face to face!" There's something important about seeing and meeting them face-to-face.

We live in these unusual, *unique* days, where we find half the world in an enforced lockdown because of a virus. And so we are prevented from meeting face-to-face. The sermons of this church go out on the internet for the time being. Some churches do live streaming, video streaming. So people can watch their pastor and see his face if you like while he's preaching. But all these things are just making do. I do hope we're not satisfied with that. You know, pastors around the world I think are slightly concerned. Concerned that their people might get used to this way of listening to

the messages. They might think that they are fulfilling their responsibilities by praying at home and listening to their pastor online. That of course is not the case.

What is this business about being face to face that John places an emphasis on? Well that's the way God has made us. He has made us as creatures that respond to each other in the best way when we see each other face to face. We have very sophisticated exchanges between people based on complexities of language and complexities of facial expressions and other mannerisms. And it is an experience that cannot be reproduced by written letters, emails or even video chats. We were meant to interact face-to-face. Social creatures. This is how God has made us.

And there's my prayer: that not only the people from this congregation but those from every congregation in our land would be dissatisfied right now. That they would yearn to have proper fellowship with the saints. And if there are any people out there who feel quite comfortable and could quite happily go on this way indefinitely, there's something wrong. There is something wrong with their walk and they need to be made aware of it and ask God to help them. I mean, can you imagine a mother being separated from her children by thousands of miles and never be able to meet them again? They may communicate through the internet. They may be able to see each other's faces on a computer screen. But anyone will tell you that is not as good, not by a long way. They want to see them, they want to get hold of them, they want to hug and kiss them and so on. And I just pray, I pray, that when we come out of this episode that the church will not be worse off but that it will be cleansed and purged and it will be healthier as a result.

Well friends after these several months, we have come to the end of John's writings. We are witnessing the end of all those ages of inspiration. For thousands of years God has been communicating to his people, the prophets and the apostles. Even Jesus' own words are recorded. And then Jesus ascends. The apostles one by one die. And with those writings comes the end of all inspiration. And those writings go out. They get shared. The churches reproduce them. They use them to teach from. They acknowledge them as having apostolic authority. In the providence of God, the church was put into something of a corner and had to make a formal declaration together about which of these writings which were around should be regarded as the word of God. And so they agreed together that all these writings—that we now know as the Bible—should be gathered together and called “the Scriptures”. The Holy Bible. And this is what we have today in our own language.

John has been so highly challenging, and he has been greatly encouraging. He's been doctrinal. He's also been practical. And all those things we've looked at should be considered with reference to Jesus Christ himself. Jesus Christ.

We respect John. We respect him. But much more Jesus Christ. We're thankful to John for giving these things to Christians throughout history. We're thankful to him. But we're much more thankful to the one who he wrote about. The one who inspired him to record these things for us.

We shall close with a word of praise to Jesus. These are the words of John himself from The Book of Revelation, and the first chapter: “John, to the seven churches which are in Asia. Grace be unto you and peace, from him which is and which was and which is to come, and from the seven spirits which are before his throne; and from JESUS CHRIST, who is the faithful witness and the first begotten of the dead and the prince of the kings of the earth. **Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and made us kings and priests unto God and his father: to him be glory and dominion forever and ever.** Amen.”