

**WHAT ARE YOU KNOWN FOR?  
HOW TO HAVE A GOD-HONORING REPUTATION:  
AN EXPOSITION OF 3 JOHN**

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**1 John 1:1-8:  
Part I**

**I. INTRODUCTION:**

A. In his book, *I Almost Missed The Sunset*, Bill Gaither writes:

Gloria and I had been married a couple of years. We were teaching school in Alexandria, Indiana, where I had grown up, and we wanted a piece of land where we could build a house. I noticed the parcel south of town where cattle grazed, and I learned it belonged to a 92-year-old retired banker named Mr. Yule. He owned a lot of land in the area, and word was he would sell none of it. He gave the same speech to everyone who inquired: "I promised the farmers they could use it for their cattle."

Gloria and I visited him at the bank. Although he was retired, he spent a couple of hours each morning in his office. He looked at us over the top of his bifocals.

I introduced myself and told him we were interested in a piece of his land. "Not selling," he said pleasantly. "Promised it to a farmer for grazing."

"I know, but we teach school here and thought maybe you'd be interested in selling it to someone planning to settle in the area."

He pursed his lips and stared at me. "What'd you say your name was?"

"Gaither. Bill Gaither."

"Hmmm. Any relation to Grover Gaither?"

"Yes, sir. He was my granddad."

Mr. Yule put down his paper and removed his glasses. "Interesting. Grover Gaither was the best worker I ever had on my farm. Full day's work for a day's pay. So honest. What'd you say you wanted?"

I told him again.

"Let me do some thinking on it, then come back and see me."

I came back within the week, and Mr. Yule told me he had had the property appraised. I held my breath. "How does \$3,800 sound? Would that be okay?"

If that was per acre, I would have to come up with nearly \$60,000! “\$3,800?” I repeated.

“Yup. Fifteen acres for \$3,800.”

I knew it had to be worth at least three times that. I readily accepted.

Nearly three decades later, my son and I strolled that beautiful, lush property that had once been pasture land. “Benjy” I said, “you’ve had this wonderful place to grow up through nothing that you’ve done, but because of the good name of a great-granddad you never met.”

***“A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.”  
Proverbs 22:1***

***Transition:***

- B. In 3 John we have an historical account that highlights the reputations of three individuals. First person mentioned is the addressee of this letter: Gaius. The second individual is Diotrephes, and the third is Demetrius. Addition to the three individuals, we can also learn more about the Apostle John’s character. Thus, the title of this evening’s exposition of Third John is: *What are you known for? How to have a God-honoring Reputation!*
- C. Here’s our reason why we are looking at character? The Apostle John is not only concerned about doctrine, how much bible and theology a Christian knows, he is also concerned about one’s character, one’s daily behavior, how one conducts his or her life.
- D. Churches, great churches, not only come under attack from dark satanic forces, forces that lie outside of the church walls, but also from potential forces within. For example, because of theological ignorance or willful, self-centered rebellion churches fall to doctrinal deviation. But there is also another persistent threat churches face: moral failure among its members and leaders. When moral failure finds expression among its people, the health and collapse of a church becomes a real possibility.
- E. Or we can look at this way.... why we are examining what it means to have a God-honoring reputation? While 1 and 2 John the apostle addresses false teaching, in 3 John the apostle John addresses the moral failure of a particular individual and intends to confront him directly when given the opportunity to visit his church.
- F. Before we examine the reputations of Gaius and John in our first study (vv. 1-8), and Diotrephes and Demetrius in our second study (vv. 9-15), we need to ask ourselves what does the word, “reputation” mean:
- G. According to *Encarta Dictionary*, the word “reputation” is used in three different ways:
  - 1. Reputation refers to general opinions, that is, the views that are generally held about somebody or something;

2. Reputation refers to a “good opinion”, that is, a high opinion that people hold about somebody or something.
    3. Reputation also refers to “something that somebody is known for.” This nuance refers to “the generally accepted estimation of somebody or something as having particular qualities or attributes.
      - a. Edgar Watson How offered an interesting observation about a person’s reputation: “What people say behind your back is your standing in the community.”
- H. Before we examine what John under pen of inspiration records about these three characters, let’s set the scene:
1. The apostle John is responding to a report he received about a particular local church. Evidently, one of the church leaders, a man by the name of Diotrephes, asserted control over the congregation to such an extent that he was forbidding itinerant preachers of other churches from ministering to his congregation.
    - a. The early church had the practice of sending out itinerant ministers as messengers of the apostles or churches. These men would minister in a local church for a period of time, providing spiritual encouragement and doctrinal instruction.
    - b. These traveling preachers were, according to verse 7, “ministering for His name’s sake.” Even worse, any member of his church who dared to show hospitality to these evangelists, these itinerant preachers, were expelled from the church.
  2. But there is more here than simply rejecting these ministers. In verse 9 we see that the apostle John had written them a letter and his letter was rejected. So, here is a possible scenario of the chain of events that then led John to write this letter to Gaius and declaring to him, among other things, that he intends to plan a visit there to confront Diotrephes.
    - a. Perhaps this church was in the grips of a theological struggle that is described in 1 and 2 John. Theological deviation was threatening their church like so many others.
    - b. John writes a letter to the church but an influential man named Diotrephes rejected his letter (3 John 9).
    - c. John sends the itinerant preachers to them but Diotrephes steps forward and refuses to acknowledge and care for these men (vs. 10)
    - d. Diotrephes not only repudiates John publicly (vs. 9) but spreads malicious rumors about John’s character (vs. 10)
    - e. Diotrephes forces his people to not only refuse to demonstrate hospitality to them but to even speak to them. If they do, they are thrown out (vs. 10).

3. So, we have an arrogant, controlling leader of the church, Diotrephes, violating Christ's command to love one another. So, John wrote this letter to deal with the problem, to inform the recipient that he is planning a personal visit, and to encourage Gaius, the letter's recipient. But John also tells Gaius that he can trust Demetrius.
- I. This letter is dealing with a problem that is all too common in our local churches: personal ambition, a quest to gain and maintain power and control, and utter self-centeredness. The upshot from violating the commandment to love one another with agape love, can lead to disastrous consequences: disunity: Agape love is the "*commitment of the will to the true good of another person.*" Not only do power plays of this sort destroy the effectiveness of ministry both inside and outside the church walls, but it can lead to such emotional and spiritual scarring that can be so traumatic that some people will never walk into another church again.
    1. This is illustrated in the life of the famous author Mark Twain. Church leaders were largely to blame for his becoming hostile to the Bible and the Christian faith. As he grew up, he knew elders and deacons who owned slaves and abused them. He heard men using foul language and saw them practice dishonesty during the week after speaking piously in church on Sunday. He listened to ministers use the Bible to justify slavery. Although he saw genuine love for the Lord Jesus in some people, including his mother and his wife, he was so disturbed by the bad teaching and poor example of church leaders that he became bitter toward the things of God.
    2. Indeed, it is a privilege to be an elder, a deacon, a Sunday school teacher, or a student leader. But it is also an awesome responsibility. Let's make sure we attract people to the Savior rather than turn them away.
  - J. Just as some people will never walk through the church doors again because they were so terribly disturbed and hurt by ego-centered leaders, some churches, as a whole, never regain their reputation, no matter how many years separate the event from present day. It is just amazing how the sins of past church leaders, whether they official or non-official leaders, can haunt the effectiveness, health, and growth of churches today. As we enter into a post-Christian culture, personal integrity, being beyond reproach, imitating Jesus Christ, is desperately needed. Here's why. People need to see us living out what we claim to be. People are looking for someone to believe in, someone that is true and authentic. Theological purity and godly lifestyles together, harmonized, should point people to Jesus Christ. People need to see "truth in action." We call this lifestyle evangelism.

## II. Exposition of Third John 1-8:

A. Let's now directly turn to our exposition of Third John. From a bird's eyes' perspective we are going to divide this letter the following way:

- a. The Reputation of Gaius: vv. 1-8;
- b. The Reputation of Diotrefes: vv. 9-11;
- c. The reputation of Demetrius: vs. 12;
- d. Conclusion: vv.13-14.

B. The Reputation of Gaius:

***Verse 1: "The elder, to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth."***

***Let's make some observations about Gaius:***

1. We know nothing about Gaius outside of what this particular letter tell us. This name, Gaius, is a common name in the Greek world at that time and in the N.T. we have a number of others men named Gaius:
  - a. Gaius of Macedonia who was seized by a rioting mob at Ephesus (Acts 19:29;
  - b. There is Gaius who traveled with the Apostle Paul on his last trip to Jerusalem and who formed part of the group of delegates which presented the offering from the gentile churches to the church in Judea in Acts 20:4;
  - c. There was Gaius from Derbe who seemed to have represented a church there and perhaps other churches of Galatia;
  - d. There was Gaius of Corinth in whose home Paul when Paul wrote his letter to the Romans in Romans 16:23
2. Rather, this Gaius, here in verse 1 is described as "*beloved*", and whom the apostle John loves in truth.
3. This word, "beloved" or could be translated in your Bible, "dear friend" or "dearly loved one" is translated from the Greek word "agape" (love, the highest form of love) and is also related to the verb, "*I love in the truth.*"
  - a. We also see this word "dear friend" or "beloved" three more times in 3 John:
    1. vs. 2: Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in good health, just as your soul prospers.
    2. vs. 5: Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers.

3. Vs. 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.
4. How should “agape” love be defined? The best definition I’ve ever heard is from J. Budziszewski in his book, *Ask Me Anything*, volume 1. He defines “agape” love as the “commitment of the will to the true good of another person.”
5. So, here we have a “man’s man,” the apostle John, saying I “agape” you Gaius, I “agape you in truth.”
6. It is interesting to note that he relates agape love to truth. Amazingly we often just state that what John is emphasizing here is doctrinal truth derived from Christ and the apostles. But if you closely read John’s letters you see that John’s contain numerous, numerous references to truth. **No single reference explains every occurrence.** Rather, following Douglas Moo, from his commentary on 1-3 John, we might take all of his John’s references from his three letters and place them into these helpful categories:
  - a. Truth is possessed and imparted by the Holy Spirit, who is truth (1 John 2:20; 4:6; 3 John 12);
  - b. Truth refers to the ethical standards God has established for his people as expressed in his commandments (1 John 1:6; 2:21; 3:18; 2 John 4; 3 John 3,4);
  - c. Truth is God’s sanctifying presence, which gives the believer the capacity to reflect God’s character traits, such as love and aversion to sin (1 John 1:8; 2:4, 21);
  - d. Truth refers to the quality of conformity to the way things are in God’s omniscient wisdom (2 John 8);
  - e. Truth refers to the gospel of Jesus Christ, its implications, and the sphere of eternal life into which the gospel ushers those who embrace it (1 John 3:19; 2 John 1, 2, 3; 3 John 1, 8).
7. Here, John is associating truth with ethical standards that God has established for his people. This is substantiated by the fact that John commends Gaius for his behavior. So, let me re-translate verse 1:
 

*“The elder, To my dear friend Gaius, whom I commit my will to your true good by means of the highest ethical standards that God has established.”*
8. I just want to pause here and say we have an immediate example from the apostle John on how we should treat fellow Christians. We’ve got to work on desiring ill will for others, being manipulative, and deceitful when dealing with fellow believers. Like our study from James taught us, we’ve have to be habitually discipline in controlling the tongue. Commitment of the will to the true good of another involves committing yourself to loving others with their best interests at heart. We’ve also got to stop with pettiness with our time, energy, and resources.

So, when you see your brother in need, love him. Meet his needs. Do what is best for him or her no matter how costly it is!

9 Vs. 2: ***“Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.”***

- a. This statement is typical in letter greetings. Why make a statement about physical health? They did not have the medical resources we have today. Life expectancy was half that of modern standards. But this greeting could also be a note of personal ministry to him because Gaius could have actually been physically weak from some illness or affliction, or just possess some weak disposition.
  1. We also see another example from the Apostle John: He is concerned about our temporal well-being, not just our spiritual welfare. We need to be the same way.
- b. Notice that John observes that Gaius’ soul prospers. He is maturing and growing spiritually. He’s not stagnant; he’s not carnal; he’s not indifferent. He is a man who is walking in fellowship with God. He’s in excellent spiritual shape though he may be in poor physical health. What a contrast here. So many of us are in great physical shape but are in poor spiritual health. But then there are those of us are experiencing poor physical and poor spiritual health. So, here’ John prays that Gaius’s physical health will match his spiritual health.

10. So, what do we know about Gaius’ so far:

- a. He is dearly loved by the Apostle John to such an extent that John has committed his will to Gaius’ true good with the highest ethics.
- b. He might be in poor physical health.
- c. He is in excellent spiritual health. He is growing, godly person.

11. Verses 3-4 reveal more truths about Gaius’s character:

***“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.”***

- a. At this point we go from the introduction to the body of the letter (which goes from vv. 3-14).
- b. It seems that the missionaries who were rejected by Diotrephes went back to John. These fellow believers, these itinerant preachers, gave testimony about what they witnessed about Gaius.
- c. Interestingly, this word “testified” is the same word for “reputation” (1 Timothy 3:7) and seems to be the basis where “martyred” is derived from.

- d. What was John's response to this report? "***For I greatly rejoiced.***" In other words, "*I was delighted; I felt extremely happy; it was a great joy to me; what happiness it gave me.*" We see this again in verse 4 when he states, "*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.*"
1. How affirming to have the apostle John, the one whom intimately walked with Jesus Christ, to express his great delight to Gaius with pen and ink.
- e. But I also appreciate the fact that John has no greater joy than to hear about those whose style of life is consistent with God's truth. What a great focus to have! His joy is not found in merely knowing doctrine but in the relationship between truth and one's conduct.
- f. Here we have, Gaius, a man is living out God's truth with the highest ethical standards. Well, what is he doing?
- g. First, he is "**walking in the truth**" (vs. 3). In other words, he not only knows doctrine, but he is living these truths out in such a way that it is evident in the way he lives his daily life. "*Walking in the truth*" is a powerful expression because that was their primary mode of transportation. One foot in front of another. "*Walk*" refers to his "*moment-by moment, daily conduct.*"
- h. This is reaffirmed with verse 4: "***I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.***"
12. What evidences do we have that Gaius's lifestyle is consistent with biblical truth: ***Consider Verses 5-6: "Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers who have born witness of your love before the church, who have born witness of your love before the church."***
- a. Gaius is faithful: His conduct is praiseworthy because it is he is practicing faithfulness; he is committed himself to fidelity to the truth. Just like 2 John declares in verses 1-2, love stems from truth. John describes Gaius as being faithful. He is faithful in what he does. He is loyal to the truth.
  - b. How is his fidelity to the truth being demonstrated? He is fulfilling the second greatest commandment, "***You shall love your neighbor as yourself***" by loving itinerant preachers, his brothers" and strangers, perhaps other itinerant preachers, he did not know.
  - c. His ministry to loving these ministers did not stop with people he only knew, but even included those he did not know.
  - d. In fact, we can re-translate verse 5 to say, "***you demonstrate faithfulness by whatever you do for the brothers- and strangers at that!***" How awesome is Gaius:

1. So, Gaius, was not selective in whom he loved.
2. Gaius, I suspect, went beyond his comfort zone to care for, minister to, and show hospitality to others.
3. He risked himself and his own material possessions because he brought people into his life and home, cared for them.
4. Rather, than waiting for someone else, he is pro-active in ministering to them. He is pro-active about in a God-honoring way: In fact, verse 6, states:  
  
*“who have borne witness of your love before the church.”*
5. So, from verse 6 we see in the phrase, **“you have born witness”**... you have testified (*martyreo*), of your **“love before the church”**... Just as John agape loves Gaius, Gaius agape loves these ministers, even those he does not know.
6. So, he has committed himself to the true good of these ministers, no matter if he knows them or not.
7. **And he did so before the church.** In other words, he is an example to others about what it looks like to love others with the love of Jesus Christ.
  - a. But before what church does he serve as an example?
    1. We can say at least it is his church? But it makes good sense that Diotrephes’ church is aware of his example on how one should behave toward these missionaries.
    2. But some scholars speculate that when John refers to “the church,” he’s not referring to the church where Diotrephes is behaving like a tyrant. Instead, Gaius’ reputation has even reached the ears of the highly respected church in Jerusalem. So, it could be that Gaius’ example of ministering to people was even reported in Jerusalem.

13. Let’s look further by examining the rest of verse 6 and up through verse 8:

***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 sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles. 8 We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth.”***

- a. John now moves from these affirming statements to a request. Let me re-translate this way: ***“You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God.”***
    1. What does that mean? Well, the phrase, “*you will do well*” is idiomatic; it essentially means “*please*.”
    2. So, we can say it this way: ***“Please send them on their way in a manner worthy of God.”***
    3. This is a request to give these traveling preachers, ministers of the gospel, necessary resources. This involves making adequate provisions for them while they are there and at their departure.
    4. Nothing less than such generosity would be “***worthy of God.***” In other words, “this type of sacrificial, self-surrendering, ever genuine, practical meeting needs type of love is the same type of love and provision God gave with the giving of His Son.”
14. Why should Gaius do so? Consider John’s reason in verse 7:  
***“Because they go forth for the sake of the Name.”***
- a. *These missionaries were honored to go out on behalf of that Name, a name, whose name is exalted above every name.*
  - b. To go out for the sake of His name is of supreme honor. Just as it is an honor to suffer his name, it is an honor to go out and minister for the sake of His name.
  - c. John goes on to say in verse 7, ***“because they went forth for His name sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles”*** meaning that it was inappropriate for those who did so to seek support from those who did not believe in or honor that Name. In other words, they are not receive no help from the pagans.
  - d. I like what the *Bible Knowledge Commentary* says about this passage:  
  
“Even in present day, there is something unseemly in a preacher of the gospel soliciting funds from people to whom he offers God’s free salvation.”
- C. So, before we consider how we should live in view of this passage, let’s summarize what we know about Gaius’s reputation:

### THE REPUTATION OF GAIUS:

1. He is associated with people who are following hard after God;
  2. Just as the apostle John committed himself to Gaius' best interest, Gaius has committed himself to the itinerant preachers' best interest-even those he does not know.
  3. He is dynamically growing spiritually.
  4. He practices faithfulness.
  5. His focus is fidelity to the truth.
  6. He is a partner in the advancement of the Good News of Jesus Christ.
  7. He is a godly steward of what God has given him. He is taking time, energy, and resources to minister, care for, and provide for these traveling ministers-even those he does not know.
  8. He is strategic. He could have used his resources differently, but he recognized an immediate need and went out of his way to practically meet those needs even though it would cost him time, energy, and resources. He is also strategic because he is partnering with advancement of the Good News of salvation.
  9. He is sensitive to God's activities. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is spreading among the Gentiles.
  10. He is pro-active in ministering these ministers. Instead of waiting for someone else to do it, he has taken up the responsibility himself (1 John 3:16-17).
  11. He has a reputation of being a person who is displaying truth in action.
- In sum, he has a reputation before others regarding what it looks like to live out biblical truth.***

We also can say something about the Apostle John's reputation from this epistle:

### THE REPUTATION OF THE APOSTLE JOHN:

1. John's greatest joy was not found in earthly possessions, popularity, power, knowledge, or relationships. Rather, his greatest joy was seeing believers live out biblical truth.
2. He affirms those who are practicing faithfulness.
3. He confronts those who morally err.
4. He agape loves people.
5. He is deeply concerned about the local church to the extent that he is willing to

confront their problems.

6. He is sensitive to the needs of missionaries and goes out of his way to make sure they are provided for.

7. He is burdened to see the Gospel of Jesus Christ spread.

***In sum, the Apostle John has committed himself to the true good of others!***

### III. How Should We Then Live:

- A. What is your reputation? What are you known for?
1. Are you known merely as one who knows the truth or are you known as one who practices the truth?
  2. Are you known for being faithful to the truth before your community or are you known for a lack of faithfulness before your community?
  3. Are you known for redirecting your energy, resources, and time for the provision for and advancement of the Gospel, or are you a scrooge when it comes to the advancement of the Gospel?
  4. Are you known for committing yourself to the true good of others by proactively meeting their needs with your livelihood or are you indifferent to such things?
  5. Are you known to be selective in whom you love with the love of Christ or are you one who will go out of your way, take risks, to minister to those whom you don't even know?
- B. In both John and Gaius we see the following qualities, qualities that I believe exemplifies or bears witness to the fact that we are living out the 2 Greatest Commandments in our moment-by-moment living as Christians:
1. Know the Truth;
  2. Possess Conviction about the Truth;
  3. Habitually live out the Truth with a disposition of worship.

### IV. In conclusion:

- A. I want to close with an observation made by Dr. Charles Ryrie in his discussion about faithfulness in his work, *Balancing the Christian Life*:

It is more important to gird yourself for the grind of life than it is to throw ourselves into high gear only for the grandiose affairs of life. The longer I live the more I am convinced that genuine spirituality is not really proved from the pulpit or classroom or Sunday school or board meetings; rather, it is demonstrated best by consistent living before God first of all, and then before those closest to us in the home. A kind of spirituality can be seen on parade; the kind God wants is cultivated and practiced consistently and persistently in the routine of life (pg. 113).

