

Four Snapshots of Character

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[0 : 00] Let's pray. Lord God, our Heavenly Father, we thank you for the new year. We thank you for your blessings on us.

And as we look forward, we ask that you would go before us into this new year, that you would be our rock and our foundation for all that is to come.

And Lord, we pray that as we look at your word just now, that you will speak to us. And as you speak, that we will be attentive to hear and live our lives in light of it.

For the glory of your Son, Jesus. Amen. Well, what is your reputation? What is it like?

What do other people think of you? What are you known for? Reputation is the estimation others have of your character.

[1 : 15] Your integrity, your ability, your standing as a person, what people think about all that stuff. I'm not claiming that that is my reputation-o-meter there.

But we all have a reputation. Good, bad or neutral. And it may be different from what we think it should be.

It's not entirely in our control. It's other people who regard us and hold our reputation. People watch us and form opinions based on what they see.

Now, some aspects of my reputation change over time and in different settings. So, for example, my reputation when I was a lecturer at a Bible college in Nigeria was very different to when I started studying Thai language in Chiang Mai in Thailand.

My situation was different and how I was viewed was different. I never found out my nickname from the students at Bible college.

[2 : 40] And the fact that they wouldn't tell me probably indicates what my reputation might have been. But the most important part of my reputation, and that is that which pertains to my character.

And that doesn't change very much or very often. And the question I want us to consider this morning is, does my reputation bring glory to God and the name of Christ?

We're going to look briefly at four characters in this short letter of John, of 3 John. And I want us to ask ourselves, is there anyone there who looks something like me?

And as we think about that, think about this deeper question, does my life really bring praise to the name of Christ?

So let's get started on 3 John. And the first character, the first snapshot, if you like, is that of Gaius. We don't know much about Gaius.

[4 : 08] We only hear of him in this letter, and we only know what is written here. He is the dear friend of the apostle.

He's called that four times in this letter. And Gaius is commended in four areas of his life. First of all, Gaius was commended for his spiritual integrity.

Verse 2 is like a standard greeting of a letter, but it's very personalized. John is not just writing a generic letter.

He's writing to a dear friend. Gaius had a clean bill of health spiritually. I pray that you may enjoy good health and that you may go well.

It may go well. And that may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well. If I were to pray for you and ask God to bless you physically to the same degree that you are healthy spiritually, what would the results be?

[5 : 32] What would I be praying into your life? How would God answer that? That's a challenging thing. We often like to pray about our physical health.

How about our spiritual health? Gaius had spiritual integrity. He also walked in the truth.

We saw a little bit about walking in the truth last week when we considered 2 John. But the reports that came to John about Gaius was that he was faithful to the truth and that he walked in the truth. And the truth that he's talking about, of course, is God's truth, the truth of the gospel. That he was faithful to the truth means that Gaius kept the standards of God's word.

He was constant in it, whether it was Sunday or whether it was Monday. It didn't change how obedient and constant he was in being faithful to the truth.

[6 : 56] And he walked in the truth. He obeyed what he saw in God's word. He really lived by it. And we saw something of what that means last week in 2 John, as I said.

So what does that mean practically? It means that every aspect of his life was touched by God's word.

It means that he would obey in all areas of his life. An example might be in the area of honesty. Gaius was the type of person who upheld God's standard for honesty, even when it was to his disadvantage, when he was filling out his tax return or whatever.

Gaius was known for spiritual integrity. He walked in the truth. He was also known for his faithful service. In those days, there were itinerant preachers.

[8 : 08] We met them again in our look at 2 John. They went about from place to place, preaching and teaching God's word. And Gaius had a reputation of ministering to and welcoming those people, even though they may not have been known to him personally.

He was doing this because he wanted to honour the Lord who had sent those people out. Gaius was also a generous supporter.

Verses 7 and 8. Gaius had a ministry to the ones who travelled around ministering to him. He ministered to the people who ministered God's word to him.

I don't know whether you realise this, but you have a ministry to those who minister to you.

You have a ministry to Andrew, your minister. You're an encouragement to him when you accept his ministry in a way that honours God.

[9 : 25] And it's not something that can be done by anybody other than God's people. Not by the pagans, as verse 7 says.

Gaius was then a co-worker with those travelling preachers in the ministry of the truth, just as we are when we support and encourage those who minister to us.

This year, how are you going to minister to Andrew, to your minister? So that was Gaius.

He was... He had spiritual integrity. He walked in the truth. He was faithful in service. And he was a generous supporter of those who ministered to him.

He was a very different person. Diotrephes was a prominent member of the church.

[10 : 44] The type of which can unfortunately still be found in churches today. But here's Diotrephes' reputation. And the first thing you know about Diotrephes is that he loved to be first.

He just loved to be the main man. He was proud. And that's a big temptation for us in Christian churches, and especially for us who minister in churches.

Unfortunately, we might identify some in our own church who fit this same description. And even more unfortunately, we may identify in ourselves some motives that fit that description.

Because that's the default setting for sinful people. We love to be first. We love to have it all about us.

We love to be the center of our own universe. And everybody else's universe, for that matter. See, the problem here wasn't a doctrinal or a theological issue with old Diotrephes.

[12 : 17] It was a character issue. He was proud. So who is first in a church setting?

Is it the pastor? Is it the church warden? Is it the most spiritual person in the room? Is it the wisest and most godly Christian?

Well, Paul helps us here. In Colossians 1 verse 18, he says, And he, that is Christ, is the head of the body, the church.

He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. Christ should be first.

Christ is the first. Christ is the first. Christ is the first. Christ is the first. Christ is the first. Even when we try and make ourselves first. He is still the first. He is the center.

[13 : 29] He is the one who it's all about. And anything less than that, which is God's design, that Christ should be first, any other aberration from that, is not to put a too fine a point on it, sinful.

This is serious business. Diotrephes might have seen it as something else.

But it is sinful. And Diotrephes was also an arrogant person. The difference between pride and arrogance is that pride is how we think of ourselves. Arrogance is how we then think of other people. Diotrephes had nothing to do with the other leaders who were over him.

That is, he ignored their authority. And the ESV translation, I think, captures that better. He did not acknowledge our authority. We Aussies love to think that we are egalitarian.

[15:01] Everybody is the same. There's nobody who's better than anybody else. And that's one of our points of pride, almost. And yet that can easily tip over into a disregard for God-given authority and leadership over us.

And that's a danger for us. Now, we don't know why Diotrephes had this arrogant attitude, disregarding the leadership of John and the apostles.

Maybe it was because John and all he represented was old-fashioned, no longer cutting edge. And so we need to move on from that stuff.

Or maybe it was the opposite. Maybe Diotrephes saw himself as the guardian of tradition. John was a dangerous innovator, corrupting the way things had always been done.

Whichever it was, it's just an expression of arrogance, of saying, no, I know better.

[16:26] And so I will reject that God-given authority over me. I'm going to go the way that I think. Diotrephes' pride and arrogance went together.

But it seems that Diotrephes was also given to malicious gossip. Spreading malicious nonsense.

This is an easy trap to fall into. It can start with something small. Sharing a petty grievance.

Or wanting to prove that you are right in the right about someone else. Maybe pointing out a small fault in other people.

And then it escalates. It's encouraged by agreement from others. And then it snowballs into something else.

[17:27] We can help each other here by refusing to participate. By refusing to participate. By refusing to agree to these things.

By refusing to listen to it. Keeping our conversations about each other and with each other in line with Philippians 4.8.

Which says whatever is true. Whatever is noble. Whatever is right. Whatever is pure. Whatever is lovely. Whatever is admirable. If there's anything excellent or praiseworthy.

Think about these things. What a contrast. To malicious nonsense.

But finally, Diotrephes actually took actions against the gospel. Diotrephes refused to welcome the traveling preachers.

[18:33] And tried to stop everyone else from doing so. He tried to frustrate their ministry. And got others to go along with that. There's a progression in Diotrephes behavior here.

It starts with pride. Well, I'm going to be first. Around here. I'm going to be the main one. And then it moves to arrogance.

Because of course that means that nobody can tell me what to do. I'm better than them. And then.

It starts with gossip. Well, you know what they're like. Who would follow them? They're like. You know. Who, who, who, who. And then. It moves on.

To actual actions against the gospel. To see how. Diotrephes has moved down this slippery slope.

[19:39] To actually opposing God active. The work of God actively. And John.

When he comes. Is going to take action. He says. I will call him out. I will confront him. With. For what he is doing.

The reality of his actions. Now. It's not stated here. The reason. Why this would be. But the only reason.

John would want to do this. Is so that. Diotrephes would repent. You see. John hasn't given up. On. Diotrephes. Diotrephes. Diotrephes.

Actions. If we can call them that. Things that Diotrephes did. Can be forgiven. If we're anywhere.

[20:47] On that. Spectrum. That slippery slope. Of pride. Arrogance. Gossip. And then. Actions against the gospel. There is a way back.

From that. In confession. Repentance. And obedience. In faith. But hopefully. It won't get to that.

See. The message. From these two people. Gaius. And Diotrephes. Is to follow the way. Of Gaius. Rather than that.

Of Diotrophes. John says that. In chapter. In verse 11. Dear friend. Do not imitate. What is evil. But what is good.

And the reason. Because the kind of. Behavior. Behavior. Behavior. We exhibit. Indicates. Who we belong to. Anyone who does.

[21 : 52] What is good. Is from God. Anyone who does. What is evil. Is not seen. God. John.

John. Will go on to. Uphold a third person. Demetrius. As an example. Of the good. Who belongs to God. God. And he's already shown us. Diotrophes.

About whom. There is obviously. A question. And it comes back to. What we were talking about earlier. Our reputation.

Is there more. To imitate. In us. Than there is to reject. Our third person.

In verse 12. Is Demetrius. And Demetrius. Is spoken well of. By three different sources. He is spoken well of.

[22 : 50] By everyone. By the truth. Itself. And by John. Now.

If it was just. Everyone speaks well. Of Demetrius. We'd say that. Well. Demetrius. Is obviously. A nice bloke. John.

Was a godly leader. Whose judgment. We. You would trust. And so. To have him. Speak well. Of Demetrius. Well.

We know. His testimony. Is true. So. Demetrius. Really. Was. A good person. But most.

Importantly. If you were. To compare. The life. Of Demetrius. With scripture. That speaks. Well. Of him.

[23 : 45] Also. His life. Was in line. With what. God. Has revealed. Of how. He wants. Us. To live. Wow.

What. What. A reputation. We need. To form. Our opinion. Of people. Our fellow. Church members. Our leaders. Etc. How. How. How. How. How. We regard. Their reputation. That is. By that standard. The Bible. Not whether. We like them.

Or not. Not whether. They. Sound nice. To us. On a Sunday. Or not. Note. The deep. Irony. Here. Diotrophes.

Was the one. Who wanted. To enhance. His reputation. Above all. Others. He wanted. To be first. He wanted. To be known. As the. The main one. He wanted.

[24 : 43] Preeminence. But when weighed. Against the truth. God's word. God's requirements. We find that. Quite the opposite.

Is the case. God's word. God's word. God's word. God's word. God's word. So we come to our fourth. Character. The elder himself.

John. And that's seen throughout the whole letter. But as we look at what this. The. Letter reveals about this man.

The first thing that strikes us. Is that he was humble. Which is quite a contrast. To. Diotrophes. He was a.

The apostle. John. One. The brother of James. One of the sons of thunder. One of the inner four. Of. Jesus. Disciples.

[25 : 43] He was the last. Remaining apostle. Who had been there. Throughout. Jesus. Earthly. Ministry. He'd been a believer. For longer. Than anyone else.

Living at that time. And yet. He simply calls himself. The elder. He identifies himself.

With Gaius. Comes alongside him. As a dear friend. He was someone. Who got along well. With his fellow Christians.

And could address. Gaius. As a dear friend. But also. Church members. As his friends. Friends. And. He was a humble person.

Not putting his position. And making himself. First. But coming alongside. And John. Delighted.

[26 : 38] In the. Success. Of others. In ministry. We see that. In verse 3. It gave him great joy. To hear. Of Gaius's reputation.

And testimony. In verse 5. He encouraged Gaius. Saying. You are faithful. It's an encouragement. It's not. Again. Not something. We. Aussies. Are very good at. Something. We need. To learn. Maybe. In verse 11.

He. Exhorted. Gaius. To excellence. Do not. Imitate. What is evil. Imitate. What's good. He delighted.

In the success. Of others. But he also. Delighted. When any of his people. Did well. In the faith. Verse 4. I have no greater joy.

[27 : 37] He says. Than to hear. That my children. Are walking in the truth. What gives me. The greatest joy. About my time. Of teaching. In Nigeria.

Bible teaching. In Nigeria. Isn't. When I think. Of the brilliance. Of some of my students. How. How many. Marks. They got. Or the.

Beautiful essays. They wrote. Or any of that stuff. But I've had the privilege. Of. Observing them. In ministry. And the stories.

Of. Their faithfulness. Is what brings me. To tears. Not the brilliance. Of their marks. If you're wondering.

How you can. Most bless. And encourage. Your mentors. Your pastor. The people you look up to. And even those who look up to you.

[28 : 36] In the faith. Walk. In the truth. Be faithful. Be righteous.

In the way you live. As. But John. Wasn't.

Afraid. To rebuke. As we've seen. He was convinced. of who should be first in the church. And that's why he was not afraid to rebuke Diotrephes.

See, it wasn't John who should be first in this situation. It wasn't Diotrephes. It wasn't even Gaius or Demetrius.

But Jesus and John saw that and was convinced of it. So imagine you are Gaius receiving this letter.

[29 : 48] How would you feel? How would you respond? Would you be encouraged to do more good and godly things?

I think I might. I think I might. But if you were Diotrephes who intercepted this letter, what would and should your reaction be?

Would it make you angry? That John, what's he saying? Or would it make you repentant? The truth is that we're all both Gaius and Diotrephes.

We have a bit of both in us. So how should this letter make us react?

What? Let's look for character to imitate in others.

[31 : 01] There are no plagiarism laws regarding good character. We can imitate it without fear. Do we?

Why is John so joyful at Gaius' faithfulness?

It's because he himself saw the value of faithfulness. Think of when you have observed spiritual faithfulness in others.

Have you told them that? Have you encouraged them in that faithfulness?

Spend time praising God for them and let them know that they bring us joy. If people examine my life closely, does the reputation that results bring glory to God and the name of Christ?

[32 : 29] Or does it do something else? Let's pray. Lord God, our Heavenly Father, we do ask that you will mold us and shape us so that our lives more and more conform to the image of your Son, Jesus.

And we more and more give honour and glory to you. Help us to look and encourage and spur one another on to love and good works for the sake of your Son, Jesus.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.