

Four Snapshots of Character

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[0 : 00] Well, can I add my Happy New Year to all the Happy New Years we've been having? And let's pray together. Lord God, our Heavenly Father, we pray that as we look at your word now, that you will speak to us.

And as you speak to us, will you give us hearts to receive and obey that we might live in light of it. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Well, what is your reputation? What do other people think of you? What are you known for?

I wish this was my reputation-o-meter, and I was so far in the green that... But reputation is kind of not in my control, really, is it?

I may wish that everybody thinks very well of me, but I can't control that.

[1 : 08] We all have a reputation. It's the estimation that others have of your character, of your integrity, of your ability and standing as a person.

That is your reputation. And people watch us and form opinions about us based on what they see. Now, some aspects of my reputation changes over time.

As I move in different circles, I get a different kind of reputation as I have performed different roles. When I was a Bible teacher in Nigeria, I had a very different kind of reputation than when I was a language student in Chiang Mai in Thailand.

I never found out my nickname that the students gave me as I was...

And they wouldn't tell me, which leads me to conclude a little bit about what my reputation might have looked like. But there's important parts of my reputation that don't change very much or very often.

[2 : 37] The reputation that's based on my character. And the question I want us to consider this morning is, does my reputation bring glory to God and glory to the name of Christ?

Or is there something different going on? Well, we are going to look at this little letter of 3 John, the shortest by word count in the whole Bible.

And we're going to look at four characters, a snapshot of these four characters. And I want us to ask ourselves as we do this, Is there anyone here who looks a little bit like me?

And if so, does my life bring praise to the name of Jesus? So we move first of all to Gaius.

He's the first of our snapshots. We know very little about this man. We only know what's written here in this letter.

[3 : 59] He is the dear friend of the apostle. He's called that four times in the letter. And Gaius is commended in four areas of his life.

He was commended for his spiritual integrity. We see that in verse 2. It's a standard greeting, but it's personalized.

Because John isn't writing to a big group of people. He's not writing a theoretical sort of generic letter. He's writing to his friend Gaius.

And he says, dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.

You see, Gaius had such spiritual integrity that John could pray this way, asking that his external circumstances reflected his internal health.

[5 : 11] If someone prayed that way about you, what would your health turn out to be? How would God answer that prayer?

But Gaius also walked in the truth. Now, we read a little bit about walking in the truth last week, didn't we, when we looked at 2 John.

But the reports came to John that Gaius was faithful to the truth and that he walked in the truth.

And the truth that he's talking about, of course, is the truth of God's word, the truth of the gospel. He was faithful to the truth, meaning that he kept the standards of God's word.

He was constant in it, whether it was Sunday when he was in church or Monday when he was at work. It didn't matter.

[6 : 12] He was faithful to the truth. And he walked in the truth, meaning that he obeyed what he saw in God's word. It was lived out in his life.

He really sought to live by what he read and heard in the word. And that went across all of his life.

An example might be, for example, in the area of honesty. Gaius was the type of person who upheld God's standard for honesty, even when it may have been inconvenient for him, like when he was filling out his tax return, if they had tax returns back then.

So Gaius walked in the truth. Gaius had spiritual integrity, walked in the truth, and he was also known for his faithful service.

Verses five and six. In those days, there were itinerant preachers, which again, we met them a little bit last week when we looked at 2 John. But they went about from place to place preaching God's word.

[7 : 22] And Gaius was one of those people who had a reputation for ministering to these people, welcoming them, giving them hospitality, even though he may not have known them personally.

And he was doing this because he wanted to honor the Lord who had sent them out. Gaius was a generous supporter.

He had a ministry to those who were ministering to him. A ministry to those who were ministering to him. That's an amazing sort of thought, really.

And I don't know whether you realize this, but you who are regulars here at this church have a ministry to those who regularly minister to you.

You are an encouragement to Andrew, to Ricky, to all the others who minister to you when you accept their ministry in a godly way.

[8 : 28] that ministers back to them. And it's not something that can be done by anybody else, not by the pagans, as verse 7 says.

So Gaius was, in effect, a co-worker with those traveling preachers in the ministry of the truth. Just as we are co-workers with those who minister God's word to us as we support and encourage them.

Consider your ministry to your ministers. Well, when we come to the next person, and the clickers decided, yes, Diotrephes, a very different person.

He was, Diotrephes was a prominent member of the church. The type of which can, unfortunately, still be found in churches today.

Because here is Diotrephes' reputation. First of all, Diotrephes was a proud person. He loved to be first. First of all, that's a big temptation for those who are in Christian churches.

[9 : 58] And especially, I think, a temptation to us who are ministers in churches. To love to be first.

First. Unfortunately, we might identify, as I said, some in our church who fit this description. Even more, unfortunately, we might identify those motives in ourselves.

because, you see, it's a default setting for sinful people to love to be first. And the problem here isn't a doctrinal issue.

It's not a theological issue. It's a character issue. Pride. Diotrephes love to be first.

But who is supposed to be first? Who is first in a church setting? Is it the pastor? Is it the warden?

[11 : 07] Is it somebody on the vestry? Is it the most spiritual person? Is it the wisest and godliest Christian? Well, Paul actually helps us here.

In Colossians chapter 1, he writes, 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 is first. And we need to recognize Christ's supremacy. Anything less is less than what God intends.

And not to put too fine a point on it, it is sinful. So, what Diotrephes was doing is serious business.

it is not just incidental. But Diotrephes was not just proud, he was arrogant.

[12 : 30] The difference between pride and arrogance, pride is what we think about ourselves. And arrogance is what we think about other people down there.

our translation says that I wrote to the church but Diotrephes who loves to be first will not welcome us.

Or the ESV captures it better, he does not acknowledge our authority. You see, Diotrephes had nothing to do with the leaders that were over him.

that is, he ignored their God-given authority. One of the things that we Aussies love about ourselves is that we are egalitarian, is that everybody is the same.

There's nobody better than anybody else, even those who were one of these. But you see, that can easily tip over into a disregard for God-given authority.

[13 : 42] God-given leadership over us needs to be recognized and respected. We don't know why Diotrephes had this arrogant attitude.

Maybe it was because John and all he represented was too old-fashioned. No longer cutting edge. We've got to move on. I think what I, mine ideas are so much better than John is pushing.

Or maybe it was the opposite. Diotrephes may have seen himself as the guardian of tradition and John was a dangerous innovator corrupting the way things had always been done.

We don't know. But both, you see, are expressions of arrogance. The notion that I know better and so I can reject God-given authority.

Diotrephes was also, it seems, given to malicious gossip. people. He spread malicious nonsense about us.

[15 : 03] It's an easy trap to fall into, actually, because it can start small, sharing a petty grievance about somebody, or wanting to prove that you're right about someone else, or maybe just pointing out a fault in another person.

And then it escalates. Someone agrees, and so I'm encouraged in that, and it snowballs into something else.

We can help each other here, actually, by refusing to participate in that sort of conversation, and keeping our conversations about other people governed by the sentiment of Philippians 4.8, which says, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or worthy of praise, think about these things, not about this other stuff.

but finally, Diotrephes actually took actions against the gospel. He refused to welcome the traveling preachers and tried to stop other people from doing so.

In other words, he tried to frustrate their ministry, tried to stop the ministry, even threatened to put people out of the church if they went with the ministry of these preachers.

[16 : 51] You see, there's a progression in Diotrephes' behavior. The pride. I'm the main man here. I'm the guy, you know, and so, you know, arrogance, I don't need what John is telling me, what those guys say.

but actually, do you know something about them, actually? There's a little bit of this and that going on. And so, I'm quite justified in my actions against, you see how it's gone, how it's escalated, there's a slippery slope that Diotrephes' seems to have got himself on, from exalting himself to actually acting against God's work in the church.

Tried to make himself first and it progressed or rather regressed from there. Serious stuff indeed.

So, John, when he comes, is going to take action and will confront Diotrephes about his actions.

And to me, this is a hopeful thing because it means that John hadn't given up on Diotrephes. See, the only reason why he would confront him is so that he would repent.

[18 : 36] Diotrephetic activities, if you like, this pride, this arrogance, this malicious gossip and actions against the gospel can be forgiven.

If you're anywhere on that spectrum, that slope of pride, arrogance, gossip and actions, there's a way back from it in confession, repentance and obedience in faith.

faith. But hopefully it won't get to that. The message from these two people, Gaius and Diotrephes, is follow the way of Gaius rather than that of Diotrephes.

That's what John says next in verse 11. Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God.

Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God. Imitate good rather than evil. The reason because the kind of behavior we exhibit shows who we belong to.

[19 : 52] Diotrephes is good. And that's exactly what John says. You see, John will go on to hold up Demetrius as an example to his friend Gaius of the good.

Somebody who belongs to God. And he's already shown us Diotrephes about whom there is obviously a question. But it comes back to what we were talking about earlier, our reputation.

Is there more in me to imitate than to reject? We come to our third character, Demetrius.

Demetrius is well spoken of by three different sources. You notice that here. He's well spoken of by everyone, even by the truth itself.

And we, that is John and co, also speak well of him. And you know that our testimony is true. Now, if it was just everyone who spoke well of Demetrius, you'd say, oh, well, he must be a pretty good bloke, really.

[21 : 15] And John, well, he's a godly leader, and who you would trust. And so for him to speak well of Demetrius, and we know that his testimony is true, so Demetrius really was a good person.

But most of all, if you were to compare the life of Demetrius with scripture, that also speaks well of him.

His life was in line with how God has revealed he wants us to live. Demetrius was someone to imitate.

because his life was in line with scripture. And we need to form our opinion, that is, form the reputation of other people that we hold in our minds from that, from scripture.

Our fellow church members, our leaders, et cetera. That is, how we regard their reputation needs to be formed by the standard of the Bible.

[22 : 39] Not just how we, whether we like them or not, or whether we get on or whatever. Notice the really deep irony here though.

Diotrephes was the one who wanted to enhance his reputation above all others. He wanted to be known as the one who was first.

he wanted preeminence. But when weighed against the truth of God's word and what God requires, quite the opposite was true, wasn't it?

God's word and finally, we get to the fourth character and of course, that's John himself. And we see that throughout the letter.

As we look at what this letter reveals about this man, we notice that humility is a key attitude, quite a contrast to Diotrephes.

[23 : 44] he was probably the Apostle John, almost certainly the Apostle John, the brother of James, one of the sons of thunder, one of the inner four of Jesus' twelve apostles.

This is a really important person in the faith. He was the last remaining apostle. At that time, he was the only one left.

he'd been there throughout Jesus' earthly ministry. He'd been a believer longer than anybody else living on earth at that time. And yet, he calls himself just the elder.

And he identifies himself with Gaius, his dear friend. He expresses his love for him. He draws really close to this guy, Gaius, because he was also somebody, not only humble, but he got on well with other people, other fellow Christians.

He could address Gaius as his dear friend and profess his love for him, but he also talks about other church members as his friends, as we see in verse 14.

[25 : 06] And John delighted in the success of others in ministry. it gave him great joy to hear Gaius' reputation and testimony.

He encouraged Gaius, saying, you are faithful. Again, encouragement isn't a strong point in our Aussie culture, is it?

We like to be known as knockers rather than builder-upperers. and he exhorted Gaius to excellence.

Do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. So he delighted in the success of others and he looked for it.

He made, took action to try and stimulate excellence in the life of his friend Gaius. And he delighted when any of his people did well in the faith, as we see in verse 4.

[26 : 13] when I was teaching in Bible school in Nigeria, what gives me greatest joy as I reflect on that isn't the brilliance of the best students or the beautiful essays they wrote, but it's to see them now in ministry.

And some of the worst students, the ones who barely scraped through are the ones who are most faithful, most fruitful in ministry.

And that gives me much more joy than seeing them with an A against their name. If you're wondering how you can bless your mentors, your pastor, the people you look up to in the faith and those who look up to you in the faith in fact, walk in the truth.

That will give them great joy. But John wasn't afraid to rebuke as we've seen because he was convinced of who should be first in the church.

rich. And it wasn't John. And it wasn't Diotrephes, and it wasn't even Gaius or Demetrius, but Jesus. And so he was able to take those tough steps of confronting a guy like Diotrephes.

[27 : 53] God Okay, imagine you are Gaius receiving this letter.

And you hear all these beautiful things and the elder John calls you his dear friend. How do you feel? How do you respond?

Would you be encouraged to do more good and godly things? I hope I would.

But if you were Diotrephes who intercepted the letter, what would your reaction be? Does it make you angry?

John's saying all these things about me. Or does it make you repentant? Well, the truth is that actually we're all Gaius and Diotrephes, aren't we?

[29 : 10] So let us make sure that we respond in an appropriate way. Let's look for character to imitate in other people.

There's no plagiarism law against plagiarizing good character. If you see it, copy it. Why is John so joyful in Gaius' faithfulness?

it's because he knew the value of faithfulness, because he treasured faithfulness.

Think of when you have observed spiritual fruitfulness and faithfulness in other people. they might be colleagues, friends, church family, whoever.

Have you let them know? Have you told them how much it encourages you? Have you spent time praising God for them?

[30 : 33] maybe that's something we could challenge ourselves with this new year. How can we let them know that they bring us joy?

glory? Well, if people examine my life closely, does the reputation that results bring glory to God in the name of Christ?

Or does it do something else? Let's pray. Lord God, our heavenly Father, we pray that you would help us to be godly, to practice being godly, to be the sort of people that bring a smile to your face and a smile to the face of other people around us so that they may give more glory to the Lord Jesus through us.

We pray it in his name. Amen.