

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

Lesson for December 7
Golden Text—*I thank my God for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now.*

—Phil. 1:3, 5

The Lesson as a Whole

The Second and Third Epistles of John give us two sides to the question of Christian fellowship. Second John tells us who are to be avoided and refused fellowship: men who bring not the doctrine of Christ, but who seek to turn the people of God away from the truth

in which they should walk.

Third John gives us the correlative of this: It sets forth the breadth of Christian fellowship. In it, narrow ecclesiasticism and all mere sectarian bias are rebuked sharply.

The Letter is, like the former one, addressed to an individual, this time a man who is commended for his hospitality and largeheartedness to those of like precious faith.

It is very easy for us to go to extremes on one side or the other. We are inclined either to be so broadminded (as we call it) that we would extend Christian fellowship

to all who make any claim to the Christian name, whatever their doctrinal standards may be or however contrary their lives are to the behavior that should characterize all who profess to walk in the truth. On the other hand, many in their zeal for sound doctrine and propriety in the life are inclined to take a "holier than thou" attitude to those who may not endorse everything that we believe to be consistent and in accord with the teaching of the Word of God. It is so easy to mistake our prejudices for our consciences and to make our own understanding of Scriptural principles the standard of judgment, instead of that which is set forth clearly in the Word of God itself. There is always the danger of running into the Charybdis of bigotry as we endeavor to avoid the Scylla of looseness and indifference to the once delivered to the saints.

Verse by Verse

3 John 1.—"The elder unto the well-beloved Gaius." John speaks of himself as the elder, or presbyter, and addresses his Letter to Gaius, who was the head, apparently, of a Christian house, or possibly even a place of public entertainment such as we today call a hotel. Some have thought he might be identical with the Gaius of Acts 19:29 and 20:4, who was at one time a companion of Paul. In Romans 16:23 Paul writes of "Gaius mine host." Whether this be the same man as Gaius of Derbe or not, we do not know. He might be the one to whom John writes, but there is no proof that such is the case. See verse 4.

Verse 2.—"That thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." Gaius was possibly a semi invalid. Strong in spirit, he was weak in body. John desired that his physical health might be in accord with his spiritual wholeness.

Verse 3.—"Thou walkest in the truth." Servants of Christ who had been entertained by Gaius had reported how he adorned the doctrine of Christ by a consistent, godly walk. In this the apostle rejoiced.

Verse 4.—"No greater joy than to hear that thy children walk in truth." This seems to imply that Gaius had been converted through John and therefore could not be identified with Gaius the friend of Paul. It always gladdens the heart of a minister of Christ when those he has led to the Lord go on in faith, living in the power of the truth.

Verse 5 and 6.—"Strangers..... have borne witness of thy charity before the church." It is evident that Gaius delighted in showing hospitality to God's servants and visiting brethren when in the course of their travels they came to his home. In so doing he was carrying out the will of God, for in this way he was contributing to the spreading of the Gospel.

Verse 7.—"For his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles." These missionaries of the cross, who were the recipients of the bounty of Gaius, were deserving of such assistance, for they went forth in dependence on the Lord to meet their needs and did not solicit any help from the nations of the unsaved to whom they carried the word of life.

Verse 8.—"Fellow helpers to the truth." It was, and is still, incumbent on those who were employed in home responsibilities to assist those who go forth in missionary service. In this way the "stay-at-homes" became fellow helpers, and will share in the reward at the judgment seat of Christ.

Verse 9.—"Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preminence among them." This man evidently sought to dominate the local church with which Gaius was connected. He was determined that none should be acknowledged as worthy of Christian fellowship who did not have his approval.

Verse 10.—"Neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church." By insisting on rigid standards of his own devising, Diotrephes managed so to control the church that godly brethren, whom he could not dominate, were refused fellowship, and those who were of a more liberal spirit were overridden. Even a letter from the aged apostle himself failed to change the ungracious attitude of this tyrannous leader.

Verse 11.—"Follow not that which is evil, but that which is good." To comply with Diotrephes's rigid, exclusive policy was evil in the sight of God and was to be refused, knowing that such evil behavior was the evidence that one did not know the mind of God at all.

Verse 12.—"Demetrius hath good report of..... the truth itself." Demetrius was, in all likelihood, one of the itinerant workers who had been denied recognition by Diotrephes; yet his life testified to his godly character and his work should have recommended him: John wrote endorsing him.

Verse 13 and 14.—"I trust I shall shortly see thee." There was so much on the aged apostle's mind that he would have liked to put before Gaius, but he forbore, hoping soon to visit him and take up these matters personally. This is a very human touch.



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Windsor, Nov. 30 — Customs inspectors at the Ambassador Bridge here Saturday found \$250 in Canadian funds concealed between the sole of a woman's foot and her stocking. She was en route from Oshawa to a point in the United States.

The woman was relieved of the money and permitted to go on her way. Her case is in the hands of the Foreign Exchange Control Board but it may be several weeks before formal action is taken.

"On the whole," explained Harold Beardmore, collector of customs at Windsor, "Canadians are co-operating very well following the application of the new government orders. There are some exceptions and we are making every effort to discover them."

Asked if inspectors generally remove the shoes of suspected persons, Mr. Beardmore said, "not usually, but we have been discovering some unique methods of concealment and our procedure is generally dictated by the result of our interrogation of those under examination," he explained.

Canadians are permitted to take \$10 in U.S. funds and \$15 in Canadian funds out of the country without a special permit.

WINTER FINDS ONTARIO READY

Ontario is all ready to fight old man winter. So reports the Ontario Deputy Minister of Highways, J. D. Millar. He says the province has ten blowers and one hundred new snow plows, making a total of four hundred.

Millar says in addition to this, 25 more heavy duty trucks have been purchased. Says the Highways Deputy Minister, "We plan to concentrate four blowers in the Western snow belt area, which is bounded by a triangle drawn from Toronto West to Goderich, then to Owen Sound, and from Owen Sound to Toronto."

The Minister says "it is usually in this area which includes the Bruce Peninsula that we have our worst snow."

The Heart of the Lesson

Real Christian fellowship is manifested not merely by coming together to participate in meetings for praise, prayer and the ministry of the Word of God, but by practical assistance to those in need, and particularly in the case of servants of Christ proclaiming His Word, whether at home or abroad, by true Christian hospitality and by giving of our means in order that those who go forth in dependence on the living God may be properly supported and so kept free from anxiety as to temporal things, a state of mind that may prove a great hindrance to the furtherance of the blessed work in which they engaged.

This Letter is a rebuke, too, to all narrow ecclesiasticism which would refuse fellowship to godly saints because of minor disagreements.

L. E. O'NEILL

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