

The Third Epistle of the Apostle John

Exegesis and Commentary

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We will discuss the background information of this letter as we study the content of it.

I was instructed to look for direct application from this letter to the doctrine / practice of fellowship—a very current concern. To my fascination, I found that this half page of Scripture primarily demonstrates fellowship in a proactive sense. Even more, the other doctrines that are necessarily tied to fellowship—church and ministry, and the means of grace—play themselves out clearly in these inspired words of John.

“As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another” (Pr 27:17). That’s one of the blessings of fellowship. Perhaps notably missing from this paper is any reference to a major WELS work on fellowship. This is not because of any dissatisfaction with anything that has been officially written. My intent is that there may be original exegesis and fresh thought presented to the brothers of the conference. The intent is not to be maverick or novel. I do not consider myself a good exegeteⁱ or even a good thinker. I did not merely want to regurgitate what the masters have written so that everyone goes home (ho-hum) nourished, but not incited to seize the truths for himself. Some things may not be worded as well as they should. But that’s what affords the opportunity to be challenged, corrected, and, God-willing, sharpened by good discussion.

First, since the content of this letter is more descriptive than prescriptive, let us speak a little on fellowship. The word is *κοινωνία*. This comes from the verb *κοινωνέω*—“to participate in; to fellowship,” which has its root in the adjective *κοινός* = “common,” with the implication of shared ownership.ⁱⁱ

Unbelievers may have something in common, namely, their eternal destination. But, I dare say, they share very little. Each one has his own personal goal (since he doesn’t believe in hell or doesn’t care). One wants to get rich; another wants ease; another wants fame, etc. Thus each has his own separate set of priorities, joys, anxieties, etc. Ultimately each lives to serve and promote himself. Finally, though they all will be suffering in hell, they will not be suffering *together*. Each will be punished for his own sins.ⁱⁱⁱ There is no fellowship in hell. Misery will not love company. There will be no mutual sympathy—only gnashing of teeth (at God *and* each other, I presume).

True fellowship in Christ implies something shared. This implies action. Fellowship is not a status. It is an activity. We often speak of being “in fellowship” with a person or church body today. But fellowship is a *verbal* noun.

Being justified by God--now, *that’s* our status through faith in Christ. Justification is central to all true doctrine. Apart from objective justification no true doctrine can exist.

Fellowship is what we do with that justified status subjectively. We serve Christ and each other with it. Therefore fellowship is not limited to overt acts of worship either. Our fellowship with Christ begins with the forgiveness of sins (justification). Our fellowship with other believers begins with forgiving each other. “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32). From that starting point we royal priests also give up our whole lives as pleasing sacrifices and as an expression of our justified status.^{iv} Not only do we share our lives, but we share the same goal. Our spiritual gifts belong to the whole Body. We no longer claim ownership of our physical blessings, but use them

according to God's desires. We share the same priorities, joys, sorrows, concerns, and anticipation. That only scratches the surface. But these things have a function, a use, a purpose in the Kingdom. They are *shared*. Our fellowship is not static. It's kinetic (if I may put it that way.)

Because of the Christian's intimate fellowship with Christ the Lutheran Church has taught that the way of salvation is not a success theology, but the way of the cross. But also because of that same fellowship the Lutheran Church has a uniquely joyful perspective on the Christian life. Pastor Paul Spaude, in his opus completed in 1942, entitled *The Lutheran Church Under American Influence* makes this appropriate observation about the reformers: "The reformers had an exalted conception of life, particularly of the Christian life. Because of the doctrine of justification by faith, a Christian, Luther taught, enjoys the most intimate and blessed relationship and fellowship with his Lord and God, through his Redeemer Jesus Christ. All legitimate, earthly relations and activities, even the lowest work, were well-pleasing to God and had his blessings."^v At the same time the reformers valued highly the fellowship universal, as is evident from the Apology: "The article of the Church Catholic or Universal, which is gathered together from every nation under the sun, is very comforting and highly necessary."^{vi}

Thus doctrine and practice go together. They are flip sides of the same coin. Dogmatics is a *habitus practicus*. What we believe, we will also do. "It is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved" (Romans 10:10). It is tempting to categorize things as doctrinal and practical. It is tempting to use the word "theological" as a synonym for "irrelevant" (E.g. "Oh, that's the pastor's *theological* concern, but we're talking about *practical* matters in the church!"). But there is no theological / practical division. Not really.^{vii}

Fellowship is the practice of doctrine. Through the means of grace (doctrine) God creates and fellowships with His Church. Through the Church and ministry, using the means of grace, God extends, promotes, strengthens, keeps, preserves, and governs its expression / activity of fellowship, and thus (extends, promotes, strengthens, keeps, preserves, and governs) the very doctrine from which its fellowship derives. It's really rather circular because doctrine and fellowship are flip sides of the same coin. When we are practicing according to true, right and saving doctrine what are we doing but fellowshipping? When a pastor preaches a sermon, conducts a Bible Class, visits a delinquent, conducts a funeral; when a mother teaches her little one to sing "Jesus Loves Me," submits to her husband as to Christ; when the husband leads his family devotions, what are they doing but fellowshipping?

Our doctrine (what we believe) then also affects every activity of life. Even as Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men," a pastor might turn down the offer of a beer in the presence of members to whom it may end up being a stumbling block, or decides not to eat that third piece of chocolate cake at 11:30 P.M.; a mother changes her baby's diaper; a husband faithfully goes to work on Monday morning, cuts his grass, or even brushes his teeth. When all these things spring from faith in Christ, when they are in accord with right and true beliefs on the basis of God's Word, they all fall indirectly under the activity of fellowship. For true fellowship, one way or another promotes the true faith, which always promotes Christ.

Granted, in a way fellowshipping is hidden and mysterious as when God comes to us personally through Word and Sacrament or we confess our faith with all true believers who have ever lived in the Apostles Creed. These are always a tremendous comfort and encouragement. But even these have visual, concrete elements. While we are here on earth we also have to fellowship visibly, that is, on the basis of God's Word and a person's public confession of faith.^{viii}

So it was with John, Gaius, Demetrius, the missionaries and the churches.

Verse One

Ὁ πρεσβύτερος Γαίῳ τῷ ἀγαπητῷ, ὃν ἐγὼ ἀγαπῶ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ.

NIV The elder, to my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth.

The Elder, to beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth.

Ὁ πρεσβύτερος = “The Elder.” How do we know this is the Apostle John? He also calls himself “Elder” in the second epistle. The style of this letter is so similar to all his other biblical writings—especially his emphasis on love. We know that the Council of Carthage in AD 397 at which Augustine was present gave a list of canonical Scriptures including 1, 2, and 3 John almost in their present position in the New Testament.^{ix} Schaff suggests the three epistles may have been written between AD 80 and 90, 10 to 20 years after the martyrdom of Paul and Peter.^x Schaller adds, “It should be plain that only John the Apostle could have been entitled to call himself ‘the Elder,’ without further explanation, since this title would naturally belong to him as the one surviving representative of the first Christian generation.”^{xi}

Consider the implications of the term “elder” for his ministry and fellowship with Gaius. The definite article makes it certain who he is, and what his relationship to Gaius and the congregation is. He is not the commander, buddy, or merely the cold, indifferent advisor. Neither is he just one among many. This is not the priesthood of *all* believers. It is the public office speaking—in this case, possibly the last remaining apostle. This is a title of familiarity and love, and yet communicates the inherent authority of his position to teach and admonish. Children similarly say “father.” But “elder” is ecclesiastical. The word and its use in Scripture is worthy of a study all its own for which there is not time now.

Γαίῳ τῷ ἀγαπητῷ “To beloved Gaius.” Dat. I.O. Gaius was a common name at that time. It occurs several times in Scripture. Apart from this one, the *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia* distinguishes these: 1) a Macedonian traveling companion of Paul (Ac 19:29) 2) a Christian of Derbe, one of a group waiting for Paul to join them to Jerusalem with the collection (Ac 20:4; The possibility exists that he could be the same as #1.) 3) someone whom Paul baptized in Corinth (1 Co 1:14, 17).^{xii} Tradition has it that Gaius eventually became the bishop of Pergamum,^{xiii} and Thessolonica.^{xiv}

There is also a Gaius in Romans 16:23, who is praised for his hospitality enjoyed by the whole church where Paul was writing. Stoeckhardt suggests that this is the same Gaius whom Paul baptized in Corinth.^{xv} Is there any possibility this could be the same Gaius to whom John was writing? John mentions this Gaius’ reputation for hospitality to traveling missionaries. Would there be any kind of clash with Paul if John wrote to Corinth? No, especially if Paul had already been martyred. If anything, that factious congregation^{xvi} would need the continued nurturing of someone with apostolic authority. The congregational situation John addresses in this letter appears to be fragmented. It is hard to imagine that gnosticism (John’s “pet” topic) wouldn’t have made inroads among the Christians of that trading hub. But neither Diotrefes, nor Demetrius, mentioned in this letter are mentioned in either letter to the Corinthians. I can offer nothing conclusive.

He is *beloved* Gaius. Just as Peter was not jealous of being designated “the rock,”^{xvii} the apostle whom Jesus loved is not jealous of that designation either. Our fellowship begins with Christ’s love for us. “We love because He first loved us” (1 Jn 4:19). I think there is more here than the NIV translation suggests. In fact, the NIV makes the address redundant.

ὄν ἐγὼ ἀγαπῶ = The emphasis, whom *I* love, creates a sort of contrast with the word “beloved.” The 1st singular, present, indicative sets forth John’s ongoing attitude toward this individual. Ἀγαπάω you remember, is not just a love of feelings, but of actions.^{xviii} Whatever John, the Elder, says and does is love toward Gaius. This is for Gaius’ assurance. This is the motive for true fellowship. Not only do we want, but we will also work for the eternal good of others.^{xix}

ἐν ἀληθείᾳ = Here, the NIV translation is too limiting. The lack of article indicates quality. The ἐν is spherical. True fellowship cannot take place outside of truth. I suggest three implications: 1) I’m not lying! I mean it! 2) I love you in the sphere of truth—I don’t love your sin (whenever there is any). I don’t love your error (if ever there is any). I do love you. 3) I love what serves your spiritual and eternal good. All my actions and words are directed to benefit you, to strengthen your faith in Jesus and your understanding of true doctrine.

Loving in falsehood, on the other hand, would really be selfish. It is not love for God. One could only have self-serving motives to love or even condone by tolerating someone’s error or sin. John, for example, could have saved himself a lot of gray hairs by simply ignoring the troubles in Gaius’ congregation. But as Paul said, “We cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth” (2 Co 13:8). Have you and I ever put off visiting that difficult delinquent, or avoided teaching the role of man and woman, close communion, or the dangers of Dr. Dobson to spare ourselves a headache? The husband might say he loves his wife because she lets him be himself (Meaning, she doesn’t nag him about cursing, drinking too much beer, and telling dirty jokes.). This is a far cry from, “Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another...” (Cf 3:16) and “Whatever is true... whatever is lovely... think about such things” (Php 4:8). This is not fellowship. It is loving in falsehood.

From here on I will not be analyzing every single word of each verse unless it seems vital to the discussion.

Verse Two

Ἀγαπητέ, περὶ πάντων εὐχομαί σε εὐδοῦσθαι καὶ ὑγιαίνειν, καθὼς εὐδοῦται σου ἡ ψυχή.

NIV 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.

Dear friend, concerning everything I keep praying that you continue to prosper and stay healthy, just as your soul is doing well.

Ἀγαπητέ = Voc. Dir. Addr. “Dear friend.” I use this redundant phrase keeping in mind both aspects mentioned in verse one. He is dear because of the price tag God put on his head.^{xx} He is friend because John also loves him as a brother in Christ.

εὐδοῦσθαι = Pres. Pass. Inf. ACI, from εὐδύω. Bauer Arndt Gingrich traces the root of this verb to εὐ and ὄδος, and gives this picturesque meaning: “to be led along a good road.”^{xxi} Thus we translate “to prosper.” The passive sense of this noun is sensitive to the fact that we truly are led by God and our welfare depends entirely on Him. John’s attitude of love finds expression in his continual prayer for Gaius’ continual good. Isn’t it something that in all of John’s pressing concerns for the Church at large, which must have been numerous, he finds time to keep on praying for a single individual?

ὕγιαίνειν = Pres. Act. Inf. ACI, from ὑγιαίνειν, “to be in good health.”

ἡ ψυχὴ = “soul.” It would seem only natural that one Christian would wish good health on another Christian, on anyone as a matter of fact.^{xxii} Perhaps John especially wishes this for Gaius as John encourages Gaius to continue the same outstanding hospitality for missionaries he has demonstrated thus far. Good health would enable him to do that. But the curious word here is καθώς. Our Lord did not separate our physical well-being from our spiritual as He taught us to pray, “Give us today our daily bread.” We could also discuss at length how pent-up guilt, or lack of trust in God’s promises, etc. can take its toll on our physical well-being. We are soul *and* body. What affects us physically also affects us spiritually. That’s why we pastors visit members in the hospital. In various places the Bible seems to equate sickness with a spiritual problem.^{xxiii} This would serve as a worthwhile topic for a future conference paper.

I see a reflection here. Just as body and soul cannot be separated (Indeed, when they are, they cease to be living and, as it were, a human.) so also doctrine and practice cannot be separated. In our liturgy we say, “Lift up your hearts!” Is this statement made merely to souls not at all encased in living flesh? Doctrine is not merely ethereal. It is also practical. Doctrine is not just what we believe. It is also what we do—how we use our mouths, our eyes, our ears, our hands, even our hearts.^{xxiv} Our bodies are the agents, the tools, the vehicles of our souls. Thus fellowship is more than just teaching doctrine as though it were abstract. It is also living it. The phrase περὶ πάντων, by its emphatic position, supports this truth.

Verse Three

ἐχάρην γὰρ λίαν ἐρχομένων ἀδελφῶν καὶ μαρτυρούντων σου τῇ ἀληθείᾳ, καθὼς σὺ ἐν περιπατεῖς.

NIV It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth.

For I was thrilled when brothers came and were testifying to the truth about you, the way you are conducting yourself in truth.

γὰρ = Though it is omitted by the Codex Sinaiticus, we will keep it since it is quite widespread and included in the ancient Byzantine Lectionaries. It is explanatory. It explains how John knows Gaius’ soul is doing well.

ἐχάρην = Aor. Pass. Ind. 1 sg. of χαίρω, “It gave me joy.” Note the root connection with χάρις. This was a grace, an unexpected kindness from God. Any true fellowship activity on the part of any believer is only from God.^{xxv} Sanctification—the fact of it—after all, is gospel, not

law. It is only guided by the law. Not: You Christians *should* do such and such. But by the power of the Holy Spirit working in you, you will. Luther commented on Romans 12:1 (“I urge you, Brothers, in view of God’s mercy...”),

Paul does not say: I command you; for he is preaching to such as are already Christians and godly by faith, in newness of life. These must not be coerced by means of commandments, but admonished to do willingly what has to be done with the old sinful man in them. For any person who does not do this willingly, simply in answer to kind admonitions, is not a Christian; and any person who wants to achieve this result by force applied to such as are unwilling is not a Christian preacher or ruler, but a worldly jailer. A preacher of the Law comes down on men with threats and punishments; a preacher of divine grace coaxes and urges men by reminding them of the goodness and mercy which God has shown them. For he would have no unwilling workers nor cheerless service; he wants men to be glad and cheerful in the service of God.^{xxvi}

In a way, one might say sanctification is synonymous with fellowship. In the wide sense, we are brought into fellowship with God and each other by the working of the Holy Spirit who creates in us faith in Jesus. In the narrow sense that fellowship activity increases.

λίαν = Adv. “exceedingly.” Thus: “I was thrilled.” It’s one thing to know what’s right and true. It’s another thing to act on it in faith. One cannot put adequately into words the joy a pastor experiences when someone he counsels actually produces fruits of repentance (E.g. a long-time delinquent actually starts coming to Sunday worship). A parent’s joy is exceeding when their son marries a God-fearing woman. A wife feels joy when her husband acts responsibly and concerns himself with household matters. John will define just how thrilled he was in verse four. It’s not so much that we doubt God’s power to accomplish such things in believers, as it is our awareness of just how base the Old Adam is. God’s grace is unexpected because we don’t deserve it, and, by nature, don’t even want it. It’s unexpected because the school of experience has conditioned us not to expect much. It’s unexpected because of our *opinio legis*. It’s unexpected because it’s grace. Grace is always unreasonable. But fellowship (doctrine put into practice) always results in joy for believers and for Christ Himself who takes joy in His own creation.^{xxvii}

μαρτυρούντων = Pres. act. part. gen. abs. This is their ongoing testimony about Gaius. Their separate stories must also be consistent. This wasn’t an isolated incident. It wasn’t just the perception of one individual.

σου τῆ ἀληθείᾳ = The dative is reference. The genitive is content. A genitive of agent would need ὑπο.

καθὼς σὺ ἐν περιπατεῖς = The word καθὼς after verbs of saying introduces indirect discourse and can be translated “that” or “how.”^{xxviii} From this word we can deduce that not only was Gaius’ teaching or doctrinal stance correct, but also his practice was true. Was Gaius a fellow pastor or elder? John uses the same qualitative phrase, ἐν ἀληθείᾳ to describe Gaius’ conduct with the emphatic σὺ. Not only John is conducting himself in love, so is Gaius. The familiar verb περιπατέω (πατέω = to tread, crush, trample around.) reminds us everything we do leaves tracks. It is good if you are blazing a trail on the Narrow Path and not hacking aimlessly

through the underbrush. It is not just Gaius' doctrine, but also his practices that made John so happy. His practice was genuine. It would not be misleading to others.

We too want to be careful that our practice is not only correct, but also genuine, coming from true theology. Is it always genuine if we borrow from the practices of reformed theology with the right intention of giving the people correct doctrine later on? This is not in reference to anything in particular. But every now and then you hear this rationale bounced around as a reason for the way something is done.

So much of fellowship is about giving impressions. If I may be picky... why do we talk about having a Bible *information* class? Doesn't that really fit in the camp of Arminianism or Calvinism—that if you simply give a person all the right information, they'll be able to make all the right, God-pleasing life-decisions? Might the title “Bible Information Class (BIC)” give that impression? Now, if I may boast... my present day associate (actually, my senior pastor) entitles the very same course “God's Word to You.” In a positive way, doesn't that much more genuinely and accurately capture exactly what that class is, and what its purpose is? Our hope and intent is for the Holy Spirit to work through His Word and plant it into the hearts of those who take the class. We want them to take possession of it and walk away believing (whether it's the law or the gospel), “That's for me, and it's from God!” We're not merely passing on information. We're discipling. I realize this seems like a minor point. But I chose it merely to demonstrate a proactive example of fellowship in truth.

Verse Four

μειζότεραν τούτον οὐκ ἔχω χαράν, ἵνα ἀκούω τὰ ἐμὰ τέκνα ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ περιπατοῦντα.

NIV I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth

Greater than this I do not have joy, that I hear my children are conducting themselves in the truth.

Μειζότεραν = This is a double comparative, emphatic by position. “Greater than great,” with the genitive of comparison. It's interesting, by this negative comparative John is actually making a superlative.

Χαράν = “Joy.” I'll use *χαράν* instead of *χαρῖν*. Though the evidence is strongest this way, in a sense it really makes little difference. The root cause of John's joy either way is grace.

ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ = This time John doesn't use the qualitative expression used previously. He uses the definite article. When the regular conduct of one of John's concerns is consistent with the truth (right and saving doctrine), he has no greater joy. Our ultimate goal is to win souls for eternity, but isn't fellowship our immediate goal? Apart from the sacramental Victory Feast, what gives Christians a flavor of heaven as when they are Christ-like toward each other? Heaven will be the ultimate, perfect fellowship, the true performance of what our doctrine promises. Right now is the practice (pun intended).

Verse Five

Ἀγαπητέ, πιστὸν ποιεῖς ἐὰν ἐργάσῃ εἰς τοὺς ἀδελφούς καὶ τοῦτο ξένους

NIV Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you.

Dear friend, faithfully you are doing whatever you accomplish for the brothers—and this for strangers!

ὁ ἐὰν ἐργάσῃ = Aor. mid. subj. 2 sg. Ἐὰν with ἐργάσῃ is present general with the relative ὁ preceding. Ἐὰν is really the protasis: what, if ever you work. John's purpose was not to make Gaius feel guilty for anything he hasn't done, but to encourage him. We never do enough. We can always do more. We can always do it better. We can always do it with more sincerity and love. But what if ever you work...you are doing it faithfully. It is a product of your faith in Jesus, since you are conducting yourself in truth. It is pleasing in God's eyes. Christ certainly blots out our transgressions and views us as righteous along with our deeds.^{xxix} Not, you Christians should. But, you Christians are. The very thought makes you want to do more. The applications to members of your congregation are self-evident.

καὶ τοῦτο ξένους = Fellowship (verbal noun) doesn't require familiarity. Though this is helpful, remember that fellowship is also hidden. Isn't it great?! They are strangers, yet brothers!! What we do, say, preach has more effect than what we see. We can act/speak in love to strangers as well as to those with whom we are familiar. What is interesting is to watch fellowship in action between Christians who have never met before or even come from different cultures. There is a kindred spirit, even language. In the same way, one can sense right away when a stranger who is quite religious is nevertheless not "in fellowship." As Luther said, they have a different spirit.

We might naturally be inclined to do more for those with whom we are familiar, or whom we like, than for strangers even though they too are Christians. That's what makes what Gaius did even more praiseworthy.

Verse Six

οἱ ἐμαρτύρησάν σου τῇ ἀγάπῃ ἐνώπιον ἐκκλησίας, οὓς καλῶς ποιήσεις προπέμψας ἀξίως τοῦ θεοῦ·

NIV They have told the church about your love. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God.

They testified to your love in the presence of the Church. You will do well to assist them on their way in a manner worthy of God.

ἐμαρτύρησάν = Aor. act. ind. 3 pl. Emphasizes the fact of it. This is what they did.

ἐνώπιον ἐκκλησίας = Rieneker states that the absence of the article denotes a meeting of the church at which the witness took place.^{xxx} I translated "Church" indicating not just the local congregation, but that hidden body of Christ. To me it just seems unlikely that they would only have spoken about Gaius' love in one place, unless John is only reporting about a single account at which he was present. Another thought could be added. It's perhaps hard for us to see or

understand, but what you teach and do, especially as a public minister, matters to a Christian in Zambia, India, Antigua or Circle, Montana. It helps to build or tear down the Kingdom. To this day the Church benefits from the example of Gaius held before its eyes on the sacred pages.

προπέμψας = Aor. act. ptc. suppl. This word means to send someone on their way and implies helping with their support, their means of travel, making arrangements, supplying, equipping, etc. For this, Gaius' good health would continue to be necessary (verse 2). This is a further encouragement drawn from what was stated in verse 5 about his faithfulness. Today, if you need to fly or drive somewhere for a meeting, travel arrangements are pretty much left up to you and then you are reimbursed. Is it possible that in some cases these traveling missionaries did not make their own travel arrangements, and left that up to the local congregations? Did the missionaries merely give them the tentative itinerary and let them work out the mechanics of it?^{xxxii}

ἀξίως τοῦ θεοῦ = It is easy to say this, but do we stop to think about what it means? Do we actually use our material goods for others as though we are doing it for God Himself? The very reason for having an income, Paul states, is not to create comfort for ourselves but that we might have something to share with those in need.^{xxxiii}

What strong words these are! What appropriate words to our congregations and schools who want our called workers to do the work of three people for half the price of one! What appropriate words for congregations who believe that good stewardship is spelled C-H-E-A-P! Are these attitudes really worthy of God? Does it honor Him to treat His representatives that way? Why should God be satisfied with the cheapest things in His house when we insist on the having the finest in our own homes? How does it credit God's reputation if we don't trust Him enough to loosen our grip on our money?

Verse Seven

ὑπὲρ γὰρ τοῦ ὀνόματος ἐξῆλθον μηδὲν λαμβάνοντες ἀπὸ τῶν ἐθνικῶν.

NIV It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans.

For on behalf of the Name they went out, receiving nothing from the gentiles (pagans).

γὰρ = Causal - why you should send them on their way with material support.

ὑπὲρ τοῦ ὀνόματος = Do it for them as though they were God because they are carrying out their work as though they were God. They are His public representatives.^{xxxiii} God's Name is also His reputation. Whatever they teach and do will either give credit to or show contempt for His reputation. We pray, "Hallowed be Thy Name." Luther's *Small Catechism* states, "God's name is kept holy when his Word is taught in its truth and purity, and we as children of God lead holy lives according to it."^{xxxiv} God gave us His Name to bless us and save us. Fellowship is all about honoring God's saving reputation, which is promoted by correct doctrine and practice.

ἐξῆλθον μηδὲν λαμβάνοντες ἀπὸ τῶν ἐθνικῶν. = Would it have been wrong to receive help from the gentiles/pagans? Is it a bad fellowship practice to take gifts from unbelievers? Paul made a point not to receive financial help so that nothing would get in the way of the gospel.^{xxxv}

I sense he did this especially for the sake of the unconverted and babes in the faith. Through him the gospel was really free.

A congregation I served had a free car wash one summer for the purpose of raising awareness of its presence in the community. It also gave members an opportunity to share some printed materials with those who came. People had no difficulty receiving the printed materials. In general they had a big problem with the fact that the car wash was free—*truly* free. They all wanted to pay *something* for our services, and in most cases they were going to be fairly generous. That’s the way the natural man thinks and works—tit for tat. The church members firmly refused and pointed to signs posted all around the parking lot with key Bible passages written on them in large letters. It gave them an opportunity to say, “This car wash is like God’s plan for taking you to heaven—it’s truly free.”

The Church today always has the bad reputation of being after people’s money. If an unbeliever (or non-member) makes a substantial donation to the church or offers a gift to you, he might be doubly insulted when it is necessary for you to speak the truth in love to him about his sin, or refuse to bury his mother who died confessing no faith in Christ, etc. That his gift doesn’t obligate you to be “nice” to him, might be a hard pill for him to swallow.

True, God can and does rob the world and use its resources for the sake of His Kingdom. Perhaps we should let that be more providential on His part, and less solicitous on ours.

Verse Eight

ἡμεῖς οὖν ὀφείλομεν ὑπολαμβάνειν τοὺς τοιούτους, ἵνα συνεργοὶ γινώμεθα τῇ ἀληθείᾳ.

NIV We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth.

We therefore ought to take on such men so that we might become coworkers for the truth.

ἡμεῖς = Believers in contrast to the pagan world.

ὑπολαμβάνειν = Pres. act. inf. Literally, “to receive under” or “bear.” As though you are the one underneath, carrying them. I translated, “take on.”

συνεργοὶ = “Coworkers.” Further evidence that doctrine and practice go together. Their fellowship serves the truth. By contrast John wrote to the chosen Lady, “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work” (10-11). Supporting the public ministry with our material blessings is an act of fellowship. It is not an option (ὀφείλομεν). Do you desire the salvation of others? Then you will love the truth. Do you love the truth? Then you will also support its administration with your physical blessings. You have God’s command. If it were possible for us to have any regrets on the Last Day, we would not regret any material blessings spent in support of the Great Commission. We would only regret not having spent more.

Verse Nine

Ἐγραψά τι τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ· ἀλλ’ ὁ φιλοπρωτεύων αὐτῶν Διοτρέφης οὐκ ἐπιδέχεται ἡμᾶς.

NIV I wrote the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us.

I wrote something to the congregation. But Diotrephes, who loves to dominate among them will not receive us.

ἔγραψά = Aor. act. ind. 1 sg. The question of the variant is basically this: did John or did he not actually write such a letter? Was he only speaking a contrary-to-fact? Will he be coming in person because he did write and wasn't answered, or because he knows it's not worth it to write since he probably won't be answered anyway, or because he dislikes writing and wants to talk face-to-face as he indicates in both his 2nd and 3rd letters? The support for the contrary-to-fact is weak. I opt that he did write. It would seem the logical, first step to address an apparent problem. Whether or not τὶ belongs in the sentence does not affect its meaning. The aorist emphasizes that he did it. He also wrote to the chosen Lady before he visited her. Probably such a letter would announce John's plans to come and Diotrephes' answer was "Nothin' doin'!!" This might be the reason for him to write Gaius too to announce his planned arrival. John himself would now be depending on Gaius' proven hospitality.

Please permit me a moment of conjecture. Imagine that John's second letter was written to the congregation over which Diotrephes presided (the chosen Lady). In it John tells that congregation to show no hospitality to false teachers (those denying that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh). These might be the very heretics that were chumming with Diotrephes. No wonder he would not permit such a letter to be read or propagated among the people! He would feel John was bypassing him and undermining his authority by addressing these instructions to the congregation.

ἐπιδέχεται = Pres. mid. ind. 3 sg. "To receive, concede to authority, grant access." This is Diotrephes' ongoing attitude and practice. Isn't it interesting how in some instances the unbelieving world understands fellowship so well? Who of us has not had someone walk away in a huff, never willing to talk to us again, because they were turned away when they presumptuously came to the Lord's Table? Now they are convinced our fellowship is definitely something of which they want no part!!

Διοτρέφης = The name is mentioned nowhere else in the Bible. It means, "nourished by Zeus." An apt observation is made in *The Interpreters Bible* commentary: "A man is judged by those whom he attacks."^{xxxvi} We don't know what the doctrinal issue was exactly, but does it tell us anything that Diotrephes was opposed to the apostle of love, the foremost spokesman against gnosticism? Diotrephes' actions also reveal his lack of understanding about the body of Christ, the Church and ministry, and thus the means of grace and even true faith.

Verse Ten

διὰ τοῦτο, ἐὰν ἔλθω, ὑπομνήσω αὐτοῦ τὰ ἔργα ἃ ποιεῖ, λόγοις πονηροῖς φλυαρῶν ἡμᾶς· καὶ μὴ ἀρκούμενος ἐπὶ τούτοις οὔτε αὐτὸς ἐπιδέχεται τοὺς ἀδελφούς καὶ τοὺς βουλομένους κωλύει καὶ ἐκ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἐκβάλλει.

NIV So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church

For this reason, when I come, I will call to mind the things he does, babbling about us with wicked words. Not even satisfied with that either he does not receive the brothers himself, or he stops those who want to, and even throws them out of the congregation.

ἐὰν ἔλθω = Pres. subj. FMV. John is definitely planning on coming since he wants to talk face to face.

ὑπομνήσω = Fut. act. ind. 1 sg. “To remind, call to mind.” The sin is public, so John is making the rebuke public. Disciplinary measures must have already been taken against Diotrephes in some way that led to this step of bringing it before the whole congregation. This becomes more certain as we look at his continuous actions in the verse. This verb is the same one Jesus used when He said, “The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will *remind* you of everything I have said to you” (Jn 14:26). John will basically be reteaching what they have already been taught before doctrinally (as we all need), and recalling recent events and the recent conduct of Diotrephes (since we are so inclined to think of today, forget yesterday, and miss the big picture).

αὐτοῦ τὰ ἔργα ἂ ποιεῖ = The present tense indicates that this is still a problem. Repentance is necessary.

φλυαρῶν = Pres. act. part. suppl. The literal meaning of this word is “to throw up bubbles, to boil up” like a kettle of boiling water. Thus what’s coming out is hollow and useless like bubbles.^{xxxvii} To me, “gossip” seems to imply an element of truth—that John and others actually had things to hide and didn’t want anyone to know about. So I translated “babbling.” His accusations were baseless and continuous.

καὶ = Ascensive

μὴ ἀρκούμενος = Pres. mid. part. masc. sg. attr. adj. “Not even satisfied with that...”

οὔτε...καὶ...καὶ = This sets up a “neither/nor” construction that doesn’t translate very well here. I translated “either/or.”

κωλύει = Pres. ind. act. 3 sg. “He keeps stopping.” Diotrephes’ sin was not merely omission but also commission. This demonstrates further the obstinate unwillingness to be corrected on the part of Diotrephes. He is not just passively but actively separating himself and his congregation from those who teach the truth. Jesus said, “He who is not with me is against me” (Lk 11:23).

If your fellowship practice does not serve the truth it works against the truth. Our fathers who penned the Formula of Concord set forth this warning even in matters of adiaphora:

When under the title and pretext of external adiaphora such things are proposed as are in principle contrary to God’s Word (although painted another color), these are not to be regarded as adiaphora, in which one is free to act as he will, but must be avoided as things prohibited by God.

We believe, teach and confess also that at the time of the confession [when a confession of the heavenly truth is required], when the enemies of God's Word desire to suppress the pure doctrine of the holy Gospel, the entire congregation of God, yea, every Christian, but especially the ministers of the Word, as the leaders of the congregation of God [as those whom God has appointed to rule His Church], are bound by God's Word to confess freely and openly the [godly] doctrine, and what belongs to the whole of [pure] religion, not only in words, but also in works and with deeds.^{xxxviii}

John did this. Ironically, in a twisted sense Diotrephes thought he was doing this too.

Are we conscious that our actions, even in adiaphora, are part of fellowship? Can we use popular evangelical phraseology/methodology without at the same time muzzling the voice of confessional Lutheranism? Are we always sensitive to the heroic rally cry of Flacius against the confusing (and not truly Lutheran) worship practices Melancthon was promoting: *Nihil est adiaphoron in casu confessionis et scandali* (Nothing is an adiaphoron in the case of confession and causing offense)?^{xxxix} We sure take a stand when it comes to baptizing without immersion. Perhaps when we see that we are surrounded by the sects whose churches are growing by leaps and bounds, instead of doing what they do in other areas of church life, for fear that we might lose prospective members to them, it's time for us to stand out as what we are—confessional Lutherans. I am not afraid to say, as C.F.W. Walther did, that the Lutheran Church is indeed the true visible Church; however, only in this sense, that it has the pure, unadulterated truth.^{xl}

τοὺς βουλομένους = Pres. mid. part. acc. pl. attr. subst. "Those who want to."

ἐκ τῆς ἐκκλησίας = Def. art. A reference to the congregation over which Diotrephes presides... or at least bullies, if he is merely a dominant personality and not a publicly called minister of the gospel.

ἐκβάλλει = Pres. ind. act. 3 sg. The false nature of Diotrephes' ministry (or presumed ministry) is entirely revealed in this one word. He views the public office as that of boss. The congregation to him is not a visible manifestation of the Holy Christian Church, but merely an organization—his underlings! He despises the priesthood of all believers. He despises the means of grace with which he should address their spiritual needs. He doesn't even understand faith as he doesn't discipline, or even excommunicate in love. He throws them out.

John's intentions, to me, are the most fascinating part of this letter. How does he intend to use his apostolic authority? Does he intend to march in there, take charge, and set things straight? Does he intend to discipline and excommunicate Diotrephes? No. He intends to go there and *teach* (ὑπομνήσω)! It reminds me of what Luther did when he felt compelled to leave the Wartburg and clean up the mess Carlstadt had made. He preached the Eight Sermons. Order was restored almost immediately.

John's intended actions present a clear understanding and sensitivity to that necessary tension between the priesthood of all believers and the public office of the ministry. As the Great Commission indicates, there are those who are making disciples and those who are being made disciples. Paul speaks of the planters and waterers, and also the field, the builders and the building.^{xli} To the Ephesians he speaks of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, and then the whole Church.^{xlii} Peter speaks of the shepherd and the flock.^{xliii}

These designations also confer the authority with which the public office teaches. That authority does not exist apart from the means of grace. This is the true apostolic succession as Dr. Herman Sasse writes, "It consists in the clear commission which our Lord gave to His whole

church, to proclaim the pure apostolic doctrine and administer the sacraments according to the Gospel.”^{xliv} The whole Church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief Cornerstone.^{xlv}

From this it is also evident that the public office does not exist apart from the priesthood of all believers either. Sasse also observes, “It is therefore in fact impossible in the New Testament to separate ministry and congregation. What is said to the congregation is also said to the office of the ministry, and vice versa. The office does not stand above the congregation, but always in it.”^{xlvi} If I may use this analogy, it is like the Trinity. The public office, the universal priesthood, and the means of grace are one. They do not exist without each other. Yet they are distinct. They are not each other. Therefore when Diotrephes is disciplined, it is an act of the whole Church: John, the congregation, and the truth (the means of grace). The Holy Spirit governs in His temple through the means of grace.^{xlvii}

For as much as it may be said that the duties of the universal priesthood and the public office are essentially the same, yet, it is worth repeating, they are not *each other*. It creates a sort of tension.

But a necessary tension it is! The Baptists and Evangelical Free churches who make almost no distinction (between the universal priesthood and the public office) emphasize the Holy Spirit without the Word. The Roman Catholics who create a total separation between the two emphasize the Word (outward visible things) without the Holy Spirit. In both cases, human judgment reigns (feelings, tradition, or whatever) and the true rule of the Holy Spirit loses out.

I am convinced that a major factor in addressing our present fellowship rumblings throughout is to set forth clearly the distinction between the public office and the priesthood of all believers. For the function of the Church that is hobbled whenever there is a wrong understanding or overemphasis in this doctrine one way or another is *teaching*—and that with authority, since without authority there can be no teaching. From this spring discipline and admonition. Neither the Baptists and Evangelicals nor the Romans really have a way of maintaining true doctrine (with the exception that the Romans consistently insist on your submission to the pope and the sects always insist on your salvation ultimately depending on you in some way). Basically, in these two camps, anything goes with respect to doctrine. Even with the so-called Missouri understanding of church and ministry, discipline becomes nearly impossible on an inter-congregational, circuit, or synodical level. Thus, you see, fellowship itself, the correct practice of doctrine, is impossible without the right understanding of church and ministry. The contradistinction of the priesthood of all believers over against the public office is necessary to keep the public office (whatever form it takes) in line, so to speak and vice versa.

I confess that when I first entered the ministry I had misgivings about the ongoing trend of having laity handle the Word at meetings, in classes, etc. But by studying the Word myself (this exegesis playing a large part in how I am influenced) I no longer have those misgivings.

The pastor’s office can still be that of an overseer (*ἐπίσκοπος* = one who scrutinizes over something), a bishop whose authority comes from the Word, the Holy Spirit, and the Church which calls. He still oversees to make sure the Word is still taught in its truth and purity and that the local church practices are genuine. More often than not I have seen that even those who are asked in the called positions as leaders of the congregation to teach, or conduct a devotion before a meeting, still have the same regard for the function of the pastor as the overseer and shepherd. Of course, every now and then a Diotrephes will rise up. But that still doesn’t negate the function

to which a pastor has been called. Whether Diotrophes obeyed John or not, didn't reduce John's authority as an apostle.

John taught. Though it is the responsibility of the entire priesthood, it is also the distinct function of the public office—whatever form it takes. Without that distinction, I don't believe we in the WELS will be able to maintain our present (and correct, I might add!) stance on fellowship.

Verse Eleven

Ἀγαπητέ, μὴ μιμοῦ τὸ κακὸν ἀλλ' τὸ ἀγαθόν. ὁ ἀγαθοποιῶν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν· ὁ κακοποιῶν οὐχ ἐώρακεν τὸν θεόν.

NIV 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.

Dear friend, never imitate what is evil, but good. The person who does good is from God. The person who continues to do evil has not seen God.

ἀγαπητέ = This is now the fifth time John uses this affectionate word for Gaius (once as a verb). Humanly speaking, sometimes when someone causes us trouble, those who do not become so much more dear to us. John, no doubt, was losing a lot of sleep over Diotrophes and was very grieved for his soul and apparent unrepentance. The God-given miracle of Gaius becomes so much more evident and precious. It's not surprising when someone acts like Diotrophes. But here's someone else who actually believes the Word, loves it, acts on it, and sticks to it!! Wow!!

Do you ever stop to ask why any of the members of your congregation keep coming back to worship Sunday after Sunday? They've got lives. It would make sense if they wanted to catch up on sleep, run errands, etc. Some of them have downright difficult obstacles to surmount just to get there. What keeps bringing them back when there's no apparent, immediate pay-off? We know the answer. It's from God (ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ). Let's never stop marveling over it!

μὴ μιμοῦ = This present imperative sounds like our word "mimick." The very nature of the word includes both doctrine and practice. Though it's not technically correct, I translated "never" because it was smoother than, "Do not continue to imitate." That wording would seem to suggest John was admonishing Gaius' conduct, and would be contradictory to the first part of the letter.

John here certainly speaks like John. We also want to note that though Gaius is highly praised by John, John still gives Gaius this encouragement. After all, we still carry with us our sinful flesh which is prone to all sorts of temptations. Even Peter's conduct went momentarily awry by the influence of judaizers.

We pastors who spend our full time with the Word are nevertheless also not above temptation and wrong influences. We need the encouragement and even the sharpening of others. How many of us consider it to be among the top five in the list of priorities in our ministries to study, to spend time with our wives and congregation members, and to spend time with the brothers?

έώρακεν = Perf. Act. ind. 3 sg. of όράω. I admit that this phrase I find difficult to explain. John certainly uses it elsewhere.^{xlviii} The Bible uses the picture of blindness/sight, darkness/light to describe unbelief/faith. We talk about seeing with the “eyes of faith,” though I don’t know if this expression is ever used in the Bible. Hebrews 11 comes close. I guess when the Holy Spirit enlightens us by giving us faith in Jesus, we then have an awareness about God and truth that we did not before. Someone who keeps on doing evil is certainly not aware of the true God or what pleases Him.

Verse Twelve

Δημητρίω μεμαρτύρηται ύπό πάντων και ύπό αύτῆς τῆς ἀληθείας· και ἡμεῖς δὲ μαρτυροῦμεν, και οἶδας ότι ἡ μαρτυρία ἡμῶν ἀληθῆς ἔστιν.

NTV Demetrius is well spoken of by everyone—and even by the truth itself. We also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true.

Demetrius is attested by all and even by the truth itself. We also affirm it and you know that our testimony is true.

Δημητρίω = The only other Demetrius mentioned in the Bible is the silversmith in Ephesus who made life difficult for Paul.^{xlix} Perhaps this is someone Gaius was presently housing who had come prior to John to address or assess the problems there.

και ύπό αύτῆς τῆς ἀληθείας = The ultimate and only true test of anyone’s teachings/conduct. Isn’t it interesting how, as the basis of fellowship John always goes back to the Word?

ἡμεῖς = Emphatic, with the adversative δὲ. Gaius would need to know that John and those with him were “in fellowship” with Demetrius. He was someone on whom Gaius could rely for help, advice, partnership in combating error, etc.

Verses Thirteen and Fourteen

Πολλά εἶχον γράψαι σοι, ἀλλ’ οὐ θέλω δια μέλανος και καλάμου σοι γράφειν·¹⁴ ἔλπίζω δὲ εὐθέως σε ιδεῖν, και στόμα πρὸς στόμα λαλήσομεν.

NIV I have much to write to you, but I do not want to keep writing to you with pen and ink. Rather, I am hoping to see you immediately, and we will talk face to face.

I have so much to write to you, but I do not want to keep writing to you with pen and ink. Rather, I am hoping to see you immediately, and we will talk face to face.

Πολλά = Emphatic by position. I translated “so much.”

γράφειν = Pres. act. inf. Different from the aorist infinitive in the previous a phrase. There’s so much to write, but I don’t want to keep writing.

στόμα πρὸς στόμα λαλήσομεν = This is the same phrase John used in his second letter. Fellowship takes place between the living. Jesus not only quoted the Scriptures (the Word written on paper), He also wants His Word to be preached and heard.¹ Paul earnestly desired to speak to the Galatians in person.^{li}

Why have people come to church? Why not pipe the sermon in on their computer screens? Why not just have them read their Bibles one hour a week? The reasons are several. The Church gathers around the Word. The Church is a living body. Fellowship is what it does. It takes place between the living. Think of how much more is communicated by the preachers tone of voice and facial expressions than what can be lifted from paper. Think how powerful the hymn *Thy Strong Word* is when sung by many voices together, as opposed to reading the verses alone. Who doesn't realize that listening to a live concert is better than listening to a recording because of that live element? Isn't this truth magnified in the worship or fellowship of the Church among whom Jesus said He would personally be present?^{liii}

Conversely, what if we were to take our youth groups to contemporary Christian rock concerts, or revivals that are clearly sponsored by the sects? Do we sense the intense draw that the live contact would have for them? Of course we do. But rather than hoping that this would get them more interested in their Christian faith, shouldn't we rather be alarmed by the draw they feel? It is not so much the music style *per se* as the theology from which the style of music among the sects springs—their lack of belief in objective justification, objective truth, and the means of grace, their search for assurance of salvation in their feelings. If we actively exposed them to such events, could we honestly say as John does that our actions are “in truth” (spherical ἐν)? Do we really think those teenagers are going to come back with a greater love for the Western Rite that keeps us Christ-focused, and means-of-grace-focused—a true *Gottesdienst* (God's service to us), something that really will nurture their faith?^{liiii} The Old Adam will never be attracted to that, but will always be attracted to whatever is me-focused (even under the Christian dressing of prayer, praise, feelings, experience, right living, service, etc.). Do we really want to nurture that?

We Lutherans have the one thing that truly will inspire God-pleasing, sanctification (prayer, praise, feelings, experience, right living, service, etc.), namely objective justification. Then, instead of wanting to become more active in my Christian faith because it “feels so right,” I'll have the motive that God really wants—this is what Christ did for me, because His Word says so.

But I digress. Sorry, pet soapbox.

Verse Fifteen

εἰρήνη σοι. ἀσπάζονται σε οἱ φίλοι. ἀσπάζου τοὺς φίλους κατ' ὄνομα.

NIV Peace to you. The friends here send their greetings. Greet the friends there by name.

Peace be with you. Your friends greet you. Greet our friends by name.

εἰρήνη σοι = Above all we want for each other the peace that comes from objective justification and is received through faith in Christ, namely that God is no longer at odds with me because He has forgiven my sins for Jesus' sake. Being reconciled to God, indeed, having a God

who devotes Himself to our eternal well-being endows us with a peace of mind that overcomes all our earthly circumstances. It even aids us in temptation. Fellowship with Christ comes from the forgiveness of sins. Fellowship with Christ is the true source of peace between believers.^{liv} We *want* more fellowship!

οἱ φίλοι...τοὺς φίλους = It is possible being immersed in the Diotrephes problem Gaius is feeling quite lonely. Not only John is there to encourage Gaius, but many others. John also has no doubt that where the Word still is taught, the Church still exists. There still are friends to greet there. These friends must be believers as opposed to friends of the world. James wrote, “Don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God” (4:4). Similarly, John’s first letter says, “Do not love the world, or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (2:15). This is also the conclusion of Stoeckhardt.^{lv}

John wants them greeted by name (κατ’ ὄνομα). In hell people will descend to nameless oblivion.^{lvi} Though in Christ we are one body, nevertheless only in Christ are we also true individuals. God Himself knows and calls us by name and records us in His book.^{lvii} Our fellowship takes place not just with the whole Church, but also with each other as individuals.

There is not one *sedes doctrinae* to be found in 3 John. Nevertheless God deemed these words important enough to have them penned and preserved for our edification. The book itself demonstrates to us a valuable example of proactive fellowship in action.

ⁱ At sem, I was once thrown into the leper colony for an unsatisfactory exegesis.

ⁱⁱ Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 3:789ff.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ezekiel 18

^{iv} Romans 12:1; 1 Peter 2:5, 9

^v Paul W. Spaude, *The Lutheran Church Under American Influence* (Burlington, Iowa: The Lutheran Literary Board, 1943), 17.

^{vi} *Triglot Concordia* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1921), *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, Articles VII and VIII: 9. P. 229.

^{vii} Cf. Titus 2; 1 Timothy 4:16

^{viii} Cf. Matthew 7:15-16; Romans 10:9

^{ix} R.R. Williams, *The Cambridge Bible Commentary of the New English Bible: The Letters of John and James* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 3.

^x Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1858; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 1:222

^{xi} John Schaller, *The Book of Books: A Brief Introduction to the Bible for Christian Teachers and Readers* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1924), 241.

^{xii} Merrill C. Tenney, Ph. D., ed., *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975) 2:624

^{xiii} Nolan R. Harmon, ed. *The Interpreter’s Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), 12:308

^{xiv} Tenny, 2:624

^{xv} Dr. George Stoeckhardt, *Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Erwin W. Koehlinger (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1980), 209.

^{xvi} 1 Corinthians 1:11-12

^{xvii} 1 Peter 2:5

^{xviii} 1 John 3:18

^{xix} Ephesians 5:1,2

^{xx} 1 Peter 1:18-19

^{xxi} Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed., trans. and eds. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 323.

^{xxii} Matthew 5:43 ff

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- xxiii Cf. 1 Corinthians 11:30; 2 Corinthians 7:1; James 5:14-16
- xxiv Romans 10:9
- xxv Phillipians 2:13
- xxvi C.F.W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, trans. W.H.T. Dau (St. Louis; Concordia, 1986), 388.
- xxvii Cf. Luke 7:9; Ephesians 2:10
- xxviii Bauer, 391, #5
- xxix Matthew 25:34-40
- xxx Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, trans. And ed. Cleon L. Rogers, Jr. (Giessen: Brunnen-Verlag, 1970; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 800.
- xxxi Cf. Acts 17:10; 18:27; 20:13; 21:2; Philemon 22; Phillipians 4:18; 1 Corinthians 9:4,5
- xxxii Ephesians 4:28
- xxxiii 2 Corinthians 5:20
- xxxiv David P. Kuske, *Luther's Catechism: The Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther and an Exposition for Children and Adults Written in Contemporary English*, 2nd ed. (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1989), 6.
- xxxv 1 Corinthians 9:12, 18
- xxxvi Harmon, 311.
- xxxvii Joseph H. Thayer, trans. and ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), 655.
- xxxviii *Triglot, Formula of Concord*, Article X:5, 10. PP.1053, 1055.
- xxxix *Triglot*, F. Bente, *Historical Introductions to the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 110.
- xl *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, 343.
- xli 1 Corinthians 3:5ff
- xlii 4:11-13
- xliii 1 Peter 5:2
- xliv Herman Sasse, *We Confess the Church*, trans. Norman Nagel (St. Louis: Concordia, 1986), 107.
- xlvi Sasse, 78.
- xlvi 1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16.
- xlviii Cf. 1 John 1:3, 5, 6; 2:7ff; 4:20
- xlix Acts 19:23
- ^l Mark 16:15; John 8:47
- ^{li} 4:20
- ^{lii} Matthew 18:19-20
- ^{liii} I see us present WELS pastors often in a quandary. We hate the deadness of the liturgy that we grew up with. We tend to blame the liturgy itself for the deadness we sense in the congregations we serve now. We are even suspicious of anyone who seems to be “high-church” because they are even *more* liturgical. Ugh! So we won’t go back that way, fearing a *more intense* concentration on liturgy and formality will only make matters worse. Our patience is worn thin by the complaints of members about our worship. We look curiously at the exciting, casual worship attracting all kinds of people in the generic “community revival churches” that surround us. We somehow sense in the backs of our minds that it wouldn’t be right to adopt what they do wholesale, but we hedge. Maybe if we adapt a little of what they do into our services it might inject some life into our people. Maybe then we won’t end up driving people away. It’s more palatable to the tastes of our present-day culture anyway and seems to be so much more relevant.
- But do we realize that the deadness of our worship is not the fault of the liturgy at all, but our own? This is only my opinion, but I submit that it is not the liturgy itself that brings about dead worship, but the pietistic spirit emanating from the European mission societies which spawned the WELS. For decades (generations?) our pastors have downplayed liturgy, shrugged off ceremony—even scorned it, as being too high-brow, stiff, Catholic, or whatever. Walther said that America is the land of the sects. Is it any surprise that we may have also been influenced by the spirit of our surroundings? 150 is not so long ago in church-years!
- Take another look at TLH. Read the rubrics, the proper prefaces for Holy Communion, the calendar, the introits, the graduals, or the canticles. It was intended to be used in a much grander, majestic (and more Lutheran) way that we in the WELS were ever inclined to use it. Like it or not, in worship we tend toward pietism (don’t give me nothin’ high-falootin’!) right down to our Geneva robes! The liturgy died because we killed it. Besides, the amount of energy, time, planning, and coordinating of talent it takes each week to make it excellent was more than we

wanted to invest. It's easier just to do the same-old same-old each week without having to think about it. Or for variety it's easier to write a special service of our own—that way it really only involves one person to get things right, the pastor. But not even that really makes an enduring impression on our people and it might carry less dignity.

To drop the liturgy as the culprit of our spiritual deadness is a pietistic conclusion, not Lutheran. It is a reaction that repeats history, reflecting the notions of Spener. We end up walking right into the problem we wanted to avoid in the first place. For if the worship is not springing from the proclamation of objective justification (which the sects *don't* have), then it is not truly spiritual, or alive—no matter how exciting it is. And as for the perceived deadness—faith generated in the hearts of our people through worship is not always something you can clearly see anyway (2 Co 5:7).

Worship is the heartbeat of the congregation. Just like everything else a farmer does all day is centered on that half hour in the morning and half hour in the evening of milking the cows, so everything we do all week as public ministers is for that one hour of worship on Sunday. If we teach a Bible class, discuss building plans, or visit a delinquent it is all aimed at making our worship more edifying to the people, more accessible, or better attended.

I am convinced that if we really want spiritual renewal in our congregations, it has to begin with our Sunday worship. And the best way to renew our Sunday worship (besides spending a lot more time on our sermons and honing our preaching styles!) is to renew the liturgy—use the Western Rite restored to its former Reformation, and even pre-Reformation glory (sans the Mass, adding the vernacular, of course!)—use it the way it begs to be used. Actually, the Western Rite enables us to employ whatever talents God has given locally in a variety of ways with a variety of styles (cultural sounds?)—and yet keeps us Christ-focused. For (it seems to me) the Western Rite is more of a form or formula, than it is a specific set of words or songs. It is a true vehicle that does what only Lutheran worship does today—it proclaims. Yet in its structured formalness it retains the mystery necessary to worship and true edification—mystery because our God is awesome and mysterious (Romans 11:33ff). Grace and salvation are a mystery too (Ephesians 3:2ff). Can a person read the heavenly worship service taking place in Revelation 5 or 7, and not sense the grandness, the majesty, the mystery, and... (Get ready!) the formality?! Check out the repetitive, conspicuous use of the word *καὶ* throughout, giving a sense of ceremony or ritual with successive parts. It appears to be almost (Dare I say it?)... liturgical! At least it definitely comes closer to the orderliness of liturgy than chaotic praise concerts and the me-focused, remodeled anxious benches of the reformed brethren.

The Western Rite doesn't permit God to become trendy, trite, or familiar (which breeds contempt). We come to worship to escape the familiar, to be transported to something bigger than ourselves, and transformed into something better than we were before. The Western Rite has stood the test of time and served diverse cultures for the better part of the last two millennia. (I saw/heard a video-taped worship service from our brothers and sisters in Mexico accompanied entirely by guitar—done excellently. The same for worship done *a capella* in four-part harmony in Zambia. Try to tell me the Holy Spirit is not living among those worshipers!) It helped save the day in the question concerning the divinity of the Son during the formulation of the Nicene Creed. Using it unites us to Christians of the past, who in many cases though in different languages, nevertheless spoke the same words because they were convicted of the same things. Those people are still living, still repeating the same words with us, only in the Worship Triumphant. Complain about dead orthodoxy if you will, but on the other hand, *the orthodox church has always maintained the Western Rite* (E.g. Think how the regular use of the Three Ecumenical Creeds keeps us on the right path doctrinally. Think of teaching your people, who know two of those creeds by heart, how they can use them as a way of verbalizing what they believe to others, as a yardstick to measure the teachings of other churches against, as a way of recalling their baptisms, as a guide for conducting family devotions, etc.).

Perhaps if we spent some real energy teaching our people in Bible Class the why's and wherefore's of worship and the Western Rite, instilling the ideas of structure, symbolism and ceremony, they would have a greater appreciation for it—and probably get more out of their Sunday worship too. They might find that as the liturgy speaks more clearly to them, more of their spiritual needs/questions are met. You will not run out of things to talk about. For the liturgy, one way or another, touches on every doctrine and covers every aspect of the Christian life. Sometimes I wonder, if we truly did liturgical worship liturgically, how many people would actually think it was so-called contemporary worship. Take this as a personal admission of falling short, as I myself have not given it the energy it deserves, nor do I now how to do it well. However, personally, I welcome the revitalized emphasis on liturgical worship that has accompanied the new hymnal in the WELS. If you haven't studied the CW Manual (at least Section One), I would recommend it.

^{liv} Cf. John 14:27; 20:19,26; Ephesians 2:14; 4:2; Philippians 4:2,3

^{lv} Dr. George Stoeckhardt, *Lectures on the Three Letters of John*, trans. H.W. Degner (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1980), 91.

^{lvi} Cf. Matthew 25:12; Luke 12:20

^{lvii} Isaiah 43:1; Philippians 4:3; Revelation 3:5