

# UNSUNG HEROES OF THE BIBLE: DEMETRIUS

Willie A. Alvarenga

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## INTRODUCTION

As we study the Bible, we cannot help but to notice how much emphasis it gives concerning the need to be imitators of good examples (e.g. 1 Corinthians 4:16; 1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2:14; 3 John 11; Colossians 4:5). As we can see, we are encouraged to be good examples to others. Our study at this moment will focus on a great example we have in the New Testament. Even though we do not have many verses devoted to telling us about this particular Christian, we know he was a faithful example to follow. We are talking about our brother in Christ, Demetrius. As we examine our lesson, let us consider the following: (1) The phrase of our topic under consideration, (2) The faithful man under consideration, (3) The good testimony of Demetrius, and finally, (4) Seven practical principles on how to be a good example like him.

## THE PHRASE OF OUR TOPIC UNDER CONSIDERATION

What does the phrase, “Unsung heroes of the Bible” mean? It basically means that there are several examples of faithful people of God who served Him faithfully in the past, but who do not receive much acknowledgment from our part. We have preached many sermons about the Apostles and many others, but at times, we have failed to acknowledge the faithful service of others such as Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25-30), Antipas (Revelation 2:13), and Onesiphorus (2 Timothy 1:16-18), just to mention a few. For this reason, we need to be encouraged to speak about the good service others have provided to our heavenly Father. God, in His infinite wisdom, decided to include their names in the inspired pages of the New Testament. We must recognize that God did this for our own benefit, that is, so that we may imitate their faithful service to Him.

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<sup>1</sup> *American Standard Version*. 1995 (3 Jn 12). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

## THE NAME DEMETRIUS

What does the Bible say about Demetrius? As we study the Bible, we realize that this name appears only three times in the New Testament. Luke tells us about a person named Demetrius in Acts 19:24, "For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no little business unto the craftsmen." This same person is mentioned again in Acts 19:38, "If therefore Demetrius, and the craftsmen that are with him, have a matter against any man, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls: Let them accuse one another." It is obvious from these two references that this man was not a Christian. The other reference to this name is found in 3 John 12, "Demetrius hath the witness of all men, and of the truth itself: yea, we also bear witness: and thou knowest that our witness is true."

One of the questions we may ask is whether these two names make reference to the same person, or to different ones. Some have suggested that both may be reference to the same person. Notice what J.R. Dummelow commented:

Both he and the mob leader lived in or near Ephesus, and there is nothing impossible in the suggestion that the agitator had become a disciple, and that both references, therefore, are to the same person. He may have been the bearer of this letter<sup>2</sup>

According to an approximate chronology of events in the book of Acts, we may suggest that the events in Acts 19 took place around A.D. 54-57. It has been argued that the letter of 3 John was penned at about A.D. 95. If we take these dates into consideration, and if we suggest that these two references are the same person, then about 38 years have transpired since the events in Acts 19, and the writing of the letter of 3 John.

There may be a chance that the person named Demetrius Luke mentions in his book may have later become a faithful Christian in the Lord's church. Taking into consideration the dates, he may have been in his late 60's or 70's.

## THE GOSPEL CAN CHANGE LIVES!

We must remember that the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16), and as such, people can turn their lives around for the better. We know this was the case with **those who practiced magic** (Acts 19:18-20) "Many also of them

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<sup>2</sup> J. R. Dummelow, *Commentary on the Holy Bible* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937), p. 1062.

that had believed came, confessing, and declaring their deeds. <sup>19</sup>And not a few of them that practised magical arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all; and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. <sup>20</sup>So mightily grew the word of the Lord and prevailed”, **Saul of Tarsus** (Acts 9, 22, 26), **those at Corinth** (1 Corinthians 6:9-11) “Or know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with men, <sup>10</sup>nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup>**And such were some of you:** but ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God,” and many others.

But as far as Demetrius is concerned, and his possible connection to the one mentioned in Acts 19, we can only speculate as to who this person really was. We can only hope that the one mentioned in the book of Acts was the same the Apostle John mentioned in his letter. If this was the case, then, what a great joy and victory for the cause of Christ this was!

### **DEMETRIUS: A MAN OF GREAT TESTIMONY**

In the New Testament we have approximately 7, 957 verses. Of all these verses, only one was dedicated to mentioning Demetrius. Yes, only one verse, but a powerful one! When we examine and practice the content of this particular verse, it will help us to become faithful servants of the Lord. This faithfulness will take us into eternity with God. With this in mind, let us consider what the inspired Apostle John wrote about this faithful Christian.

### **DEMETRIUS ENJOYED A GREAT REPUTATION FROM ALL MEN**

*“Demetrius hath the witness of all men, and of the truth itself: yea, we also bear witness: and Thou knowest that our witness is true” (3 John 12).*

What a great statement this is! The faithful Demetrius enjoyed the blessing of being able to be well spoken of by others. He was a diligent Christian who, even though he lived in the world, he did not live according to the world (John 15:19; 17:14).

If ye were of the world, the world would love its own: but because ye are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you (John 15:19).

I have given them thy word; and the world hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world (John 17:14).

The phrase “*of all men*” implies that he had a good reputation not only among Christians, but also with the people of the world. With regards to the people outside of Christ, the Bible encourages us to be a good example to them. Please consider the following verses:

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a lamp, and put it under the bushel, but on the stand; and it shineth unto all that are in the house. Even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:13-16, ASV 1901).

Walk in wisdom toward *those who are outside* (Colossians 4:5, NKJV).

Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear (1 Peter 3:1-2, NKJV).

That you may walk properly *toward those who are outside*, and that you may lack nothing (1 Thessalonians 4:12, NKJV).

Moreover he must have a *good testimony among those who are outside*, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil (1 Timothy 3:7, NKJV).

We are also encouraged through the Scriptures to be good examples to those of the family of God. Consider the following verses:

And ye became imitators of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit; so that *ye became an ensample to all that believe* in Macedonia and in Achaia. For from you hath sounded forth the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith to God-ward is gone forth; so that we need not to speak anything (1 Thessalonians 1:6-8).

Let no man despise thy youth; but *be thou an ensample to them that believe*, in word, in manner of life, in love, in faith, in purity (1 Timothy 4:12).

In all things showing thyself an ensample of good works; in thy doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of us (Titus 2:6-7).

It is imperative that you and I strive to be good examples to others so God may be glorified and those outside of Christ may be encouraged to obey the gospel as they consider our lights shining. There is no doubt that Demetrius was able to bring people to Christ through his excellent example. People were able to see Christ in him! Let us remember the words penned by Luke in Acts 2:47, “Praising God and *having favor with all the people*. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). What a positive impact we can have on others through our faithful example!

Now, according to the context of this letter and the good reputation Demetrius enjoyed, we can safely conclude that this Christian man (1) Walked in the truth of God’s Word, (2) He was a faithful worker in the kingdom of God, (3) He was a helper of those who needed help, (4) He was a fellow-worker for the truth, (5) He was an imitator of good examples, and (6) He was a good example to others. Even though most of these things are said of Gaius, as stated before, we can safely conclude that Demetrius practiced these things as well.

### **WALKING IN GOD’S TRUTH**

With this in mind, let me encourage all of us to walk in the truth of God’s Word just like John, Gaius and Demetrius did. The Bible teaches us to be obedient to God’s Word. Let me encourage us to take heed to the following verses: “Hold the pattern of sound words which thou hast heard from me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 1:13), “But abide thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them” (2 Timothy 3:14), “If you love me, ye will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). If we follow these verses we will be walking in the truth of God’s Word. Let us remember that we are to be doers of God’s Word and not hearers only (James 1:22-25). We can be sure that Demetrius did indeed follow and obeyed God’s Word.

## FAITHFUL WORKERS IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

We also need to strive to be faithful workers in the kingdom of God as Gaius and Demetrius were. The Scriptures place a great emphasis upon a diligent service in the kingdom. Let us hear what God has to say on this:

Not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord (Romans 12:11).

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God (1 Thessalonians 4:1).

The kingdom of God needs more faithful workers like Gaius, Demetrius and all the ones who have served the Lord in His kingdom throughout the ages.

I am confident that Demetrius, like Gaius, showed love for everyone. They were willing to extend a helping hand to everyone. The Church of our Lord needs more faithful brethren who are willing to love one another as Jesus loved us (John 13:34-35). We need brothers and sisters who practice unfeigned love (Romans 12:9). The Apostle Paul exhorted the saints at Philippi to practice brotherly love when he penned the following words,

Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interest, but also for the interest of others (Philippians 2:1-4).

These exhortations are exemplified in the same chapter with the life of Jesus (Philippians 2:5-11), Timothy (2:19-24), and Epaphroditus (2:25-30). These faithful men showed the kind of love that needs to prevail within the church of Christ. I am confident that Demetrius followed the same example.



## GOOD REPUTATION BEFORE THE TRUTH AND FAITHFUL BRETHREN

It is great to know that Demetrius enjoyed great reputation, not only from everyone, but also from the truth itself, and the Apostle John. The faithful Demetrius walked according to the commandments of God. We know this to be the case because the inspired Apostle John tells us so. This man of God was a true example of what the Word of God can do in our lives! When you walk in God's truth, people will notice that. I am reminded of Acts 4:13, "Now when they beheld the boldness of Peter and John, and had perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; *and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.*" The Apostle Paul also tells us something we can relate to what Luke wrote, "Ye are our epistle, written in our hearts, *known and read of all men*" (2 Corinthians 3:2). Has the world noticed that we have been with Jesus? What are people reading through our lives? When we let the Word of God work in our lives, this will help us to live a life like the one Demetrius lived.

The Apostle John also bore witness of Demetrius. It is a great blessing to have faithful brethren who are well known among our brotherhood and who can speak well of us. If you are a faithful Christian, brethren who are well known, will never hesitate to write a letter of recommendation for you. I am confident that if Demetrius needed one, the Apostle John would never have said no to this request. We often tell our students to strive to be diligent in their Christian conduct while they study at school, this way, whenever they need a letter of recommendation, if they were a good example, then we would be glad to write one for them. **We all need to make every effort** to be faithful in our conduct.

## DEMETRIUS: NOT A DIOTREPES

One last thing we can say about Demetrius for sure is that he was not a Diotrephes in his Christian conduct. We can safely conclude that: (1) He did not love to have the preeminence among our brethren, (2) he was not a hindrance to the work of God, and (3) he did not speak evil against the brethren. Sadly to say, today we have some in the church who like to imitate the example of Diotrephes, instead of Demetrius. I have known several brethren who have done this. We must remember that those who imitate that which is good are of God (3 John 11). May the God of heaven and earth help us to be more like Demetrius, and not like Diotrephes!

## **SEVEN PRACTICAL PRINCIPLES THAT CAN HELP US TO BE MORE LIKE DEMETRIUS**

What are some of the things that we can practice in our lives to be more like Demetrius? What can we as Christians do to enjoy a great reputation among our brethren and those outside the body of Christ? Let me suggest a few things we can practice in our daily living, things that will help us tremendously to accomplish a good reputation. Please know that God has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness. These things are found in His Word (2 Peter 1:3).

### **1. Remember who we are!**

The Bible teaches us that we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13-16). Through our lights, we guide people to Christ. We are also Christians, followers of Jesus Christ (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16), and as such, we follow His example (1 Peter 2:21-22; 1 Corinthians 11:1). Remember that the word “Christian” basically means, “Christ-like.” If we make every effort to remember who we are, then we will always be a good example to others.

### **2. We must grow in the knowledge of God’s Word**

The knowledge of God’s Word can help us to be ready for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17). This knowledge will inform us as to what we must do in order to enjoy a great reputation before God, our brethren, and those outside the church. God encourages us to grow in the knowledge of His Word (2 Peter 3:18) because He knows that if we do not do this, we will be destroyed (Hosea 4:6; Isaiah 5:13). Only God can tell us what to do to live a faithful life in Christ (Psalm 119:11). I am confident that Demetrius was a diligent student of God’s Word. Are we diligent students of the Bible?

### **3. Pray for wisdom**

Wisdom helps us to rightly divide the Word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15). God can give us wisdom if we ask Him (James 1:5-6). The practice of wisdom in our lives will help us to develop a great reputation among people (James 3:13; Colossians 4:5). The practice of God’s Word in our lives will help us to be wise people. Notice the great lesson we learned from Deuteronomy 4:6, “Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, that shall hear all these statutes, and say, surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.” We are confident that Demetrius was a wise Christian, and so must we!

#### **4. Imitate the life of faithful Christians**

We have seen in this lesson how the Bible exhorts us to be imitators of good examples (1 Corinthians 4:6; 11:1; Philippians 3:17; 3 John 11). The Bible is replete with great people we can imitate (e.g. Jesus, Paul, Timothy, Epaphroditus, Jeremiah, Ezra, Job, Gaius, Demetrius, etc.). Do we take time to consider the examples we have in the Bible? Do we prayerfully consider living according to their pattern? I really hope we do!

#### **5. Stay away from bad examples**

The Apostle Paul gives us instructions with regards to this point. Notice what he wrote to the Corinthians, “Be not deceived: Evil companionships corrupt good morals” (1 Corinthians 15:33). He also wrote, “know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?” (1 Corinthians 5:6). The writer of Proverbs also gives us instructions with regards to this, “Walk with wise men, and thou shalt be wise; but the companion of fools shall smart for it” (Proverbs 13:20). Let us stay away from anything that can have a negative impact in our lives.

#### **6. Strive to live a holy life in Christ**

A life of holiness can help us tremendously to be a great example to others. With regards to this, the Word of God has a lot to say concerning a holy life. There are plenty of exhortations where we are encouraged to stay away from sin. Let us examine the following verses: “But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to *fulfil* the lusts *thereof*” (Romans 13:14), “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16), “but like as he who called you is holy, be ye yourselves also holy in all manner of living; because it is written, Ye shall be holy; for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:15-16), “Beloved, I beseech you as sojourners and pilgrims, to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul” (1 Peter 2:11), “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vain glory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever” (1 John 2:15-17). These are some of the exhortations that can help us to live a faithful life in Christ. Anyone who follows these will make it to heaven (Hebrews 12:14; Matthew 5:8).

## **7. Be a doer of God's Word**

There is no way to accomplish a good example in life unless we practice what the Word of God teaches. Let us remember that our heavenly Father will only bless those who practice His Word (James 1:22-25; Luke 11:28). And so, with this in mind, let me encourage us to prayerfully consider all the things we have learned in this lesson. This is the only way to experience a change of life for the better. We must remember that God gave us His Word, not only for our information, but also for our transformation.

### **CONCLUSION**

What a great study this has been! It is always a great blessing to study the life of those faithful brothers and sisters in Christ who served the Lord in His kingdom. Demetrius is a great example to follow with regards to a good example. We thank God for giving us a pattern to follow. The question is: Will we imitate the example of those who lived a faithful life in Christ? Will we also be a good example to others? I pray that we will always live as the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13-16). By doing this, our heavenly Father, will be glorified!