

December 31, 2017
Sunday Evening Service
Communion
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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LIVING OUT THE TRUTH CAUSES JOY

3 John

Some Bible scholars are of the opinion that the three letters of John were a package deal. That is, John wrote all three letters, sent them to his friend Gaius, who was a member at the Church in Ephesus, with the intent that all three combined would accomplish an important teaching opportunity. In that theory, First John was the doctrinal instruction that laid the foundation of truth regarding the various tests that prove faith in Jesus Christ. Second John was intended to teach application from a prohibitive perspective, that is, don't express love or help toward a false teacher who denies Christ. Third John was intended to teach application from a positive perspective, that is, practice love by supporting the true servants of Christ.

Whether or not that was actually the case is up for much debate. Regardless of whether the letters came to Gaius as a package, the fact remains that Third John is a practical application of the truth. Throughout this short letter, John appealed to the way truth was being put into practice by people like Gaius and Demetrius, or the way truth was ignored by people like Diotrephes.

The letter serves to teach us to avoid falling into the pride of presuming that we alone are right and, therefore, we reject everyone who disagrees with us. More importantly, the letter teaches us to practice the truth in a way that will be helpful to others who are busy about the Lord's work.

Greeting.

From the opening words of this letter we discover that the recipient was a friend of the writer. *The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth. Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul (vv.1-2).*

The recipient, Gaius, was beloved. At the outset, we need to acknowledge that Gaius was a common name. It was the name of the man from Macedonia who traveled with Paul and was accosted in Ephesus (Acts 19:29). It was also the name of a different man from Berea who accompanied the offering to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4). Also, Paul's host when he was writing to the Roman Christians was named Gaius (Romans 16:23). Obviously, there were many men in that culture who owned this name. And the Gaius who received this letter was probably none of the above.

He was beloved first by God and, therefore, was a redeemed sinner. At the same time, John also loved Gaius and no doubt other Christians did the same. It was not that Gaius was such a loveable guy, but that love for fellow Christians was the expected norm. Remember the lessons from First John? That love was important. Christian love, brotherly love, is quite meaningful in a persecuting world.

John loved his friend Gaius in the truth. It almost seems odd to find the word *truth* show up in a standard greeting in a letter. But truth is the center point, the foundation, the common bond among Christians. We will see in verse three what a major part truth played in the life of Gaius. John didn't just have warm feelings for this Christian. He desired the very best for him even if he had to sacrifice—and the best is always determined by truth.

The writer desired goodness for the recipient. Who was the writer of the letter? Again, as in Second John, the writer identified himself as the "elder." Most conservative scholars believe that John was the author. As we mentioned in our study of First John, he was possibly the pastor, leader of the Church in Ephesus in a time past. But more than that, he served as a "bishop" in the way the office is practiced in some Christian circles today. As such, he would have been responsible for overseeing multiple churches. This was much

like Paul's instruction for Titus to appoint elders in every town (Titus 1:5).

More important still is the fact that John was the last of the apostles upon whose teaching and leadership Christ built the church (Ephesians 2:20). In all of these ways, John owned God ordained authority over the local assembly of which Gaius was a part. Recognizing and submitting to that authority was an issue that needed attention.

The remainder of the greeting in this letter essentially is John's desire for Gaius to, "Have a great life." *I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul (v.2)*. John's words almost seem trite or unlikely in a world dominated by Domitian one of the most zealous emperors to persecute Christians. The world—which God's children were not supposed to love—was a clear enemy to the truth of the gospel. And yet John's desire was sincere. Would we prefer John to have written, "I know that because you are a Christian you will have a rotten life, but I am praying that God will grant you sustaining grace."? John expressed a deep and genuine love for Gaius partly because of the man's impeccable testimony.

Thanks for Living Out Truth.

Part of the reason for this letter from John to Gaius was for John to point out that it was reported that Gaius was walking in truth. Obviously, some fellow Christians had testified to John about the truth in Gaius. So John confessed, *For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth (v.3)*.

John was delighted by the testimony of mutual acquaintances. We assume this report came from some travelers who had been with Gaius and observed that he held to truth. More precisely, they reported that Gaius was characterized by truth. Living according to the truth is supposed to be the normal standard for God's people. It was important in the first century and it remains important in the twenty-first century.

But living according to truth is no longer important in our culture, and probably not anywhere in the world. Truth has been

sacrificed on the altar of expedience. For a few generations, ungodly teachers in colleges and universities taught impressionable young people that truth is relative. They taught that there is no such thing as absolute truth. Therefore, in this age of "creature worship" (Romans 1:25), the individual has the privilege of determining what constitutes truth. Now, truth is whatever a person says it is.

Therefore, what is truth to you may not be truth to me. The result is that feeling trumps truth. How a person feels is more important than someone's opinion about truth. This is how we have ended up in a culture where the Supreme Court has to determine if a person's choice to think he or she is not the gender his or her birth and body parts indicate he or she is, is a protected right guaranteed by the Constitution.

This same "creature worship" mentality has flooded the church visible. Many, maybe most, assemblies are characterized by the desire to make people comfortable first, and the desire to know truth second (if there is any desire to that end at all). The person who insists that the truth of the Bible is clear and knowable is dismissed as a backward ancient relic who is out of touch with the modern church.

As a result, the most important task of the modern church is to make sinners feel comfortable in the audience of so-called saints. Because truth has been set aside, reinterpreted, and minimized, most of the so-called saints who are trying to make sinners comfortable are nothing but sinners themselves.

Another result is that even people who sincerely profess to be Christians wonder, "Can we know the truth and should we defend it?" That question should not even be a matter of debate in the Church. Obviously, the truth of God is clear in the Bible and He intends for us to live it out. Good men have always differed on secondary interpretations of truth. But sincere children of God always agree on the fundamental truths of the Bible.

Gaius knew the truth and lived the truth, and living in truth causes joy. John confessed, *I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth (v.4)*. Being the spiritual father for spiritual children is a heavy responsibility. Discovering that they are identifying truth, learning truth, and living out the truth is a cause for great joy. At the same time, discovering that your spiritual children

are drinking the Kool-Aid of creature worship is a cause of disappointment and discouragement.

Truth is not as elusive as modern religionist say that it is. In fact, walking in truth is really quite practical. Among other things, it involves our relationship with those people who go “out for the sake of the name.” *For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles (v.7)*. This is a reference to people who have dedicated their lives to serving God by sharing, teaching the gospel. These are people who Christ has gifted as teachers and preachers and given to the Church as servants. They live for the sake of the name of their Savior alone.

And as these people live and serve God, they are not dependent on the government, or the lottery, or “go-fund me” accounts supported by the unsaved. They depend wholly on God’s people being sensitive to God leading them to provide hospitality and support. Paul testified that the people in the Church at Philippi were very faithful in this practice.

The only right conclusion of loving in the truth is that we ought to support such laborers. *Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God (vv.5,6)*. God does not give everyone the capacity to serve as traveling teachers and preachers. The majority of God’s people gathered in God’s local assemblies can practice loving in the truth by providing support for the ones God has called to vocational service.

And as we support God’s servants, we should do so *in a manner worthy of God*. Why? *Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth (v.8)*. We ought to support God’s servants. We ought to support them like we would support God Himself. It is our privilege because to do so makes us fellow workers for the truth. The whole practice of making sacrifices so that the truth and genuine servants of God can continue to serve Him comes back around to our relationship to the truth. Notice throughout the history of cultures that as love for, concern for the truth of the Bible wanes, the servants of that truth and the citadels of that truth begin to disappear. One day, maybe even in my lifetime,

people will have to search to find local assemblies where the truth of the Bible is presupposed, preached, and embraced.

Truth Versus Error.

Errant Diotrophes is a plain example of what not to do, or how not to live out the truth. He was a man who thought too highly of himself. Read John’s sad warning. *I have written something to the church, but Diotrophes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority (v.9)*.

This man named Diotrophes exalted himself. He practiced what I call the Romans 12:3 principle. God’s plan for the Church is stated in Romans 12:1-2, a passage we know well. *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

Sometimes God’s plan gets off track when a person thinks more highly of himself than he should. That is the warning of verse three. *For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned (Romans 12:3)*. When this happens, there will be conflict. It is not just a misunderstanding or an unavoidable disagreement. Exalting self beyond measure is the original sin, the sin of Satan. He desired to be more than God made him to be. The result was chaos and conflict to say the least.

Notice how John pointed out the various ways that Diotrophes demonstrated this sin of pride. He rejected John’s authority over him as one *who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority (v.9)*. He gossiped about and slandered John, *talking wicked nonsense against us (v.10a)*. He refused to practice the truth of hospitality and support for God’s workers in that, *he refuses to welcome the brothers (v.10b)*. And not only that, but he *also stops those who want to (v.10c)*. And worse yet, he excommunicates those who disagree with him. *He puts them out of the church (v.10)*.

The result of the man's sin was chaos in the church. He failed to understand that God has established authorities in life for a reason. Think about all those relationships that work out under God-ordained authorities. God set up the authority of the husband over wife, the parents over children, the civil rulers over society, and employers over employees. God has also established authorities in the Church for a reason. He determined the authority of the pastor/elders who teach. He determined that the leaders must give an account to Him. Living out these truths creates an environment of peace and stability that is conducive to preaching and teaching the gospel.

Therefore, the sin of Diotrephes should be dealt with. *So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church (v.10).* John's plan to deal with the matter strikes us as pretty soft, maybe even weak. John was going to *bring it up* when he visited in the future. Was that the right response? Most likely. Not all issues of conflict require throwing the troublemaker out like was the case for the incestuous man in Corinth (1 Corinthians 5).

Learn the three-part lesson (v.11). *Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good (v.11a).* That seems like a pretty simple principle. The Christian life is all about simple principles repeated over and over. Our training is repetition of learning and doing the same truths over and over. It is Isaiah's pattern of line upon line, precept upon precept.

Why is it important for us to know what is good and imitate it? The second part of the lesson is that whoever does good is from God (v.11b). This is not to say that doing good puts us in a relationship with God. Rather, when God establishes a relationship with us as we trust in the work of Christ, He indwells us and becomes our source for doing good. When we live according to the power of God in us, good will be the result. Good is what Gaius and Demetrius lived—the opposite of Diotrephes' life.

Third, we must learn that whoever does evil has not seen God (v.11c). People who are characterized by evil have no relationship with God. They are content to worship the creature. Evil can be really bad like murder, adultery, theft, and lying. Or evil can be very subtle and acceptable like jealousy, envy, pride, and not telling the truth.

Deotrephe practiced evil while serving as a leader in the local assembly.

Now we come to a contrast with the evildoer Diotrephes in a man named Demetrius who may or may not have been a leader. Whatever else he may have been, Demetrius was truthful. John had received a good testimony about this from others. *Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone (v.12a).* In fact, the testimony about Demetrius came *from the truth itself (v.12b).* Add to that was John's own testimony. *We also add our testimony and you know that our testimony is true (v.12c).*

Closing.

As John closed this letter, he wrote something similar to what he wrote in Second John (which might indicate that these were three separate letters sent to three separate recipients). John expressed the desire to meet. He longed to meet with Gaius because there is much to say. *I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink (v.13).*

The preacher/teacher of truth always has something important to say. Granted, vain talkers and babblers think they always have something to say too. Therefore, we ought to listen carefully to sort out the difference between the communication of God's truth and the communication of personal preferences. God's truth will shape a person in the image of God. Personal preferences will shape a person in the image of the creature.

Again John expressed the thought that it is better to meet than write. *I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face (v.14).* Until that meeting came to pass, the friends wish peace. *Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends, every one of them (v.15).* Christian friendship is true friendship. Christian friendship moves friends toward peace. The bond of Christ influences our little circles to be more like Christ.

We often talk about how common it is for us to meet people who know people we know when we travel and visit other places. Indeed, it is quite common for me to meet people in churches or at conferences, literally all over the world, who know people I know. Often we respond to that discovery by saying, "The world is small."

Actually, it is not that the world is small, but that our circles are small. What a joy it is to just run into a Christian brother or sister who is also friends with other Christians we know. It reminds us that we are walking in the truth and because we do, we have fellowship with one another. Doing truth brings great benefits.