

**Live What You Know:  
Love in Truth  
3 John 1:1-8**

## **Introduction**

Thanks to Paul Bixby for his teaching on 2 John. 3 John is a companion letter dealing with similar themes. Whereas 2 John was written to a local church John calls "the elect lady," 3 John he writes to an individual named Gaius, evidently a leader in the church. The letter is personal, mentioning two others by name: Diotrephes and Demetrius, one an example of a leader gone bad, the other with testimony of doing good.

This brief letter gives us personal insight into church life at the end of the first century. As such, it provides direction for us to "live what we know" in a way that displays the truth through the practical love the gospel produces in our lives.

<sup>1</sup> The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. <sup>4</sup> I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

<sup>5</sup> Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, <sup>6</sup> who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God.

<sup>7</sup> For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles.

<sup>8</sup> Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.

1. Prayer (1-2)

2. Joy (3-4)

3. Commendation (5-8)

### **1. Prayer (1-2)**

<sup>1</sup> The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth. <sup>2</sup> 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.

The NT mentions three men named Gaius, one from Corinth, another from Macedonia, (northern Greece), and the other from Derbe, also in Macedonia. Various Bible scholars argue for one or the other of these men, but since Gaius was as common a name in the Roman Empire as John is in the English-speaking world, we don't know for sure.

The apostle John refers to himself as the elder, not just because of his advanced age but also because of his leadership role among

the churches. His address to Gaius brims with the affection we've come to associate with the apostle John. He calls Gaius "beloved," one he "loves in truth." His love for this brother in Christ has grown in their common reliance on and devotion to the truth, that is, the gospel of Jesus Christ. In this sphere of revealed truth from God, love grows and bears fruit among genuine believers with the life of God in their souls.

It is fitting that John declares that he prays for this beloved brother in the gospel. We serve our brothers and sisters well when our love goes beyond just talking to them about God and extends to talking to God about them. *Prayer for our brothers and sisters in Christ is a priceless gift of love to them. No matter the limitations of time or the physical distance that may lie between us, genuine love for other believers must surely manifest itself in earnest intercession for them if we care about them at all.*

Notice that John's prayer for Gaius is comprehensive in its scope—both soul and body. He is confident Gaius is healthy of soul, as is evidenced by his faithful love expressed toward other believers in practical ways. But he desires his good health physically as well. We are holistic beings, and what impacts our bodies marks our souls and vice versa. The salvation Christ brings not only regenerates

our spirits, but will one day resurrect our bodies. We are rescued from sin and eventually from death. Our fallen spiritual state mars our physical existence, and salvation must restore both to be complete. In His earthly ministry, Jesus demonstrated His compassion for human suffering, not just from sin but from disease and disasters. He brought His almighty healing touch to both soul and body, showing us clearly His power and His purpose to bring an end not only to sin but to all the suffering it has brought upon our lives, including death itself. How could the Savior-King do any less? Our dignity is found in that truth that God has created us in His image. When He created us, He made us physical beings—male and female—as well as spiritual beings. And when His salvation of us is complete, Jesus Christ will have saved every part of us, spiritual and physical.

It is appropriate, therefore, to pray for our brothers and sisters regarding every part of their lives. Christianity is not like ancient Gnosticism, which falsely valued the soul but devalued the body. It is right for us to serve the needs of people both spiritually and physically. And it is foolish and harmful to divide the two. How can you love what you can't see and touch in a person if you don't love what you can?

For that reason we intercede to God on behalf of others for their spiritual and their physical needs.

Love your brothers and sisters by praying for them. You can do that far more regularly than nearly any other expression of love available to you. Surely to bring God into the equation of a person's life is the best of blessings.

Who are the brothers and sisters in Christ you genuinely love?

Who are the ones for whom you regularly pray?

What are you praying for them?

Do not limit your petitions to spiritual matters. Ask God's blessing on them in all that they are and do.

## **2. Joy (3-4)**

<sup>3</sup> For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. <sup>4</sup> I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

What is causing such joy in John's heart?

The firsthand testimony from credible believers that Gaius is walking in the truth: your truth, walking in the truth (2x).

*Walking*—literally, “walking about.” It is the characteristic way the NT describes one’s normal, moment-to-moment living.

What brings John joy is not just that Gaius has professed to know Christ. It is that those who have observed him in his daily living give eye-witness testimony that he is living in line with what the gospel teaches about how we treat our brothers and sisters in Christ, particularly in this case, showing generous hospitality to those who are traveling away from home in order to spread the good news of Jesus Christ.

*Christian truth cannot remain merely academic and theoretical. It is active and life-changing. It transforms one’s walk-about life. If it does not, it’s either not the gospel truth, or the gospel truth has not actually taken root in the person’s life.*

History is full of practical benefits genuine Christians have brought to others—showing gentle kindness to the vulnerable, the oppressed, the weak, generous giving to spread the good news, building schools and hospitals, working to abolish slavery and other forms of abuse, including the mistreatment and destruction of innocent children.

Many forget the vital role Christians have played in these arenas, revising history to make Christians the villains. It is true that even genuine, born-again Christians can still do harm to people because they still can sin. But the pervasive character of their lives is that of goodness and kindness not only toward their brothers and sisters in Christ, but also toward their neighbors and all human beings. None of us knows who of God's enemies today will become His children tomorrow through the testimony of the gospel in our faithful, loving words and deeds.

What is vital for each of us to keep in mind is that this way of living rises naturally—or supernaturally, we might say, because it is produced by the Spirit of God who has regenerated us and who indwells us—so it shows itself in the everyday, walkabout living of each believer. The big movements of history are the outflow of that lifestyle. They grow from the way we live everyday life.

Do the people who know you in the everyday, common patterns of your living see you doing good toward those around you? That is far more convincing than what people do in the public eye and in the big issues of the times. Once politics and money and other cultural issues get mixed in, people can find it hard to believe your good works are genuine, rather than just pragmatic or self-serving. When you

live the goodness of Jesus in the small ways and in the normal routines, the transforming power of the gospel is far more clear to those who observe.

1 Peter 2:12

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

3 John 1:4

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

John's reference to his children may mean that Gaius is among those who came to Christ through John's own gospel witness. Paul refers to Timothy this way. "My children" can also refer to believers for whom John cares for as a parent does his or her children. He talks this way in 1 John about his beloved children.

Either way, John is invested in their lives for the sake of the gospel, and their lives' displaying practical obedience to the truth of God brings him great joy.

The apostle Paul expresses this same joy over the persecuted yet thriving believers in Thessalonica.

## 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20

<sup>19</sup> For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? <sup>20</sup> For you are our glory and joy.

## 1 Thessalonians 3:8-9

<sup>8</sup> For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord. <sup>9</sup> For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God.

When you give yourself for the good of others through gospel witness and gospel living, nothing is so satisfying as seeing them thrive. Much of life can feel nonproductive and unfulfilling, but to see growth and health in the lives of people you love makes your efforts feel worth it. It reminds you that our labors for Christ impact the very shores of eternity, because many of the people in whom we are investing are members of our forever family. They will experience with us the ultimate payoff of a life lived for the Savior-King who rescued them and made them citizens of His eternal kingdom.

Would those close enough to you to observe your walkabout life testify that you are walking in the truth?

Are you bringing joy into the hearts of those who have poured their lives into you for Christ? Or do they see a person fixated on his or her own ambitions and pleasures, oblivious

or indifferent to the needs of individuals around them?

### **3. Commendation (5-8)**

<sup>5</sup> Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, <sup>6</sup> who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God.

Faithful

Working—action not just talk

Love—self-sacrificing love like Jesus showed for us

Testified before the church—the entire congregation of which John was a part were blessed by the report the brothers brought back

They were brothers in Christ, but they were strangers to Gaius. He received them not because he already knew them well, but because they knew Christ and were family in the Lord.

Hospitality—love of strangers

Gaius provided for them, sending them on their way to fulfill their gospel mission. Did so in a way worthy of God—that is, in keeping with their divine mission. Jesus Himself commanded this kind of gospel effort in the great commission. And Gaius' providing

for them was in keeping with the generosity of God Himself. Stingy Christianity is a contradiction of terms.

3 John 1:7

For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles.

Gone out for the sake of the name—"The name" is the revealed character of a person. They are traveling to spread the good news of who God is and what He has done through Christ. The gospel is all about making known the righteous and compassionate character of God, who in His goodness has made a way to rescue sinners deserving of His wrath and to give them instead an eternal inheritance in the Messiah Jesus.

*In a broken world like this one full of broken people like us, we desperately need someone to testify of a God who is making all things new. The present is full of heart-breaking tragedies, disease, violence, and disillusionment. But God promises a bright future. A sure hope. The present darkness and pain come from the curse of sin, but Christ has come to bear it all away. He has suffered in His own body to bear the brunt of that curse so that we might be freed from it. That is good news worth taking to the ends of the earth to all ethnicities, for we all are*

slaves to sin and death and we all need deliverance.

It is fitting that those who have come to trust in this good news is for real should underwrite the expense of spreading it abroad rather than expecting those who are not yet convinced to foot the bill. Thus they were accepting nothing from the Gentiles, that is, those who are still without God and without hope in the world, strangers to the covenants of promise. Christian missionaries were not to be like those ancient hawkers of religious cures, vagrants making merchandise of the people would give them an audience, fleecing the sheep, demanding payment for their religious tricks and performances.

3 John 1:8

Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.

What Gaius has done for these missionary brothers is what all of us who know the Lord should be doing. It is the way God wants us to take part in the expansion of the gospel to those who don't know God yet. Our practical participation in hospitality and in financial support of missionaries makes us fellow workers with them for the truth.

With the mention of the truth, John has come full circle. Gaius and all those like him are living out the truth in their daily lives. And part of that living the truth involves helping spread the truth to those who have yet to believe in Jesus. The truth will change all who believe. Over the course of history whole cities, countries, civilizations have been turned from darkness to light. When the light shines from our lives it plants itself in the lives of others and displaces the darkness that once tyrannized their lives.

All of us who are truly born-again believers in Jesus are working together to fulfill this epic mission, given to all disciples of Jesus by the Savior-King himself.

This is love in truth. This is truth generating love. And it shines with the love of God Himself. Live what you know. Love in truth.

In what ways are you opening your heart, hands, and home to others, especially believers on gospel mission?

Is your giving to the cause of the name of Jesus worthy of God who gave us the mission?

Are you a fellow worker for gospel advance?

## **Conclusion**

The apostle John's response to faithful Gaius is one of—

1. Prayer (1-2)
2. Joy (3-4)
3. Commendation (5-8)

What would the apostle say about you?

(Communion)

## Discussion Questions

1. What is the value of having personal apostolic letters like this one dating from the end of the first century for us who are part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century church?
2. What are some reasons that prayer for specific brothers and sisters in Christ is an expression of genuine love for them?
3. From the standpoint of the earthly ministry of Jesus and the Biblical promise of complete salvation, what is the doctrinal significance of praying for the physical wellbeing of our brothers and sisters as well as their spiritual wellbeing?
4. From a practical standpoint, why is it important to pray for both physical and spiritual needs?
5. What does *walking* in the truth reveal about the gospel itself and about the authenticity of a believer's profession of faith?

6. The definition of the word *gospel* is “good news” or more fully, “news that brings joy.” How is the gospel as evidenced in the lives of Christians like Gaius bringing joy to the last surviving apostle? (Compare John’s words in 1 John 1:4: “And we are writing these things so that our/your joy may be complete.”)
7. In what ways do your everyday normal patterns of living (walking about in the truth) provide a more powerful testimony to the gospel than the special occasions and big events?
8. What are some reasons John would describe missionary effort as “going out for the sake of the name”? Whose “name” is at stake?
9. What are practical ways we can be fellow workers with brothers and sisters carrying the gospel to other places in the world?