



Light from the Word

3 John: Support and Opposition in the Lord's Work

Editor's note: this month continues a four-part series of teachings from some of the shortest books of the Bible; Philemon, 2 John, 3 John, and Jude.

*"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."*¹

In this third letter from the Apostle John, through a few very personal lines written to one believer, we have a beautiful insight into the realities of life in the early church. We see a deep and enduring love between brethren, an exhortation to remain in truth (the greatest source of joy), an encouragement to put faith into action, an acknowledgment of opposition to spiritual authority—even in the early church—and a reminder to reject such opposition and to honor those who are of good report.

John's love for Gaius was profound. So profound that he repeated it in his greeting, calling him well-beloved, and then emphasizing that he loved him "in the truth." There are many ways in which people care for each other. Union brothers, fraternity brothers, and members and fans of a team all develop a strong bond, but there is no bond as deep or as strong as the bond of genuine Christian love, based on truth. John certainly wished Gaius the best in body and soul, but emphasized just how important walking in truth is when he reminded him that there is *no greater joy* than to hear that his children walk in truth.

If there is no greater joy than to know that one's loved ones walk in truth, then it is well worth our time to understand what it means to walk in truth. What is truth?

What appears to be a simple question has occupied philosophers for millennia, with little agreement. However, we read in the Bible that God

is true, and that even if every man were a liar, God will still be true.² Although men might be unreliable and changeable, God does not change. God Himself confirms that by speaking through Malachi, "*I am the Lord, I change not.*"³ Truth does not change. It is eternal. The Bible teaches that it is impossible for God to lie,⁴ and that life eternal is to know Him — the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom God sent.⁵ We also read that God is love.⁶ Therefore, we understand that God is true, God is unchanging, and God is love. By an equality, we understand that walking in truth is to consistently walk in love, which is to walk in the Spirit.

John rejoiced to find Gaius consistently, in all aspects of daily life, living (walking) in truth. As we have seen, this really means living in God; living in love; living by the power of the Holy Spirit. It goes far beyond a theoretical reliance on grace to a practical expression of grace. It goes beyond a positional justification through faith in Christ to a functional faith that demonstrates the power of God. John encouraged Gaius to know that whatever he did faithfully both to brethren and to strangers (foreigners) was evidence of living in truth. It was the action that mattered. "Walking" is doing. Our actions demonstrate whether we are walking in truth or living a lie. It is the doing that brings great joy.

*"If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him."*⁷

If we desire to walk in truth, we must tap into the source of truth, and then utilize His strength and wisdom to live in truth in all aspects of daily life.

*"He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."*⁸

By definition we understand that truth is objective and not subjective. Contrary to some popular philosophies one cannot have his own truth, or it is no longer truth, it is one's subjective — and deceptive

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— illusion. There is much about this world that is deceptive. Living in the ways of the devil can never be walking in truth, and always brings great heartache — not only to those who love us, but also to oneself. The battle between God and Satan has always come down to truth. The serpent's first words to Eve were intended to introduce doubt of the truth into Eve's mind, "Yea, hath God said . . .?"⁹ Jesus refers to the devil as a liar in whom is no truth.¹⁰ No matter how good he makes sin appear, it always disappoints and it always leads to hurt. Eventually, the bitter course of uncorrected sin will lead not only to pain and disappointment, but to a full denial that Jesus is the Son of God.

"I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie

*is of the truth. Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son."*¹¹

To his great disappointment, John had to warn Gaius of one who was not walking in truth. It seems apparent that Diotrephes believed he was walking in truth. However, contrary to the meekness of Christ, he loved to have the preeminence in the church. He felt himself to be important and wanted others to elevate him as well. He felt himself to be so important that with malicious words and discord he resisted the authority of John, who was one of the twelve Apostles chosen by Jesus and was clearly ordained by Jesus to hold authority in the church. John warned Gaius to be cautious of Diotrephes, and by extension, of all who would despise authority and cast others out of the church in their lack of love.

In contrast, John commended Demetrius, who had a good report of all. Let us also be cautious of

those who are rebellious against authority and rejoice in those who worship God in spirit and in truth — those who from the heart walk in love. What a wonderful thing to not only believe that God has the power to transform our lives, but to by faith allow Him to empower us to put love into action.

It is in *doing* that we worship God in truth.

*"God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."*¹²

(Footnotes)

¹ 3 John 1:4

² Rom. 3:4

³ Mal. 3:6

⁴ Heb. 6:18

⁵ John 17:3

⁶ 1 John 4:16

⁷ 1 John 2:29

⁸ 1 John 2:4

⁹ Gen. 3:1

¹⁰ John 8:44

¹¹ 1 John 2:21-22

¹² John 4:24

Due to the shortness of 3 John, references to the chapter itself are omitted from endnotes.

John 14:27

*Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you:
not as the world giveth,
give I unto you.
Let not your heart be troubled,
neither let it be afraid.*