

**Soul Prosperity or
Walking in the Truth**

We've now spent several weeks studying and reflecting on the Apostle John's first letter to Christians who lived two thousand years ago. The "Beloved Disciple," the one to whom Jesus had commended His mother as He hung on the cross, was the author of the Gospel of John, the book of Revelation, and three short letters to some early Christians.

His first was a "dear children" letter to encourage them to stand fast, to remain in fellowship with God, to reject false teachers and to show true Christian love to each other. Then we considered John's second letter. It's really more of a postcard – very short, one of the smallest books in the Bible. It was written to *"To the lady chosen by God and to her children, whom I love in the truth..."* She and John shared a faith in the truth of Jesus Christ (vs. 1-2). Her children in the faith are those people she has brought to Christ and given instruction in the Christian faith. John writes to assure her that the disciples she has instructed are indeed *"walking in the truth."* He also writes to warn her about false teachers. From these letters we learn that to have fellowship with God we must: **1) Know God's truth, 2) Obey God's commandments, and 3) Love God's children.**

The third letter of John was written to one Gaius, a dear friend. Along with personal greetings, John emphasizes the way of a genuine disciple of Jesus. **A follower of Christ walks in the truth of God's Word each day. Additionally, John tells us that Christians show their faithfulness to the truth as they work together with fellow Christians for the truth.**

A Faithful Walker

So who was this Gaius? It was a very common name in the Roman culture of the first century. There are three other men named Gaius in the New Testament; all associated in some way with the Apostle Paul. But there doesn't seem to be a strong case that any one of those three is the man to whom John wrote this short letter. From the letter we can determine that this Gaius was a faithful lay leader in his congregation, offering his home as a place for traveling pastors and teachers to stay. John calls him a "dear friend" whom he loves "in the truth." What makes his relationship with Gaius so satisfying is that they were connected by the truth of Christ, and they were joined in ministry through that same truth. Sometimes we meet a new person and discover that they too attend a church, and that gives us some satisfaction. At the very least it confirms that others do as we do. Sometimes

we meet a new person and discover that not only do they attend church, but it's a church of the same denomination or one similar to ours. Yet when we meet someone new who not only attends church, and perhaps one like ours, but they also express a profound faith in Jesus and share how they are actively serving Him to spread the gospel, then real joy wells up in us. That's what John is expressing in his letter to Gaius. **Joy is found in sharing the truth, faithfulness to the truth, and working for the truth.**

There are many people today who still ask the question that Roman Governor Pontius Pilate posed to Jesus at His trial. The Gospel of John reports that at His trial **Jesus said to the governor "... the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."** ...

"What is truth? retorted Pilate," John 18:37-38. And Jesus stood there, not saying a word, for the truth (the very embodiment of truth) was standing right before Pilate and he didn't recognize it. Yes, that is the question many ask today – what is truth? It's the question of the ages, for upon its answer lives are determined: how one is to live, how one sees the world and other people, and what shall be one's destiny. What is truth? Is there any truth? Can each person decide what truth is for him or herself? The "post-modern" culture seems to believe so (regardless of what biology may say).

The one answer to all such questions is that Jesus is the truth! Not only is he the truth, but He declared so: **"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me," John 14:6.** Jesus also said, **"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free," John 8:31-32.** Just as he is the truth, so too Jesus' teaching is the truth. Concerning His disciples He asked his Father in heaven to, **"Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth," John 17:17.** So to be clear, we can say that faithfulness to the truth means being faithful to what Jesus taught and what He confirmed as the Word of God, and who He is.

Faithfulness on Display

In this third letter John shares with Gaius two key ways our faithfulness to the truth can be made real. **First, walk in the truth. Second, work together for the truth.**

A. Walk in the truth. How can a Christian let his or her faithfulness to the truth be seen? **"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" 3 John 2.** No doubt it was encouraging to Gaius to know that John himself—the disciple whom Jesus loved—was praying for him! John was praying for his physical health and the everyday things he faced in life. John then gets quickly to the heart of the matter. **"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. *I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.* John stated just how Gaius showed his faithfulness to the truth. He walked in the truth as he lived his life.

So, what exactly did John mean? From our reading of John's other letters we know that he meant that **Gaius knew the truth of who Jesus was and is, because he studied the Scriptures, believed the testimony of the apostles, and he found ways to apply this knowledge in his life.** He listened to the "brothers" (those faithful teachers and preachers) that came to him with the truth. Then Gaius took the lessons and sermons to heart and applied them to his life.

Gaius was more than a "good person" who got along with his neighbors and obeyed the laws of the Roman Empire. He actually walked in the truth; that is, he walked in step with Jesus. His decisions about what he said and did were determined by the truth of God's Word. He loved others because Christ loved him. He saw others as Jesus sees them.

Now if Gaius had been asked, "What's the greatest danger to your faith?" he could have listed all of the things that we hear about today. "The world around me, the devil and his temptations, and my own sinful flesh are all great dangers to my faith!" And if we had said to Gaius, "We face those dangers too! What can we do about it?" From his experience he could say, "Show your faithfulness to the truth. Walk in the truth each day!"

So how can we live the type of Christian life that Gaius lived? First of all, like Gaius we learn the truth. We learn it and relearn it so we can walk in it. As we age, and as the world in which we live changes, we continually look at how we can apply the truth of God's Word to our lives. Our decisions as a spouse or parent are made as we walk in the truth of Scripture. What we do at work, how we act on vacation, what we say to others, are just extensions of walking in the truth. **We apply God's Word to all the situations of every day life.** That is walking in the truth as John declared to Gaius.

"... the most heroic acts and the greatest feats aren't the stuff of headlines and fame. They're actually to be found in the daily choices that you'll make and the habits that you've already begun to form." (VP Mike Pence, Commencement Address, Hillsdale College, May 12, 2018).

B. Work together for the truth. Christians gather themselves into congregations, like ours, to reinforce and encourage one another in this walk in the truth. Here's the second way that Gaius showed his faithfulness to the truth, as noted in John's letter: *"Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you. They have told the church about your love. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth."*

Before there were colleges and seminaries the Apostles trained the next generation of pastors and teachers. Think of Paul's missionary journeys recorded in the Book of Acts. While he established churches, he also trained workers in those churches. And before there were what we would call "congregational mission offerings" or sources of funding for pastors and teachers they relied on the hospitality of the people who received their messages for their food and lodging. Gaius had been showing such hospitality to the "brothers" even though they were strangers to him. John encouraged Gaius to continue that practice. Don't be like Diotrophes, says John, one who thinks he knows it all and can't even welcome genuine apostolic teaching. *"Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good."*

Our faithfulness to the truth of Jesus is shown by working together with others for the truth, and following the truth as taught in Scripture. Some of you serve in a formal way as a church officer or on a board or committee. Others of you serve in informal ways. You volunteer here and there for a variety of tasks. You faithfully bring your offerings – our financial support, together, continues the message of the truth we know in Jesus Christ. All of us ought to be praying for one another and for this congregation. Together we are working for the truth.

Blessings All Mine

We ask God for blessings ... we do it all the time ... little realizing that blessings are the result of our obedience to God. When we choose to obey all God has commanded us, the blessings flow ... not as reward but as the natural result of our relationship with God, working in the manner that God intended when He created us.

We might ask ourselves, "What is the greatest danger to my faith in Jesus?" Every day we face the allure of sin on the internet, in the movies, on television, and just the lowering standards of morality around us. Please don't let that question slip quickly from your mind. Consider it carefully. What is the greatest danger to your faith? In Romans 9 the Apostle Paul writes, *"... but the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works,"* Rom. 9:31-32. What he meant was the unbelief of the Israelites who substituted their own "religion" for what God had revealed to them. It is just as tempting to us to substitute our own religious system for God's plan of salvation. Because of the pride in our sinful nature we are frequently tempted to think that our good lives and our religious behavior make us righteousness before God (and everyone else for that matter).

So with these spiritual "landmines" around us and within us, in addition to the temptations of the world around us, what should we do? First recognize that there isn't just one "greatest danger" to our faith. There are many great

dangers to our faith! But ultimately the response to all of these temptations and dangers to our faith is found in the Means of Grace—the Word and Sacraments. God promises us that nothing can separate us from his love. Jesus said that we are protected and we are commanded to remain faithful to the truth of God's Word where those promises and God's power to preserve us are found. With the Scriptures, our goal in life ought to be to “hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them.”

A genuine follower of Christ walks in the truth of God's Word each day. Additionally, John tells us that Christians show their faithfulness to the truth as they work together with fellow Christians for the truth. Here we find the best defense against all the great dangers to our faith.

“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth,” 3 John 4.