



"Walking in the Truth" - 3rd John

by Pastor Tim Dodson
of Jesus Fellowship of Believers
in Menomonie, Wisconsin
on July 5th, 2015

(1) *THE ELDER, To the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth:*
(2) *Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.* (3) *For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth.* (4) *I have no greater joy*

than to hear that my children walk in truth. (5) *Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers,* (6) *who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well,* (7) *because they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles.* (8) *We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth.* (9) *I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us.* (10) *Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church.*(11) *Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God.* (12) *Demetrius has a good testimony from all, and from the truth itself. And we also bear witness, and you know that our testimony is true.*(13) *I had many things to write, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and ink; (14) but I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak face to face. Peace to you. Our friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.*

The apostle John...now writing his third letter, addresses this one not to a group, a church, or a people, but rather to a specific individual by the name of Gaius. So just who is this Gaius? Who knows? Gaius was an extremely common name in that day, so we would liken it to John writing a letter that began with "Dear Bob." I mean, that would narrow it down right? But we DO know that Gaius was a pretty special guy to John... which places him high on the "food chain" in my book!

John says he loves him. And, looking back to the last letter and the preeminence upon truth therein, John again in this letter...says that he loves "in the truth." In fact, he goes even further to say that he has "no greater joy" than that which he received by hearing that he and the church there was in fact also "walking in the truth." There is no doubt that Gaius, and by association the church that Gaius was connected to, was bringing great joy to John. He praises them not because they were especially holy or bordered upon perfection in any way, but that they "walking in the truth." That should always be our goal here as a fellowship. Let it always be said that we "walk in truth." For that fact settles a lot of issues and clarifies so many questions.

He calls "Bob" a "dear friend" and as a friend naturally would, he writes in hope that "all is well with him and that he was as "healthy in body" as he was "strong in spirit." We don't know anything about Gaius, which is a very strong reminder that often those who bless the pastor the most...the guy who is there for him and holds up his arms in battle, can often be pretty anonymous on the grand historical scheme of things. It is never an "ol' boys club" of the religious elite who congregate in a special clubhouse for members only! At least it's not for me, and apparently not for John.

Once again...as in his last letter, John refers to himself merely as "the elder." Though he could've called himself an *apostle*, yet he refers to himself as an *elder*. Through it all there was a humility...a "take the back seat" kind of heart and approach in this guy John. He would eventually be the last of the apostles, the "last man standing." Surely that kind seniority would have produced some shiny "street cred!"

Some believe that his approach herein was his way of protecting the safety of this church in case his letter was to fall into the wrong hands. Meaning he doesn't identify himself so as to not cause the recipients to be put into danger because of their association with him. That idea is not a stretch of the imagination. We ourselves are careful with emails and communication into south-east Asia for that reason, and we have avoided some ministry locations there also for flock safety reasons.

The *second* letter of John warns the reader to be careful not to lift up and respect the wrong men: those that would reject scripture, truth, and obedience. This letter seems to also take the other side of the issue, reminding the people to be sure to show love, honor and hospitality toward those that are *indeed* the “real thing.” This Gaius was not receiving a letter from John because he needed to be corrected, but instead Gaius was being praised for doing the right thing in an atmosphere where apparently such was rare. It is a sad testimony against the greater church when such venomous attacks and character smears are so prevalent as they are today.

Thankfully, no mere “man” is the representative of God and His character. However, let’s admit that for many people, we are the only “God” they will ever see and ever know, so I wouldn’t want us to excuse ourselves so easily and let ourselves off the “spiritual hook” so quickly either. Gaius was not being told to “look the other way” or to avoid spiritual confrontation. But he was rather being praised for and directed to continue to love and support those who are ministering for the kingdom in a righteous and scriptural manner. To “*love in truth.*”

We can gather that in some way, this guy Gaius was a leader of some sort...a ‘guy in charge.’ He was therefore responsible for the “flavor” of that church...the ministry priorities and “tone” of the fellowship at large. All of us who lead...who call ourselves pastors, have to take on that mantle of responsibility and accountability. I can’t simply “wash my hands” of such! I certainly have known pastors who have tried! Those who would have everyone think that despite the rebellious attitudes and general ungodly practice of the flock, that somehow they were themselves innocent and “above the fray.” No, ...*I don’t think so!* Frankly, it is the pastor’s ultimate responsibility to set a righteous, holy, and faithful tone and direction for the church body or to burn it down in trying.

I know this one guy...*I would stop short in calling him a pastor*, that when challenged about the need to make right some very unrighteous behavior and entrenched positions in his “flock”, he said “*oh...I don’t think they would stand for that.*” *Excuse me?* I must have missed that directive in the pastoral epistles...the part that said, “if it’s hard and they won’t stand for it, just let it go!” I have often said that if it came to that I would see the last of everyone out the front door, turn the open sign over, and pack it in!

The bottom line pastors, is that if you “can’t take the heat, then stay out of the kitchen!” I’m not being flippant here...it’s really hard to do this job! It’s exhausting some times, a spiritual battlefield *most* of the time, and scary *all the time*. But that does not change the fact that we don’t get to write our own job description! It’s all there in scripture, and the boss is frankly fairly demanding. So suck it up and get out there!

I think John would have been the first to cuff Gaius in the head if he wasn’t doing what he should have been doing. We know that because in the latter half of this book he does indeed go after one who had strayed from the pastoral job description, a guy he named by name, one “Diotrephes.” Now this dude liked to be front and center...he liked to have the perceived ‘pastoral badge,’ but he just didn’t want to get his hands dirty and he didn’t want to be unpopular.

He, according to John, “liked to have preeminence.” NLT says “*Diotrephes, who loves to be the leader, refuses to have anything to do with us.*” Why? Because Diotrephes wanted the power and position, he just didn’t want the responsibility nor the accountability. He couldn’t take the risk that John or Gaius would “out” him because of his inappropriate behavior! So best to paint the picture that they are all villains and hunker down in the “compound” where no one can get to us! It was...*and is today*, a sad scene to watch!

But Gaius was not one of those guys. His reputation...according to verses 5- 6, had gone out before him. This was a guy who was not only committed to sound doctrine, but to living out that doctrine in a real and tangible love. John says, 'I see both truth *and* love in Gaius. I see right doctrine, right belief, and commitment to Christian love. I see doctrine and love, truth and practice joined.' What a great description of the Christian life! A healthy disciple who loves God's word and is committed to truthfully living that out in love. In this case, John speaks to Gaius about their support of visiting missionaries in the local congregation, and praises him for his "practical love played out." Apparently, for this church, love was more than words.

Another problem that arises here is that there will inevitably be those who take the position "*well...that's gossip, and we shouldn't gossip!*" But I would contend that such is misunderstanding the definition of gossip. Gossip is not the avoidance of discussion...even by name if need be, of a problem or situation where there is the clear intent and power to rectify. How often we avoid accountability and brotherly responsibility under the cloak of "not gossiping!" Gossip is idle 'chit chat' about someone else where there is no responsibility or intent or power to deal with the issue being discussed.

John was not only willing to speak to Gaius about the problem of this guy who's spreading dissention in the local church, but was willing to talk to Diotrephes himself about it and it seems that he went out of his way to send a letter that at least was written in part for that specific purpose! If Gaius and John weren't church leaders, then all this was indeed gossip...and we would not expect John to gossip. But John wrote to Gaius about Diotrephes because they were in positions of authority.

And with those positions come the responsibility to deal in a pastoral and sensitive but biblical and forceful way with this man who is rejecting church authority, causing dissention in the body and rejecting fellowship and support of other servants of God. Of course we are all supportive of such an ideal as John's correction until we are the recipients of such correction, right? Then the pastor is a bully and the leadership abusive. That's how I have so many times gone overnight from loving, supportive, and blessed pastor and friend to abusive cult leader! Everything was fine until there had to be an uncomfortable corrective session and then *boom*, I'm out of the club!

But John ventures into that realm...perhaps with a fearful and trepid heart or maybe boldly, but either way he dealt with it. Because like it or not, that IS brotherly love! Not a mute affirmation or a tacit relinquishing of personal participation in one another's life. No, that is not "truth" and John again calls upon us to not only love, but love "in truth." To wash our hands of each other and the accountability *to* and the *accountability for* each other, is not love and it most certainly is not truth! I mean, John calls Gaius "beloved" a couple of times in this letter, and I really think that such was more than a personal feeling from John! I think that such was simply Gaius' street cred, and his reputation for this love in action had traveled far and wide.

Now, make no mistake here...would Diotrephes have called Gaius "beloved?" (or called John "beloved" for that matter?) No way! He would have had some choice adjectives to attach to his name, but I am willing to bet that "beloved" wasn't one of them! He probably called them a 'cult' and said that John and Gaius were abusive! Such is the result of ungodly dealing with difficult situations and immature reception to correction. And in our day of "me-centric" culture, never have we seen more knee-jerks to contrary opinions or verbal opposition. We will picket, march, blog, facebook, sue and make calls. But what we won't do it seems, is sit down and talk like adults and humble ourselves to hear from others! And for sure we will tend to reject all authority over our lives...whether that be government, law enforcement, church, family, or employer!

Apparently, John was intent on coming to town with the plan of "outing" this guy Diotrephes and his ungodly behavior. "*Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious*

words." There was no vindictive or vengeful heart behind his actions, but rather the love of the flock and the hate of evil.

I think it is often easy to believe in this perfect idyllic church world that we suppose existed in the early days of the church. Where everybody loved one another, there was never a squabble, and everybody always agreed. They'd all be zealous for the gospel of Christ, spreading witness to Jesus, living as Christians ought to live. But this passage gives us a glimpse into the real life of the early church. And it most often looks real familiar!

Just like now, imperfect people led the parade, and that means there is going to be some bumps and problems. There are a lot of different reasons why people go to certain churches and a lot of different reasons one gets into the business of leading one. Often, our motives are not pure and neither is our doctrine. I wish it all wasn't the case. I wish we all represented Jesus in a better light. We could surrender to what we believe to be the inevitable and just shut out the noise and ignore the rhetoric. But again, we cannot "walk in the truth" by operating in such a manner. We must lovingly, albeit directly, "face the music" and not avoid the uncomfortable issues that come with dealing with people in our fallen and broken state.

What specifically brought this guy Diotrephes to this point? Firstly, the text says he "loved preeminence." There was a fleshly need in him to be "the man." That's really just the ancient plague of pride with new vernacular and a soft touch.

Secondly, we are told that Diotrephes would not accept apostolic authority. As was said already, we hate allowing any authority over us in any aspect of life. This too is just another manifest of pride. The irony of such a heart is that it is literally in direct opposition to Christ! Jesus *delighted* in submitting Himself to His Father's authority! "I love to do my Father's will"... He says over and over in the gospel of John, "It is my meat to do the will of Him who sent Me." Such a contrary heart here that we see here is the original sin of the garden and has been plaguing us every since!

Thirdly, verse 10 says that Diotrephes is a liar. He spreads gossip and "malicious" words. This is almost an absolute in such cases, because often lying in the "sin of last resort." Meaning, sooner or later a person's actions catch up with them and the only way out is to lie your way out. It's the "i'm-backed-into-a-corner" scenario. So instead of coming clean and humbling oneself in repentance, just dig the hole a little deeper! The crazy humor in that is so often these lies are so badly constructed and so poorly delivered that the only person that really believes it is the one with it on his lips!

Fourthly, Diotrephes "refused to receive the brothers." Meaning he closed himself off from others who might participate in the ministry. He refused to support others who were battling on the same side as he professed to being on! It was a case of "us four and no more." Again, this is just pride! He went further in this by strong arming the rest of the church and trying to stop them from such support and fellowship toward other believing servants of Christ!

Finally, John doesn't deal with this in some highbrow esoterical philosophy. He just calls it straight. He says quite simply "*He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God.*" You see, it's not what we say or what we have filed in our heads. It's what we actually *do* that says who we are. That's the truth. And that is what John calls upon **that church and this one** to "walk in it..."