

Walking and Working Together For the Truth

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[0 : 00] Good morning. As we come to God's word, why don't I just pray for us before we commence.

Lord, we thank you for your word, which we have heard read. We thank you for your Holy Spirit, which will illumine it to our eyes and our hearts and our minds.

May we hear it, take it in and obey it. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. This morning, as you already realize, we're looking at John's third letter.

And I hope that during the reading you were quick to pick up some of the same language and concerns that we saw in 2 John last Sunday. There is a continuity of focus in all three of John's letters on the ways that you, the believer, can test the validity of your confession of faith.

But before we get to the passage, I'd like to talk about something that really interests me. Those who know me well know that I have a special love for church history and particularly the contributions of individuals, specifically as they were motivated by their faith or their evangelical zeal to make a difference.

[1 : 28] And 18th century England was full of these. And one of the greatest of my heroes of this time will always be William Wilberforce. Today's passage, however, reminded me of another person from that same period.

Someone whose generosity, hospitality and gospel mindedness had a massive impact on the revivals of those days.

Selina, the Countess of Huntingdon, was an English aristocrat who played a prominent role in the revivals of 18th century England and Wales.

She was very, very wealthy and she extensively funded early Methodism as well as mission work both to the Americas and to Africa.

Along with a group of like-minded wealthy believers, she financed the building of 64 chapels all over England and Wales.

[2 : 31] And this is significant because most of the nonconformist preachers of that time were not allowed to go into the local Anglican pulpit. So they needed somewhere to preach.

In spite of poor health and the disparagement of others in her upper classes, she was the personal sponsor, no less, of both John Wesley and George Whitfield.

And if you wanted two people on your resume, they would be some of the best, I guess. And she was their partner, therefore, in those the greatest revivals possibly that the world has ever seen.

Others, like the great hymn writers Isaac Watts, When I Survey the Wondrous Cross, or Augustus Toplady, Rock of Ages, were also among her friends and enjoyed her patronage.

She endorsed the work of Philip Doddridge, whose great book, The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul. I don't think that would sell with that title today, but it was the cause of Wilberforce's conversion, no less.

[3 : 39] Selina was renowned for her faithful generosity, and she spent the abundance of her wealth in the cause of the gospel. She also used her high position wherever possible to remove those obstacles that had been put in the way of the non-conformist preachers.

Her great concern was not her wealth, nor her social position, but for Christ's message of grace. So that on her deathbed, she was able to say with the greatest confidence, My work is done. I have nothing to do but to go to my Father.

So with her great example in mind, let us come then to our passage. And in verse 1, another of John's opening greetings. Who does John address this time?

Well, unlike the case in 2 John, not a whole church, but rather he addresses an individual. An individual named Gaius.

And we don't know much about Gaius. There's not much to know except what is there in the text. But one thing can be said for sure. Gaius is John's dear friend.

[4 : 58] John calls him that no less than four times in the passage. But this is more than simply great personal affection between the elder or the apostle and this man Gaius.

Like the sister church in 2 John, the apostle says that he loves Gaius in the truth. As we saw last week, loving someone in the truth means to love them in Christ.

Gaius and John are united in the love of Christ and that mutual love that comes from Christ. It is the same love that distinguishes the body of true believers everywhere.

And in verse 2, John shows that his concern for Gaius is not simply spiritual. He has a concern for the whole person.

Gaius' body as well as his soul. You see, we are not only spiritual beings. And in the context of what is coming next, John's concern for the physical well-being reflects how spiritual faithfulness has to always be observable in real life.

[6 : 22] Outworking and attributes and attitudes. John himself would personally have remembered hearing the parable of the Good Samaritan and what that meant for the true believer.

As well as John's final instructions to him when he was on the cross. For he, John, to take care of Mary, the mother of Christ. This is a book full of real practical outworkings.

How we treat and care for fellow believers in the church is therefore going to feature prominently in the rest of the sermon.

But why is John writing this letter to Gaius in particular? There's no evidence that Gaius held any place of special leadership in the church.

It seems likely that he was just an ordinary believer. Albeit a friend of the apostle. And we do know from the context of both 2 John and 3 John.

[7 : 30] In fact, even 1 John. That it seems that at this time, there are a number of itinerant preachers who are going around. Some, as we saw last week, who were deceivers and antichrists, preachers of a false gospel.

But also some who were truly sent out by John and his church to preach the gospel of Christ. And verse 3 tells us, though, that Gaius is distinguished, not because of his standing in the church, but because he walks in the truth.

Which, as I said last week, walking in truth and walking in love means that he exhibits the marks of the true believer. My Bible study group will tell you that I like two words.

Orthodoxy and orthopraxy. And Gaius is noted to have both of these commendable attributes. He's orthodox, which means that he believes the truth of the teachings which came from Christ and the apostles.

And only from them. But not only is his belief sound. His practice is also sound.

[8 : 52] His practice is commendable and continuing and obvious to all. And for the apostle John, this means there is no greater joy than to see such faithfulness in action.

And as I said last week, and as we'll see this week, the same again. Faithfulness in action is what should be our source of joy. And later I'll say what we should be imitating.

Especially because we'll see also that there is an example of the opposite. 3 John is not a passage full of theological content.

In fact, I think all three books, 1, 2, and 3 John, are probably written into the same church context. And obviously 1 John is full of theological content and some in two.

But this book is really a practical book. Describing, it seems, more the life and tensions within this early Christian church.

[9 : 59] But which will enable us to draw some tangible lessons therefrom. You see, that church like ours is full of ordinary Christians like ours.

But it is those people and the people here too who will make an extraordinary difference when they are faithful and generous and available.

As we look deeper in the passage, John's objectives appear to be one, to reinforce a commitment to true Christian hospitality. And two, to draw our attention to those attitudes that befit the true believer.

Especially within the church body itself. By way of both positive and negative examples, as we will see. The outline you have in the bulletin has the first two of these as discrete attributes.

Namely, hospitality and gospel-mindedness. However, in reflection, I think that the two are too closely tied to separate. Because I think that the text actually teaches us that true Christian hospitality arises from our concern for the gospel.

[11 : 20] In verse 5, Gaius is commended for his faithful hospitality to those preachers who had been previously sent out by John's church. As an aside, it seems that these would have been the same people that Diotrephes, who we will soon encounter, rejected and spurned and would not accept.

I hope you'll remember from last week too, that hospitality in that day had all kinds of overtones of patronage and protection for those being hosted.

And so hospitality was incredibly important in the early church. But also, it was important because travel in those days was very dangerous.

The inns were unsavory. And the church largely consisted of the poorer classes. So tangible support for gospel workers was an imperative.

And that means that Gaius is doing a lot more than simply opening his home to these people. He's in fact putting his reputation at risk, and this for strangers.

[12 : 36] He's expending probably scarce money and time. And he even may be going against the church hierarchy of his community.

But what Gaius does earns him the commendation of other Christians and honors God. Our key message last week was that the marks of the believer walking in the truth and walking in love are inseparable.

And that they were so that the world would know that we are his disciples. Because of what? Our love.

All of which means, then, that hospitality is a necessary component of any evidence of Christian discipleship. What's more, it's not even one of the really difficult ways that we can demonstrate our allegiance with Christ.

All it requires is a generous spirit. Now, in biblical terms, hospitality is primarily about how we treat strangers.

[13 : 57] And unfortunately, though, we don't do very well in this area very often, it seems. Even when we set the hospitality bar quite low and think of it only in terms of entertaining those we know and like, I'm sure all of us know that we can do a lot better.

The church is at its hospitable best when it looks after the stranger and the alien, especially those who are of the body of Christ. Last week, I was talking about Francis Schaeffer and he seems to make the point about that great commandment that it has a special relationship to those within the church.

And the same here. We need to be hospitable to the strangers and aliens who come into our midst. But also to those in need, the widows and the orphans.

We've let such practices slip and we've become far too much like the world, overly embroiled in our own concerns and needs.

And before anyone says to me, you're too harsh or critical, I know that any finger I point points back three at me. However, there are always great exceptions and Holy Trinity is no different in this.

[15 : 28] In fact, in our very first week here, we saw such kindness to strangers by some still worshipping here who invited us into their home the very next week that I would go so far as to say it was this almost as much as the preaching of Paul Barker, which was the reason that our family stayed.

And I would say very happy to have done that. If we claim, though, to be Christians, then similar behaviour to Gaius is rightfully expected of us.

And why? Well, verses 7 and 8 tell us. These strangers whom he takes into his care serve the same Lord that Gaius does.

He has a shared gospel-mindedness with them. They went out, John says, for the sake of the name, proclaiming Jesus as God come in the flesh.

Unlike those false teachers of 2 John who denied that message and go out to deceive. So then, whilst we must remember Jesus' confronting message in Matthew 25, that what we do to the least of his disciples, we do to him, we can also balance that with another promise.

[16 : 55] So that we are encouraged and not simply burdened. Because Jesus says in Matthew 10, 41, that whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet's reward.

and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. This is completely aligned with John's own word in verse 8, that our hospitality and generosity to gospel workers makes us co-workers with them and by implication able to share in their reward.

our gospel mindedness will therefore always be reflected in our attitude to our resources. Especially in the ways that we give of our time or give of our money, how we go about sharing those things we have, or even when we forego our comforts because of someone else.

And 3 John seems to indicate that our partners in the truth, those that we send out to preach the gospel, have such a claim. They have a valid claim on our resources.

Which means that the generosity which is expected of us must extend beyond hospitality or caring in a local sense to supporting missionary endeavor in real ways both here and abroad.

[18 : 30] As we saw in the example of the Countess of Huntington, or even in the Old Testament reading where the leaders of the families, the officers of the tribes of Israel, the officials in charge of the king's work, it said, gave willingly.

God's and this is a truth that we should not ignore. The Lord loves willing generosity. Back in verse 6, John told us that Gaius should send them on their way in a manner which honors God.

So we too have no choice but to send our evangelists and missionaries on their way into the mission field in a manner that is honoring to God.

And how was Israel told to honor God? Well it was with the first fruits of their harvest, not the leftovers, not that which they didn't need.

And John goes on to say that the support of these missionaries can only come from fellow believers. it cannot come from the pagan or the unbeliever in order that there is no obligation to them nor any temptation to shrink from preaching the hard messages of sin and repentance.

[20 : 00] We can't all have the resources of a Lady Huntington but we can all use that which God has given us in a way which glorifies and honors him.

You may have little but you can still use that when you regard it as his and not yours. John says in verse 7 that the culmination of all of this is honoring God and how we use our resources means that we will be working together for the truth.

But unfortunately John must now move on in his letter to an example of someone who is working against the truth. In verses 9 and 10 John expresses great disappointment in the behavior of this church leader called Diotrephes.

Here is a man who in most ways is the diametric opposite of Gaius. Instead of humility and sacrifice Diotrephes must be preeminent.

He must always be first. Unlike Gaius Diotrephes has no respect for his spiritual leaders like the apostle John.

[21 : 26] His apparent work in the church and from what we know about him he was possibly even a bishop by this stage is for personal self-gratification and not as a co-worker in the kingdom.

If we learnt anything from last week walking in the truth and in love means from 1 John 2 verse 6 that if we claim to live in him Christ we must walk as he did.

And Matthew 20 28 tells us that Christ the son of man did not come to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.

All of this means that the evidence that we should be looking for is a servant like demeanor. Not uncontrolled vanity and ambition.

Not overbearing and leadership. Not dismissive of others. Nor unaccepting of spiritual oversight and discipline.

[22 : 38] Certainly not being a malicious gossip. All of which characterized diatrophies who loved to enforce his own will. And in so doing has led many of his fellow believers into error by rejecting the true preachers that have come from John.

By contrast the suffering servant our Lord Jesus Christ did nothing nothing for personal gain.

And this must be our attitude too. Because all of the evidences I said that hospitality and gospel mindedness are tightly coupled.

But I think that true hospitality also goes hand in hand with a servant like attitude. When we don't consider ourselves more highly than we ought and don't consider the things we have and the position we occupy as being so important that we can't serve.

In thinking of an example, I was told about something which really struck a colleague of mine a few years ago. He was in a church here in Australia and in that church he walked into the kitchen and there was a man who was quietly washing the dishes.

[24 : 07] It was the end of a evening service, an evening service, if I recall, and this man was washing the dishes. Nobody was helping him. He didn't draw any attention to himself. And suddenly he thought, but you're incredibly familiar.

And this man happened to be the CEO of one of the largest companies in Australia. And that struck this colleague of mine maybe as much as the message, because here was also a servant-like attitude.

The man could probably have afforded to pay for a servant to come in and do it ten times over. And here he was serving his fellow believers in a simple and practical way, not thinking of himself more highly than he ought.

So what all of this means then is that we must be united in fellowship for the gospel sake, not for our own, not for our own purposes or ambition, but for the sake of Christ's gospel.

And the greatest commendation that we can receive is to be called a fellow worker, not to be called a bishop, not to be the preacher or the leader, but to be a fellow worker.

[25 : 19] like Gaius and like Demetrius who we will meet in verse 12. And verse 11 tells us that we must imitate what is good.

And good is what comes from God. And what does this look like? Well, picking up from some of the things we said previously last week, it must include a clear knowledge of God's decrees and his commands.

It must be full of sacrificial love. Faithfulness and zeal, despite any cost or threat, must be found in abundance.

And serving together must be the hallmark. This is what true discipleship looks like. And this is something or someone worth imitating.

Being someone to be imitated means to have a good testimony from all. Not just within the church, but from outsiders too. Verse 12 tells us of Demetrius that he was well spoken of by everyone.

[26 : 33] Even unbelievers could see that Demetrius was a genuine follower of Jesus. They could not fault his behavior nor his commitment. He was well spoken of, it says, even by the truth itself.

This commitment to the truth of Christ and its obvious impact on his life was its own validation. The truth, you see, was the defining characteristic of Demetrius' life.

The truth which is Christ in us, the truth which is Christ working through us. Demetrius' Demetrius' in all likelihood is another of the preachers about to be sent by John and his church to pick up that work of the itinerant preachers who had been previously rejected, dismissed by diatrophies.

And so this is for Gaius a further opportunity to demonstrate or continue to demonstrate his hospitality and his fellowship in the gospel.

And looking closely, it means that we have three very good examples in this text that we can imitate. Gaius, Demetrius, and the apostle John himself.

[27 : 54] They all showcase the marks of the believer and we can safely imitate them to serve God as we should. These men are to be emulated precisely because they are walking in the truth and walking in love.

We've already seen that Gaius is hospitable and generous. He's humble, happy to serve others without taking into account his own position. His concern is only that the true message goes out to the lost and he loves those who proclaim it.

Demetrius, we've seen, has vouched for by John himself as one whose life and witness is commendable and true. His good testimony in this matter is exactly what Scripture elsewhere tells us to test for when we're choosing our overseers and our leaders and our ministers.

While John's pastoral heart is clearly evident throughout his epistles, apostles, some of you might think here that he's rather standing on his own rights and position, especially in verse 10 when he says he's going to come and publicly denounce and chastise diatrophies.

But the reality is that the apostle is obligated as a faithful spiritual leader to exercise his authority, to exercise it in a biblical way, in a Christ-like way, in a servant-like way, so that diatrophies' abuse of leadership does not continue to lead his church astray.

[29 : 43] On the other hand, we have this rotten example, diatrophies, who as a Greek aristocrat and leader in the early church, is inhospitable to the extreme, refusing to allow true brothers into his

church.

He prefers his own ambitions to those of the gospel. He clearly lords it over the other believers and leads them into sin and error.

And it seems he only tolerates unity on his own terms. He excommunicates anyone who doesn't toe his line, especially those who seem to want to bring in or to accept the true preachers.

The text, however, does not give us any indication if diatrophies was aligned with those deceivers and antichrists we met last week. Nevertheless, his sins of vanity and overweening ambition are certainly the opposite of the examples of the other three, or even his fellow aristocrat, Lady Huntington, who all we could clearly see walk in and work for the truth.

John's message throughout this short book is very clear. Unless our practice conforms with the teaching of Christ that we claim to believe, then our example is deficient and we are certainly not to be imitated by anyone.

[31 : 20] last week we were told not to provide hospitality to those bringing a different gospel, but now we are under obligation to generously receive those who preach the true message and to facilitate their going out into a lost world with that message.

and it needs to be in Christ-like submission and with a unity of purpose that comes from knowing the truth and having a heart full of love.

John's final words in verses 13 and 14 again reflect his real heartfelt Christian affection for his fellow believers and a desire to be with Gaius and others who he says please greet by name.

Pen and ink are almost too impersonal for him for the rest of this message of encouragement that he wants to bring them. He longs to share in their struggles and victory so that the prince of peace is ultimately glorified and we should be the same.

It should be our greatest desire, our greatest joy, to share in and walk with those who are walking faithfully. With Gaius in this passage and with the church in 2 John, John's purpose ultimately is to foster a deep fellowship in the truth, to have churches that are imitable because this fellowship in the truth will protect our testimony.

[33 : 03] The world will be able to see by our love that we are his disciples and it will enable us to work together for the extension of the kingdom of God. Amen.