

Walking in the Truth

3 John

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Note: The text below was prepared for oral delivery rather than for publication in print. As such, be aware that sentence fragments are intentionally used and that this document has not been edited to correct the errors in grammar, sentence structure, etc.

I. Introduction: Our text for today is the book of 3rd John. The title of this message is “Walking in the Truth.” Some of you may recall a recent message I preached on “The Doctrine of Christ” taken from 2nd John, verses 9-11 where we read the admonition to not bid God speed – to not receive (as it pertains to religious fellowship) those who would not abide (or consistently adhere to) the doctrine of Christ, the truth concerning His Person and finished work. Well there is an interesting contrast between that admonition of 2nd John to not receive those he described there to that which we will consider today from John’s 3rd Epistle – an admonition to receive those described therein. And this comparison is helpful to our understanding what it means to walk in the truth.

II. 3rd John Text: With that, follow with me as I read through this short Epistle, the book of 3rd John: “*The elder unto the wellbeloved Gaius, <pronounced Gay’-us> whom I love in the truth.* <As I continue you will hear “the truth” emphasized a total of 6 times in these 14 verses. Continuing in verse 2...>. ²*Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.* ³*For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth.* ⁴*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.* <Speaking of his spiritual children in the faith> ⁵*Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers;* <speaking of other spiritual brethren but who were before strangers to him> ⁶*Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well:* ⁷*Because that for his name’s sake <i.e. – the name of Christ – or for His glory> they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles.* ⁸*We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellowhelpers to the truth.* ⁹*I wrote unto the church: but Diotrefes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not.* ¹⁰*Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating <or speaking nonsense> against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church.* ¹¹*Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.* ¹²*Demetrius hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself: yea, and we also bear record; and ye know that our record is true.* ¹³*I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee:* ¹⁴*But I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be to thee. Our friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name.”*

III. Walking in the Truth: Here in 3rd John we hear the clear instruction to receive a people whereas in 2nd John we hear the clear instruction to not receive a people.

- A. To refresh your memories, look with me back to 2nd John, verses 9-11 where we read, ***“Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, <and I believe that is speaking of any house of worship for in that day they would meet to worship in houses> neither bid him God speed: ¹¹For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.*”**
- B. So here in 2nd John, the instruction was to not receive those who did not abide in the doctrine of Christ. And today we see in 3rd John the instruction to receive the brethren (that is the spiritual family of believers, fellow adopted children of God in Christ as evidenced by God-given faith and repentance – faith that abides in the truth – the doctrine of Christ). And that’s how the spiritual family is identified – they walk in the truth.
- C. At first reading, our natural tendency would be to assume that “walking in the truth” would refer to living an honest life – not one marked by deception, cheating, or misleading others, not as a liar or living a lie. But I want you to see that in this context the Apostle is referring to something much more specific – the truth that would distinguish the believing brethren from unbelievers. “The truth” spoken of in our text today (3rd John) is the same as the “doctrine of Christ” as it is called in 2nd John. I will not revisit that entire message on “The Doctrine of Christ,” taken from 2nd John, but it is complementary to today’s message and so I would encourage you to listen to it on-line or order a copy if you missed it.
- D. In short, “the truth” in which believers walk, “the doctrine of Christ” is the Gospel – God’s gospel (His one way of salvation as set forth in His Word) – a way that is distinguished from all counterfeits (all false ways) in that therein (in the Gospel message that is ultimately believed upon by all who are saved) is the righteousness of God revealed. That’s the unmistakable language of Romans 1:16-17. That righteousness of God is simply the satisfaction to justice Christ accomplished for those He saves by His obedience unto death on the cross. The truth spoken of here in 3rd John is the truth concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, the doctrine of Christ – His Person and finished work whereby He actually accomplished what the angel declared to Joseph that Christ was sent to do – to save His people from their sins. So “the truth” in the context of 3rd John refers to the truth of the Gospel of God’s sovereign grace in which true believers walk.

- E. And the issue of having or not having religious fellowship, (described in these 2 Epistles as “receiving” or “not receiving” others), is part of the cross that believers are said to bear. When someone is given faith to believe God’s Gospel, they immediately come to the sad realization that the majority of folks they know (which may well include our best friends or closest relatives) are resting in the same false gospel from which they just have been delivered – thinking that salvation is based upon something other than (or in addition to) Christ and His finished work of righteousness. So we ask ourselves, “How can so many be so tragically mistaken?” But believers ultimately will bow to God’s Word – the Gospel as God sets it forth and not make our judgments based upon the majority opinion of others.
- F. The command of 2nd John is this: Do not condone a false way of salvation – do not lie to others who expose by their doctrine that they do not believe “the specific truth” of God’s Gospel of grace. And why would we be tempted to do that – to mislead others on such a vital issue? I know that by nature I would much prefer to be aligned with the majority of my friends and family, even though the Bible teaches that the way to eternal life is a way of the minority – not the majority. Christ described it as a narrow way and a strait (or narrow) gate that leads to eternal life and few be that enter into it.
- G. As for myself, I selfishly want folks to like me. For the most part, I want to get along with everybody and so there is always the temptation for me to mislead those who (just like me before God-given faith) have not yet been blessed with the eyes of faith so as to embrace the truth of the Gospel. We do that (sometimes by what we say or do and sometimes by what we do not say or do) – by words or actions that would suggest to them that they are spiritually okay or of like mind with us, religiously receiving the very ones believers are commanded to not receive – not when it comes to religious fellowship with them.
- H. This doesn’t mean we are commanded to go out pick fights with folks. We are to strive to get along peaceably with all. But the occasions inevitably arise. And when they do we are not to deny Christ but rather we are to take sides with our spiritual brethren when it comes to this vital issue of the gospel of grace – of how God saves sinners by Christ alone, based solely upon His doing and dying – not determined by some response or work of our own hand.
- I. The Prophet Jeremiah made note of this sort of compromise of God’s Gospel as he described those who sinfully would cry unto others, “...***Peace, peace when there is no peace,***” meaning where there was no evidence of peace having been made between them and God – no evidence of genuine God-given faith that trusts in Christ alone for salvation. Crying peace where there is no peace causes others to assume that we judge them to be spiritually okay while all the while we know better. The believer knows better because with genuine faith comes repentance of the very notion that they still embrace – the deadly false assumption that our salvation is at least in some way gained by something we do or don’t do. Such crying peace to others may well help us to be better received by them socially, but it certainly does not do them any good. And as we read in 2nd John, God says it is to partake of their evil. See the importance of this?

- J. Now just as believers are instructed in 2nd John to not condone a false gospel – not receive those who abide not in the doctrine of Christ, conversely, the command of 3rd John is to receive any and all who do abide in the doctrine of Christ – in “the truth” of God’s Gospel. This command to receive others or to not receive others when it comes to their religion can be quite unsettling for us. We live in this world and we want to get along and we want others to like us.
- K. But think about this: In one sense our physical family is similar to the spiritual family of God – all the adopted children of God for whom Christ died. You and I had nothing to do with deciding whose earthly family we would be born into. We had no say in picking our parents or our brothers or our sisters. And we likewise have nothing to do with deciding who will be born of our heavenly Father – who will experience spiritual birth as evidenced by the God-given gift of faith by which our spiritual brothers and sisters are identified – those who make up our eternal, spiritual family. This means that the spiritual destiny of individuals we might prefer – perhaps those most like us, or those that we like the most, or with whom we have much in common, or whose company we may prefer – even our nearest and dearest love ones – their spiritual destiny or their being kin to us spiritually is a matter completely out of our hands. As Jonah proclaimed, salvation is truly of the Lord!
- L. As it relates to our earthly family, consider what Christ said in Matthew 10, beginning in verse 34: ***“Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. ³⁵For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. ³⁶And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household. ³⁷He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.”*** This is describing at least part of what it means to take up our cross and follow Christ.
- M. Do you see here how our obedience to these commands to ‘receive’ or ‘receive not’ is cited as an evidence of Godly love. If you refuse to religiously fellowship with others simply because they hold to a different gospel doctrine – why, that doesn’t seem very loving to most folks. But God’s word teaches just the opposite.
- N. We can all relate to this if you’ll think about it. We know that our natural love for friends and family is manifested by our desire for their well-being. We want the best for those we love the most. Think of your own children. We desire that they prosper in every way just as John expressed to Gaius. But in love, we don’t always tell them what they want to hear, even when we know it may bring on some animosity towards us. Think of the tough love that all responsible parents show their children.

- O. It's out of love that people arrange for interventions for dear friends or family members such as those with addiction problems. And often that's not well received. Yet, if we truly care about them, we are willing to bring news that might disturb them if it's something that really matters. If you're out late one night and drive by a dear friend or relative's house who has already retired for the evening and you notice smoke billowing out of their attic, would you hesitate to call them or rush in to alert them of their pending danger? We wouldn't reason, "Gosh, they aren't going to like hearing the bad news their house is on fire so I think I'll just allow them to sleep on in spite of knowing that they are in grave danger." That's nonsense if you care about them. What if a doctor informed you of his diagnosis that your nearest or dearest loved one had a life threatening disease? Wouldn't you (out of love) tell them the bad news that they are not physically okay, but rather are facing a deadly disease – particularly if there remained a possibility of a cure that they could be pursuing.
- P. And yet when it comes to religion, folks are more likely to think of you as overly judgmental (if not downright cruel) if you dare even suggest to them that they are not okay spiritually but rather that they are in grave eternal danger. And yet walking in the truth will have us bear that cross for we hope and desire that they will seek the certain cure that we have come to know – that was brought our way under the preaching of God's Gospel of grace.
- Q. A few weeks back there was an article in our bulletin by our former Pastor, titled "Speaking the Truth in Love." And this was referring to a specific love which is foreign to the natural, spiritually dead man because, as the scripture tells us, by nature we cannot know the things of God – including the specific truth of which John writes. This love is love in the truth as John expressed to Gaius. That article's title, "Speaking the Truth in Love" was taken from Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus in which he taught how truth and love go together. In that article Bill wrote, "The greatest love we can show anyone is to tell them the truth in light of God's Gospel of eternal salvation and final glory based on the righteousness of Christ alone." He went on to say, "The greatest show of compassion is to expose their disease (the guilt and defilement of sin), and then show them the only remedy (Christ established a righteousness that demands the salvation and final glory of all for whom He lived, died, and arose)."
- R. Now neither you nor I would ever bear this burden at the risk of rejection from those we love unless we have truly experienced the love of God toward us in our own salvation, as undeserved objects of God's mercy and grace toward us – having learned (under the preaching of this Gospel) of His love for us from all eternity in Christ our Savior. It's God's love for His people, manifested by what He has done for them through Christ, their Substitute, which causes true believers to bear that cross. Godly love is what causes them (1) to receive in religious fellowship spiritually like-minded brethren (regardless of their background, their economic status, their race, their cultural differences, regardless) and (2) it's that same love of God that constrains us to not receive in religious fellowship those who have not embraced this specific truth. It is what causes us to not compromise the truth – the doctrine of Christ, even to those whose friendship and fellowship we most desire.

It's because we know there is no hope for eternal life outside of Christ and the truth concerning salvation in and by Him alone. Believers are drawn by God the Holy Spirit to see that what Christ said of Himself is really true – that He is “...*the way, the truth*, <the truth that we walk in> *and the life, and that no man cometh unto the Father but by...*” Him! (John 14:6).

- S. Well, as you saw in today's text, the Apostle commends the actions of those such as Gaius who walk in the truth. He commends Gaius as one who is consistent – who “faithfully” receives fellow believers, even those who were previously mere strangers to him. John commends his faithful charity in financial support of the missionary efforts of the Gospel ministry. Believers should financially support the ministry of the Gospel. He makes note of how these missionaries that were sent forth from Judea to the Gentiles did not take anything from the Gentiles in way of support. It is believed this was to make sure that none could accuse them of being in the ministry for their own personal gain. And so, in verse 8, John says that we, meaning Jewish believers, ought not only to support them, but receive them so that we might be “fellowhelpers” to the truth! All believers should be “fellowhelpers” to the truth by identifying with it and supporting the spread of the truth – the ministry of the true Gospel of God's grace.
- T. As we read, John spoke of an evil man in a position of leadership in the church whose name was Diotrephes (evil in that he would not receive fellow believers in the truth). It is believed that Diotrephes was an elder in the church with apparent influence. And he concealed John's letters (some think he may have concealed the letter of 1st and / or 2nd John). And we see the seriousness of this issue of “receiving” or “receiving not” in John's characterization of the actions of Diotrephes as an evil that they should not follow.
- U. But then the Apostle commends another man in the church named Demetrius, saying he had been given a good report from other believers, a good report of him as it pertains to the truth itself. There are several lessons we might take away from these descriptions of how true believers are to act, but today I want to emphasize to you that their walking in the truth, their walk of true genuine faith is evidenced by Godly love in these 2 ways: (1) It is a love that refuses to receive in religious fellowship those who abide not in the doctrine of Christ – the truth and (2) It is a love that readily does receive those who do abide in the doctrine of Christ – in the truth.

IV. Conclusion:

To summarize, we've seen here in 3rd John that believers are described like Gaius as those (1) in whom the truth is found (vs 3a), (2) who walk in that truth (vs 3b) and (3) who are described like the spiritual children of the Apostle (meaning His converts) because they walk in that truth (vs4), and (4) finally as those who are involved in and identify with a true Gospel ministry as a “fellowhelper” to that truth (vs 8).

Now religious folks under the broad banner of “Christianity” will apply these same evidences to their own various versions of the truth. And so they will commend men as if it is akin to John’s commendation of Gaius and Demetrius – commending those who financially support their ministries, who in so-called Christian charity and hospitality receive other professing so-called Christians. But if we are to make an accurate application from this passage as to whether we be in the faith, whether we are walking in the faith, we must do so with a clear understanding of the truth in which true believers are said to walk.

Do you see that giving money to support a ministry (and all believers should financially support a true gospel ministry to the extent they are able), or being hospitable, receiving strangers who profess to believe as we do (and all believers should if it’s the true gospel of grace which they profess to believe) – Do you see that, while these things are to be encouraged and commended among true believers, that if they are not accompanied by belief of this specific truth, then these traits (which others will commend) are not the identifying marks of a true believer (and not at all commendable)? Where the truth is present, these things are manifestations of the love of God that a true believer has experienced in Christ. But one may give and one may be kind to those of like profession and yet still not be of the faith. So how do we know? We know by whether or not they walk (embrace and abide or continue) in the truth – the doctrine of Christ and salvation by Christ alone – the truth of God’s Gospel of grace.

And the only reliable standard for discerning spiritual truth is God’s word – and the specific truth John writes of is the truth of the Gospel as it’s set forth in God’s word. We walk in the truth when our spiritually enlightened hearts and minds bow to it and embrace it – the doctrine of Christ (as John had called it in his 2nd Epistle). No matter how charitable or receiving of other religious folks one may be, if the specific truth of God’s Gospel of grace is absent, they are not walking in the truth.

So once more, what is this truth? Again, it is the doctrine of Christ – the simple truth of (1) who He is and (2) what He has done (according to God’s word) to save His people. So here is how you can know if you are walking in the truth: Do you see that Christ, as both God and man (a suitable Substitute and Mediator), truly accomplished what God’s own word tells us He was sent to accomplish and did accomplish. God’s Word says that Christ came into the world to save sinners – not to try to save them or to make their salvation merely possible – but to save them! Now either you believe that He truly saved His people from their sins by His obedience unto death on the cross or else you believe that He didn’t. Multitudes will call Him their Savior while at the same time believing that His doing and dying on the cross, in and of itself, didn’t save anyone unless they _____<fill in the blank> - unless they respond in some form or fashion.

The truth is that for all those for whom Christ lived and died, Christ did accomplish what God tells us He came to do! He saved His adopted children from their sins. In perfect and complete satisfaction to the justice of God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ paid in full the entire debt owed due unto their sins against God by His death on the cross, having the demerit of their sins imputed or charged to Him and the entire merit of what He accomplished (His righteousness) imputed or charged to them (2 Cor. 5:21).

The truth, the doctrine of Christ, is that Christ fully met all that was required for the salvation of His people and as such, their salvation is not pending some remaining condition which the sinner must meet in order to save themselves. It's not their baptism, not their church attendance, not their so-called confirmation or adherence to a catechism, not their living a good, honest life, not even their acceptance of Him, not their act of faith – nothing that they do to save themselves. Only God is to receive the glory in the salvation of sinners. And that redemptive glory is uniquely found in the Person and saving work of Christ alone!

So according to the doctrine of Christ, Christ did it all and He does not fail to save even one of those for whom He lived and died. Their debt to God's justice was paid in full. His death got the job done. Christ has saved His people from their sins.

That's the truth! And we evidence true, God-given, blood-bought faith when we embrace and continue in that truth – trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ alone for all of our eternal salvation, repenting from having dared to imagine that anything done by us sinners could contribute even one iota toward procuring our own eternal salvation – as if our response or decision to accept Christ – something the sinner could do – could achieve that which God declares could only be (and was) fully achieved by the precious blood (the death) of the Lord of glory. God-given faith does not look to itself. It looks to Christ alone for all of salvation. The truth is that simple.

I pray that by God's grace all who hear this message will be convinced by the Spirit to look to Christ alone for all of their salvation, and so identify with the spiritual family of true believers, "Walking in The Truth."

Footnote from the author: While this sermon was prepared and delivered by me, I often utilize the commentaries, study helps, and teachings of others to supplement my own prayerful study of the scriptures. Since this document was not originally prepared for publication in print, please excuse and recognize that it was unfeasible to properly identify and credit all of the various original sources used to develop the content herein. Ultimately, it is my sincere and foremost objective to accurately present the gospel of God's grace found in the only infallible source, God's word itself – the Bible.