

Abiding Fruit

Informing the Mind & Inflaming the Heart

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Fellow Workers for the Truth

3 John 5 - 8

The little word “truth” occurs six times in this short letter from the Apostle John (see vv. 1, 3², 4, 8, 12). Three individuals are mentioned by name; Gaius (vs. 1), Diotrephes (vs. 9) and Demetrius (vs. 12). 3 John is a personal letter to Gaius by John who describes himself as “the elder” (vs. 1). The Apostle John had received a good report from other brothers who had visited Gaius commending him for his hospitality. This display of hospitality is connected with the truth because it is the truth in practice (vs. 3). John describes it as “walking in the truth.”

Gaius was demonstrating everything that John had taught him – he was hospitable, and he was contending for the truth against Diotrephes who was opposed to the truth. Diotrephes saw no need to help traveling missionaries, and in fact sought to stop others from welcoming them, even going to the extreme of putting such people out of the church. He was a very self-centered person in the church who seems to have had an influential position as a leader. Gaius stands in stark contrast to Diotrephes.

It seems that Gaius opposed the actions of Diotrephes who had slandered both John and himself. Diotrephes was against godly teachers whereas Gaius welcomed them. Gaius stood for the truth whereas Diotrephes was against it. John marks out Gaius as a man who stood for the truth and who lived out the truth. Division in a church is easy to come by. Usually it is rooted in false teaching and self-centeredness. The Apostle gives directives to handle both division and false teaching, by loving and exercising discernment. If we love one another (as Gaius was demonstrating) we oppose division. If we seek to know the truth and live the truth, we oppose false teaching by being discerning believers. These two ingredients that are so essential to fruitfulness enable any church to handle divisive matters and to combat error.

John states that he was planning a visit, and that when he came to them, he would then deal with Diotrephes (vs. 10). How would he deal with him? By “bringing up” what he was doing, which tells us that it is actions that demonstrate whether we live by the truth or not. Loving the truth is demonstrated by living out the truth. John states that the actions of Diotrephes are opposed to the truth because he calls them evil (vs. 11), and believers are to always imitate that which is good, because goodness in action (hospitable actions) reflects the truth and is from God.

John says that even the truth bears a witness all its own (see vs. 12) as in the case with Demetrius. Demetrius could very well have been a visiting missionary who was rebuffed by Diotrephes. He might have brought this epistle to Gaius, since John states that he could add his own personal testimony regarding the man’s character. He either received a good testimony from all who were there, or he had a good testimony when he came, and John corroborates this fact. Gaius would do well to show kindness to Demetrius.

Gaius is described as a fellow-worker for the truth (vs. 8). In what way was he a fellow-worker? The passage describes two actions that reveal that Gaius was a fellow-worker. We have already touched on them. First of all, Gaius went to great effort to show hospitality toward strangers who were believers. He supported them. It is true that we should be kind to all men, but even more so, to those who are the saints of God, because we share in Christ and labor together in a common cause. These strangers have reported back to others on their visit about Gaius, and John commends him for his service.

John says that Gaius would do even better if he helped them on their journey forward. So as they leave, Gaius should help them on their way, sending them off on their journey with kindness and help. Gaius demonstrates that he is a fellow-worker for the truth by supporting these visitors and by sending them on their way.

Most of us are impressed by the public gifts of preachers, teachers and missionaries, but these are not where the Bible lays its stress as to value. It is true that these are very important, vital and necessary, but it is the hidden labors that count far more. It seems to me that in demonstrating hospitality, only those who received it (the visitors), knew of Gaius' work and what he had done for them, because their report revealed such. The report did not come back from fellow church members (though they probably knew of Gaius character). The Apostle Paul comments on the value of spiritual gifts that are not public, when he commends *as indispensable*, those "*parts of the body that seem to be weaker*" (1 Cor. 12:22). We treat the showy with honor, but God treats those who lack appreciation from men with far greater honor. Indeed the church cannot function as it ought to, unless both parts exercise their function (gifts). Greater honor belongs to the weaker gift because without it, all you have is a Diotrephes type situation. Public gifts are truly only of value because of the indispensable weaker gifts. Diotrephes looked down on these so-called weaker gifts in the church and despised them and abused them. He was so puffed up that he also despised visiting preachers who should have been shown honor as Gaius showed them.

What this means for us is that service and support of others is a demonstration of being in the truth, of being in Christ. How can you and I determine whether we doing that which is of the truth? Ask yourself, what would the Lord Jesus do here in this situation and you will find that you have your answer. By doing these things we show ourselves to be fellow-workers for the truth. We are seen to be working in the cause of Jesus. We serve Him and therefore we serve the truth, because He is the truth (John 14:6).

John states that he has no greater joy than to know that his children were walking in the truth (vs. 4). It is evident that Gaius was one of these. He was the spiritual child of John and he was walking in the truth and he was working for the truth.

This should motivate us to service. There is no greater cause than the truth in Christ. It will motivate us within the church in our fellowship with each other. It will motivate us toward fellow saints from other places who also love the truth. Is it not this which sets apart the Church of the Lord Jesus? Love for each other demonstrated both at home and abroad, and united in the truth. It is Christ who binds us in harmony and love with each other. It is not our own efforts. It is the power of the Holy Spirit working within us, which is conforming us to the image of our Savior.

There are two points for us to consider in these verses. We are fellow-workers. That means we work together. There is a common cause. Second, our cause is united by belief (the truth). Ecumenical ideas ignore belief and focus only on relationships. We see this exploding in the Episcopal and Anglican Communion today. Ignore the faith and you do so to your peril. Relationships are truly what they are meant to be when we engage in common faith. Saving faith is rooted and grounded in the Lord Jesus Christ. The truth does matter and true servanthood is motivated by it

We must not ignore our Bibles. We must relish the truth and be driven to service by what we believe. Indeed, isn't all evangelism governed by the same idea? We spread the Gospel because we believe the Gospel. The truth compels us. To use Paul's phrase, it is our Lord Jesus that compels or controls us (2 Cor. 5:14) by His love. Gaius was motivated by these things and Diotrephes was not. Those who love the truth and walk in the truth are those who truly can demonstrate the truth. Let's be fellow-workers for the truth.