

Lesson 2: 8 November 2009

"Fellow helpers to the Truth"

Lesson Scope: 3 John

Lesson Focus

The Third Epistle of John is another personal letter. This one addresses Gaius, who, John said, "doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest.-The New Testament mentions at least three men by this name—Gaius of Corinth. Gaius of Macedonia and Gaius of Derbe. Scholars tend to agree that the Gaius John addresses is not any of these.

In this epistle the apostle John mentions two other men by name. Diotrophes, who was apparently an influential leader, abused his position and hindered truth. In sharp contrast, Demetrius "hath good report of all men." The truth is either promoted or hidden by every person. Everyone will sometime give an account of his defense of truth. There needs to be an emphasis that we will be judged on the faithfulness of our service, not by the position that we filled. It is true that, in the advancement of truth, some will fill a more noticeable role, but those who serve behind the scenes as helpers are just as important.

This lesson builds directly on the previous lesson. Walking in truth builds the foundation for being a fellow helper to the truth.

The cause of truth will ultimately prevail as the faithful exemplify and proclaim the truth they extend its influence in the world.

Lesson Aim: To present principles related to advancing, the cause of truth.

Theme Verse

3 John 8. We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellow-helpers to the truth.

Lesson Text.

Gaius—Faithful Service

3 John 1:1-8

The elder unto the wellbeloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth.

²Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth. ³For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth. ⁴I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. ⁵Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers; ⁶Which 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: ⁷Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. ⁸We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellow helpers to the truth.

Diotrephes—Malicious Opposition

3 John 1:9-11

I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the pre-eminence among them, receiveth us not. ¹⁰Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating 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.

¹¹Beloved, 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.

Demetrius—Consistent Testimony

3 John 1:12-14

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.

¹³I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee: ¹⁴But 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.

Questions for Study

Gaius—Faithful Service

1. How did Gaius advance the cause of truth?
2. What is the relationship between truth dwelling in us and walking in truth (v. 3)?
3. What are some ways of being fellow helpers to the truth'?

Diotrephes—Malicious Opposition

4. What character traits ruined Diotrephes contribution to truth?
5. Discuss the relationship of verse 11 to advancing truth.

Demetrius—Consistent Testimony

6. How does a "good report" advance truth?

7. What are the elements of healthy brotherhood communications?

Analyzing the Passage

This epistle gives us an insight into the life of the early church when the need to lodge brethren was probably more frequent than it is today. This responsibility required both sacrifice and good judgment. Apparently Gaius faithfully provided Christian hospitality. This grew out of his charity (agape love). His hospitality aided those travelers who were reaching out to the Gentiles. For the sake of the Gospel, these travelers did not take resources from those they were preaching to (1 Corinthians 9:12-15).

Diotrephes was driven by the ambition to be first. His pride drove him to berate authority without cause, reject the brethren, and squelch the interest of seekers (v.10). The apostle promises to deal with him if the Lord permits him to come and visit the church.

Demetrius' reputation contrasts refreshingly to that of Diotrephes. His character brought him into favor with all who knew him. His life harmonized with truth and testified of the work of the Holy Spirit in his life.

Principles and Applications

Gains—Faithful Service

1. *Common belief of the truth is foundational to genuine brotherly love (v.1)*

Truth draws us together in unity by providing us with similar beliefs and mutual goals. Being one in faith is the basis for brotherhood. As part of the body, of Christ, we have tender love one for another.

2. *A fellow helper to the truth will walk in the truth (vv.3, 4).* Truth rules our life, it guards our thoughts, keeps our spirit, and shapes our actions. A life so lived gives forth a powerful testimony. Jesus said, "A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid" (Matthew 5:14).

3. *Doing good to all men, especially to those of the household of faith, advances the cause of truth (v. 5).* God looks for faithful workers who use their resources to benefit others. "God loveth a cheerful giver." We can contribute to the cause even if we do not have a prominent position.

So easily we can make excuses for not helping others we are too busy, we are not well set financially, or we are not cut out for it. We need to deny

ourselves knowing that God will bless our contribution to the spread of truth.

4. *Fellow helpers sacrifice for the sake of those who are directly involved in taking the Gospel message beyond their home community (vv. 6-8)*

Although our place may be "at home" we can contribute to the spread of truth by praying for, encouraging and giving material support to those who are directly involved. Together, we can share in the blessings and rewards of the work.

Diotrephes—Malicious Opposition

5. *Loving to have the preeminence among the brethren hinders the cause of truth (v.9).*

Such a spirit sets brother against brother in competition. God gives spiritual gifts to the church so that each person can contribute to others and also receive from them. A humble attitude produces an environment in which the church can thrive and give forth an effective witness to the lost.

6. *Purging the leaven of self-will from the church is essential in help-in-the cause of truth (vv. 10, 11).* All expressions of self-will, resisting or ignoring authority, having wrong attitudes toward others or seeking position—destroy unity and rob the church of her strength. Removing such expressions allows the church to flourish and shed forth beams of guiding light to the seeker. Discipline maintains church purity and promotes the truth.

Demetrius—Consistent Testimony

7. *Fellow helpers to the truth enjoy the approval of God and the confidence of the brethren (v. 12).*

A good report of "the truth itself" indicates a blameless and trustworthy character. Every Christian worker needs this. Confidence in each other promotes mutual sharing and allows us to devote our energies to church building.

Important Teachings

1. Common belief of the truth is foundational to genuine brotherly love (v. 1).
2. A fellow helper to the truth will walk in the truth (vv. 3-4).
3. Doing good to all men, especially to those of the household of faith, advances the cause of truth (v. 5).
4. Fellow helpers sacrifice for the sake of those who are directly involved

in taking the Gospel message beyond their home community (vv. 6-8).

5. Loving to have the preeminence among the brethren hinders the cause of truth (v. 9).

6. Purging the leaven of self-will from the church is essential in helping the cause of truth (vv. 10-11).

7. Fellow helpers to the truth enjoy the approval of God and the confidence of the brethren (v. 12).

Answers to Questions

1. How did Gaius advance the cause of truth?

Of greatest importance was the fact that he maintained his spiritual life. His walk of life was consistent. He faithfully served those in need with impartial hospitality.

2. What is the relationship between truth dwelling in us and walking in truth (v. 3)?

Jesus said, "I am ... the truth." Truth comes from God and dwells in those who have the Holy Spirit. If truth indwells a person, he is ruled by it. It governs his thoughts, tones his speech, and guides his actions. He enjoys the freedom to live up to the standards mandated by truth.

3. What are some ways of being fellow helpers to the truth?

We need to know those we relate to regularly in order to detect their needs -be close to our brethren. Perhaps it is a few hours of labor, some financial contribution or a prayer offered for them that meets their need. When a brother discusses a speaking or writing assignment with us, will I be ready to contribute thoughts on the subject. We should also be ready to share meals or lodging with someone in need.

4. What character traits ruined Diotrephes's contribution to truth?

He had a love of being first. He spoke hurtful words just to ruin some else. He was intolerant of others. Apparently he lacked respect for leadership. (v. 9).

5. Discuss the relationship of verse 11 to advancing truth.

Our natural tendency is to slide to the lowest common denominator. Truth is advanced when we use the "Gaiuses" among us as our role models. God is the source of all good; following what is good promotes truth. Following evil is an admission of loyalty to the wrong camp.

6. How does a "good report" advance truth?

A person of such character is free from self-interest, pride, slander, and in-

jurious traits. The brotherhood can accept him at face value without suspecting his motives. This gives them confidence that he is pulling with them and sharing their spiritual interests. His life exemplifies truth.

7. What are the elements of healthy brotherhood communications?

Good communication opens our lives to each other. We are drawn together as we discuss our goals, confess our faults, and acknowledge our temptations. Spiritual discussion unifies us as we shape each other's thinking. Healthy communication minimizes suspicion and encourages us to face the challenges of life

Summarizing the Lesson

"Ye shall be witnesses unto me" (Acts 1:8). The cause of truth will advance, and there is work for every Christian in the cause. Some serve in prominent roles, such as leaders. Other positions are not so obvious. Possibly the greatest need is for workers who are helpers—those who are content to work behind the scenes so that others can fill their positions more effectively. Faithful service offers us the blessing of God and the approval of our brethren now. Ultimately, we will be rewarded with eternal life in God's presence.

Research Guide

1. Consider those who ministered to Jesus in various ways during His earthly life.
2. Read the chapter titled "Christian Service" in *Doctrines of the Bible*. (Daniel Kauffman, Editor)

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