WORK TOGETHER FOR THE TRUTH

3 John 1-14

Key Verse: 8

“We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth.”

In 2 John Apostle John lead us to the realm of the truth. This idea flows continually in 3 John with the word “truth” written 6 times (1, 3 (2), 4, 8, 12). In 3 John he affirms the importance of bearing witness to THE truth, of walking in truth, of being fellow workers with the truth, of receiving a good testimony from the truth. And 2 John was addressed to a chosen lady and her children, we can say, to a family, but 3 John was addressed solely to a man named Gaius. It is John’s most personal letter. In this epistle we see John’s fellowship with Gaius both walking in the truth. In this letter we see particularly three names, Gaius, Diotrephes, and Demetrius. Knowing people as well as knowing God is very critical in one’s life and the ministry so that we can truly walk in the truth personally and work together for the truth.

**First, Gaius (1-8).** Verse 1 says “The elder, To my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth.” Here “dear friend” is in Greek, agapētos, from agapaō, the noblest kind of love. So in other translations, “The elder, To the beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth.” In 2 John 1 it says, “The elder, To the chosen lady…” Gaius is a beloved of the Lord, as the lady was chosen by the Lord. Apostle Paul said in Colossians 3:12, “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved/beloved…” All who are Christ’s are both chosen and beloved by God. Gaius was also beloved by John and by the community of God. After saying, “the beloved Gaius”, John continues, “whom I love in the truth.” What an expression of his affection to Gaius, right from the beginning! In this epistle, John says again in verse 5 and 11 “beloved”. John is often called the apostle of love. He can’t stop saying “beloved” when he speaks to Gaius in this letter. Indeed, John is pouring out his affection on Gaius. Certainly, it is in the truth. Let’s see further the beautiful fellowship between John and Gaius.

Verse 2 is John’s prayer for Gaius: “Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.” This is a good prayer. In this prayer, the most important aspect is “as your soul is getting along well.” John recognizes that Gaius is healthy spiritually, meaning Gaius lives a successful spiritual life. On that basis, John prays that Gaius may also have good physical health and everything may go well with him. It is surely God’s desire for his children that they may keep a right relationship with God and, in that, receive all other blessings, health, job, house, etc., on the condition that they bear all these blessings. This is the same as Jesus’ promise in Matthew 6:33, “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” This is also the same as Proverbs 3:5-6, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.” And Paul says in his final greeting in Philippians 4:23, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.”

Subsequently, John says in verse 3, “It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth.” Here, John commends Gaius for his faithfulness to the truth and his continuous walk in the truth. It is notable that before commending his love, John commends his faithfulness and loyalty to the truth. We know that the truth does not change, but people change. How precious is a man who is faithful and loyal to the truth! Gaius loved the truth and lived by the truth, unswervingly and steadily walking in the truth. This showed that his soul was sound and getting along well. His soul was healthy, and his spiritual life was prospering. In NKJV, “faithfulness to the truth” in verse 3 is written as “testified of the truth that is in you.” We can see that when he had the truth, that is, Jesus in his heart, he could be faithful to the truth. He was a man of truth. Obviously, Apostle John was a man of truth. He was so glad and happy to see Gaius, another man of truth. They shared the same spirit in the truth.

And in verse 4 it says, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.” Here is John’s joy and again this is the joy of godly parents and the joy of shepherds and the joy of our God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This kind of joy is to be the joy of the community of God, the joy of walking in the truth being faithful and loyal to the truth.

John then says in verses 5 and 6, “Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you. They have told the church about your love.” Now John commends Gaius for his love, his faithful love. He welcomed traveling preachers genuinely with nothing attached, humanly. This revealed how faithful he was to the truth. He literally laboured in his work, opening his home for them, although there was the atmosphere of refusing such hospitality. They were so moved by Gaius’ genuine love and they reported it to the church.

John continues, “You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans.” Here we know more about the travelling preachers. They were those who were travelling to preach for the sake of the Name, the precious name of Jesus Christ. They went out for the glory and honor of Christ.

Their life purpose was very clear. Apostle Paul said in Romans 1:5, “Through him and for his name’s sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.” And in doing God’s work, they were practicing the instruction of Jesus, “Take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra tunic” (Lk 9:3). They were solely depending on God for all they needed. How precious these unknown people were! Gaius welcomed such people and served them surely in name of Jesus. What Gaius did seemed to be good enough.

However, Apostle John wants him to do more, saying, “You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God.” “You will do well” is an idiom equivalent to the English word “please.” So in other translations, “Please send them on their way in a manner worthy of God.” “Send them on their way” is a technical term in the early church for missionaries. John wanted Gaius to be mindful of their continuous journey as missionaries. John wanted him to support them for their further mission life in a manner worthy of God. Certainly, it was not easy for John to ask Gaius to do that much. We believed that he made such a request of Gaius, knowing that that is the way to continue to walk in the truth. And we are reminded of what Jesus said to his disciples in Matthew 10:40-42, “He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man’s reward. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.” This kind of reward is related to the heavenly reward, which is storing up for ourselves treasures in heaven.

Then John says in verse 8, “We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth.” What a fundamental and big picture John had! Work for the truth! In ESV, “Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.”

“Work for the truth” can be one clear theme of the Bible. When God made man, he created man to work for God’s great mission to rule the whole world with stewardship and conquering spirit. However, when man sinned, this blessing of God turned into God’s curse of working for three meals a day. Man’s work of glorious mission was changed into a meaningless toiling. Then through Christ’s redemption man’s mission is restored. Paul said in Ephesians 2:10, “We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” We are redeemed through Christ’s suffering and his shed blood so that we may be newly created in Christ Jesus to do good works in this world, while marching toward the kingdom of heaven. Jesus said in John 6:27, “Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life.” While the people of the world work for food that spoils, that is, to work to survive in this world of survival of the fittest, God’s redeemed people are to work for the truth. When we work for the truth, God will be responsible for our lives in this world of trouble. Again, this is the reason Jesus promised, “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

We believe that those who walk in the truth can work for the truth. And those who work for the truth can work together for the truth. “For his name’s sake”, “work for the truth” and “work together for the truth” is certainly related to the Lord’s prayer, “Hallowed be your name, your kingdom come” (Lk 11:2).

We thank God that Bamidele is preparing to come to Canada as a missionary, currently working to finish his PhD. May God give wisdom to complete his proposal. Thank God that M. Moses served us with the words of 2 Timothy, Ruth, and now with James. S. Jemmie is preparing the words of Colossians to serve us, S. Sara Ryu, Philippians, and S. Ian, Titus. Thank God that we work together for the truth. We also challenge again and again to serve U of T students with the truth of God’s word. We also pray for our CBF ministry. As we learned that church is the pillar and foundation of the truth. How precious it is to work together for the truth! May God guide his ministry here continually in his hope and vision!

**Second, Diotrephes (9-11).** Verse 9 says, “I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us.” We do not know about this letter, written earlier to this church. It was not written to Diotrephes; it was written to the church. Perhaps Diotrephes destroyed it, probably never even read it to the church and that’s why John tells Gaius, who is in that church, that he wrote that letter. Diotrephes had managed to move himself into a position of power and became the screener for everything that came to the church and literally rejected a letter from the apostle John.

Diotrephes is the one who loves to be first. “Love to be first” is “put himself to be first”, or to “have pre-eminence.” This is a fundamental problem of fallen mankind, driven by pride and self-centredness. There are many people who became so miserable and ended their lives in tragedy because of they loved to be first. Abimelech was a son of Jeru-Baal, Gideon, who was called a mighty warrior, and saved the Israelites from the hands of Midianites who oppressed them for(?) seven years. Gideon had seventy other sons. After the death of his father, Abimelech murdered his seventy brothers on a stone, hiring reckless adventurers. It was because of his desire to be king. Then, after three years of his kingship, he was killed by a upper millstone which a woman dropped on his head from a tower. At the very moment of his death, still pride was there. In order not to be shamed by the news that a woman killed him, he ordered his armor-bearer to kill him by the sword, and his servant ran him through. That’s the end of his life (Judges 9).

There was a man named Haman in the kingdom of Persia that ruled the Jews. The king honoured Haman, the Agagite, elevating him and giving him a seat of honour higher than that of all the other nobles. All the royal officials at the king’s gate knelt down and paid honour to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. But there was one Jew, Mordecai, who would not kneel down or pay him honour. Then Haman was very much troubled and plotted an evil scheme to annihilate all the Jews on a certain day and made a gallows of 23 meter to hang Mordecai (Esther 7:10).

There is another case. King Herod wanted people’ recognition and honour and praise very much. On an appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. They shouted, “This is a voice of a god, not a man.” This praise was what he wanted. The Bible says in Acts 12:23, “Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.”

Now let’s think of Diotrephes. In verse 9 John says, “…Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us.” “have nothing to do with us” is in other translations, “not welcome us”,
“not acknowledge our authority”, “not receive us”, “not accept what we say.” Diotrephes does not acknowledge one with apostolic authority, even the authority of John, the last living apostle, rejecting him and what he says. As he loved to be first, he only fed his ego and became his own man, rejecting any authority above him. He wanted to have the pre-eminence of Christ in the church.

Verse 10 says more about him: “So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us.” He not only rejects Apostle John’s authority but also gossips maliciously about him and his coworkers. Those who gossip maliciously or slander do so to gain trust from others by destroying the trust of those whom they slander. Anyway, Diotrephes had a wonderful opportunity to observe and learn from the last surviving apostle John, the apostle of love, who directly witnessed Jesus for three years, but he gossiped maliciously about him. When he loved to be first, he could not learn anything from others. Probably, he was an eloquent speaker. However, he used his eloquence to slander others.

Verse 10 says continually, “Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church.” The brothers who went out for the sake of the Name, Jesus, were so precious. They were worthy of being welcomed. He refused to welcome such people, but even stopped those who wanted to welcome them. He even put them out of the church. He did not want to have anyone around him who would be a hindrance for him to be the first.

In any organization there have been such people. We should really have a discerning heart to see people. We also should watch out for such elements in our hearts and fight against such sinful nature. This is the reason Jesus said, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” When we do not walk in the truth, we cannot work for the truth. We remember what Jesus said to his disciples when there was a competition to be first among his disciples: “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over the, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you, Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10:42-45). It is very important to be Christ-centred and learn the servantship of Christ in our Christian life.

**Third, Demetrius (11-14).** John then says in verse 11, “Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God.” Life is imitation. Whom or what we imitate matters. Gaius is the one who walks in the truth and love, and works for the truth. Yet, John still tells him not to imitate what is evil but what is good.

Then verse 12 says, “Demetrius is well spoken by everyone—and even by the truth itself. We also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true.” What can be a better commendation than this? We don’t need to try to be recognized by people. When we strive to receive God’s recognition, at his right time he leads us to be recognized by people. This is what James said in James 4:10, “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you…Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.”

Verse 12 is in ESV, “Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself. We also add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true.” John is introducing Gaius to this man Demetrius, in a sense saying, “Receive him.” If Gaius showed hospitality and needed to continue to do it, no matter what pressure might be coming, and if Diotrephes was the man who refused to give hospitality, Demetrius is one who is to receive hospitality. John seems to be saying, “In spite of the fact that there’s Diotrephes in the church, you need to do that and here’s one in particular that I want you to receive, and his name is Demetrius. And if you will receive him, you will not be imitating what is evil but what is good. You will then give evidence that you are of God.”

Most probably, the primary purpose of the letter was to accompany Demetrius, who was coming to visit that area. It may well be that the letter was given to Gaius, from the hand of Demetrius, sent by John. Demetrius hands him the letter and says, “I’m the man of whom John writes.

In verse 13, “I have much to write to you, but I do not want to do so with pen and ink. I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face.” And then John says, “Peace to you. The friends here send their greetings. Greet the friends there by name.” John wished that peace could pervade that congregation. And Gaius and John must have had mutual friends that they both knew. John, the beloved apostle John, the great apostle, the last apostle who had that amazing life with our Lord Jesus Christ, who lived into his 90s, who was now the only apostle left who had absorbed so many friendships and relationships even difficult ones, still knew the names of the people in his life. And he closes out his last letter by affirming how important friendship is.

May God help us to walk in the truth, work for the truth, and work together for the truth, building up friendships in Christ!