

## Small Books, Big Messages “Spiritual Health”

3 John 1-8

Delivered during the COVID-19 crisis via Livestream at Central Baptist Church on August 23, 2020

### INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** Even healthy people must be careful to remain healthy. We’ve always known this but Covid has made us very aware of sneezing, coughing, touching surfaces, and staying home when we are sick.
  - In the same way, even spiritually healthy Christians must be careful to remain healthy. It is so easy to lose our priorities and let other things crowd out our love for God and others. It is so easy to become discouraged. It is so easy to become complacent. It is so easy to neglect praying and seeking God.
    - So how do we stay spiritually healthy?
- This is where the letter of 3 John is so fantastic. Here’s the background of what’s going on. You will notice in verse 1 that John, the elder, writes this letter to a man named Gaius. Gaius is the kind of Christian every pastor dreams about having in his church. We will see that he was a spiritually healthy man.
  - But Gaius faced some dangers to his spiritual health. As you read 1 John you see that Gaius’ church was infected with false teachers and in their sickness lacked love for each other.
- John wrote the letter of 1 John to the church to help them. But an influential man in the church named Diotrephes rejected his letter. Look at 3 John 9. **READ 9 – (SHOW SLIDE 2)<sup>9</sup> I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority.**
  - Diotrephes sought to defame John, refused to accept the missionaries that John sent, stopped anyone else from receiving them, and if anyone did receive John’s missionaries Diotrephes had them thrown out of the church. **(SHOW SLIDE 3) READ 10 - <sup>10</sup> So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.**
    - Diotrephes is that power hungry controlling man that every pastor dreads to have in their church.
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 4)** But Gaius, probably just a normal member of the church who served in leadership, would not buckle under the pressure of this powerful man. Despite the threats from Diotrephes, Gaius took these men in, cared for their needs, and sent them back to John where they reported all that happened.
  - When John hears all that is going on he plans to come to the church but he sends this letter of 3 John ahead of him.
- I give all that background to show that here we have a spiritually healthy Christian named Gaius. He is doing well. But he is in danger of being infected by the sicknesses of others in the church. So John’s purpose in writing verses 1-8 is to encourage him to keep on his spiritually healthy state.

- From John's words to Gaius we learn four ways to maintain our spiritual health. This is by no means exhaustive but it is very instructive.
  - So how do you maintain your spiritual health?

### CARE FOR YOUR SOUL ALONG WITH YOUR BODY

- **(SHOW SLIDE 5)** First, if you want to maintain your spiritual health then you must care for your soul along with your body.
  - **(SHOW SLIDE 6)** READ 1 - <sup>1</sup>The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth. Right away you can sense John's deep love for Gaius. He calls him "beloved." Three times John calls him this. John verbally expresses his love for Gaius saying that he loves him in truth.
    - This has a twofold meaning. *"Gaius, my dear friend, I truly love you and I love you because of the truth we share."*
- It is the truth that unites us – the truth that *"God so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him will have eternal life."* I have met Christians on the London Tube and in the mud huts of Africa whom I have an instant love for simply because we share the same Lord and Saviour.
  - John's deep love for Gaius continues in his greeting. **(SHOW SLIDE 7)** READ 2a - <sup>2</sup>**Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul.**
- So John prays that Gaius might know physical health and that he might know general well-being.
  - The physical matters to God. He made us to be body and soul. And so we see that it is perfectly appropriate to pray for health and well-being.
- But spiritually healthy people also see how important our soul is. What I want you to see here is *how* John prays for Gaius' physical well-being. **(SHOW SLIDE 8)** READ 2b - <sup>2</sup>**Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul.**
  - That is astounding. Have you ever heard of such a prayer? Do you see what John is praying? He is saying, *"Gaius, you are spiritually healthy. My prayer is that God would match your physical well-being to your spiritual well-being."*
    - Let me ask you, *"What would happen if John prayed this for you and God answered it?"* What would happen if you prayed, *"God please make my physical health match the level of my spiritual health?"*
- I'm afraid many of us would not want that prayed for us. We might end up in the E.R. Here we see the absolute priority that Gaius put on his spiritual life – on worshipping God, knowing the truth, and living it out every day.
  - So how about you? In our culture we put so much emphasis on our physical well-being. But how about worshipping God? How about spending time in his word? How about serving others? How about prayer?
    - Do a health check. Are you spiritually healthy? Spiritually healthy people care for their souls along with their bodies.

### DEVOTE YOUR WHOLE LIFE TO LIVING OUT THE TRUTH

- **(SHOW SLIDE 9) Second, if you want to maintain your spiritual health then you must devote your whole life to living out the truth.**
  - Look at verse 3. **(SHOW SLIDE 10) READ 3 - <sup>3</sup> For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth.**
    - Notice it is not just that Gaius is faithful in believing the truth. He also lives it. He walks in the truth.
      - What does it mean to walk in the truth? There are two sides to it.
- First, to walk in the truth means to be sound in your doctrine. Doctrine is just another word for teachings. Gaius believed that the Bible was the word of truth. He believed in one God, who created all things, and who deserves all our worship and praise. He believed that humanity was guilty of sinning against God and that our only hope was for God to rescue us. He believed that out of love, God sent His one and only Son, Jesus into the world in order to rescue us through his life, death and resurrection. He believed that the only way to be rescued is to trust in Jesus. He believed that Jesus is coming back to set up God's eternal kingdom and that he will judge all people.
  - Friends, if someone were to make a report about you to John would they say that you are solid in your understanding of the gospel? Would they say you know your Bible, that you know Jesus, that you love him, and are following him? If not, what will you do this week to grow in knowledge?
    - Read this book, live in it, meditate on it, pray it, and study it.
- But walking in the truth is not just about believing the right things. It is also living them out in a life of love. We see this in verse 6. **(SHOW SLIDE 11) READ 6a – these brothers . . . <sup>6</sup> who testified to your love before the church.** Gaius was a man of love. His beliefs were shown in action.
  - If someone were to report about your life would they say your faith is demonstrated in tangible acts of love? What are those acts?
- We must never divide truth and love. They are friends. Gaius is an example but he is simply a man who is being shaped into the image of Jesus. For it was Jesus who was full of grace and truth.
  - Friends, let the truth of the gospel fill your minds. The truth that God had mercy on you. That he sought you. That he rescued you. Let this good news so fill your mind that it moves your hands to action.
    - This is what spiritual health looks like. As you devote your life to living out the truth you maintain healthy and avoid sickness.

#### ENSURE YOUR PRIORITIES ARE RIGHT

- **(SHOW SLIDE 12) Third, if you want to maintain your spiritual health then you must ensure your priorities are right.**
  - I get this from verse 4. **(SHOW SLIDE 13) READ 4 - <sup>4</sup> I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.**
    - This is a signature phrase of John to call his readers "*children*." They are first of all children of God. In 1 John 3:1 he says, "*How great is the love*

***the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!***

All those who know Jesus are children of God.

- But John also refers many times to his Christian readers as ***“dear children”*** or ***“my children.”*** In this context, John had probably led Gaius to Christ. He is John’s spiritual son.
- But what I really want you to see here is John’s priorities in life. He says he has no greater joy than to hear that his converts and those under his spiritual care are walking in the truth.
  - Can you say that? There are many things that bring us joy in life but what is your greatest joy?
    - It is a piercing question because it reveals what you truly value. John says his greatest joy is hearing that the believers he knows are going on with Jesus, worshipping him, following him, and living out their faith in everyday life.
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 14)** What joy it is to hear about people you knew years ago who are still walking with God. I am overjoyed when I hear of people who have left Central who are living for Christ and doing great things for him in the world.
- This certainly applies to those you have known to but it also applies to our actual children for they are under our spiritual care. Is it your greatest longing and joy that your own children walk in the truth?
  - I get very concerned sometimes when I talk with parents. They care greatly about their children’s success in piano and school but have little care for their spiritual lives.
    - Now of course we should be happy for our children’s achievements. But parents our greatest joy is not in our kids earthly success. For as Jesus said, ***“What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world but loses his soul?”***
- Heather and I know this family who had two kids about 7 and 5 years old. They said they were Christians and were regular at church. One Sunday they just stopped coming. I contacted them. They told me that they had decided it was more important at this phase of life to focus on their kids so they would not be coming anymore. Is it right to focus on your kids? Oh yes, but is family the chief thing we live for? No.
  - Heather met the wife again a few years later. The kids were now teenagers now and the mom was talking about how good they are at dance. Family time and dance are their greatest joys. These are good things but oh what a tragedy has happened here. These parents have modeled and taught their children that family life and dance are more important than living for Jesus.
    - ***“What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world but loses his soul?”***
- Parents, what is your greatest joy? Is it to see your kids knowing the gospel, embracing Jesus, and living for him. Pray for them. Model what it looks like.
  - Ensure your family priorities are right.

**CONTINUE TO SUPPORT THE MINISTRY OF CHRISTIAN WORKERS**

- We come now to our final point. **(SHOW SLIDE 15) In the fourth place John says if you want to maintain your spiritual health then you must continue to support the ministry of Christian workers.**
  - Spiritually healthy people are those who show love in practical ways. In this context we see that one sign that you are spiritually healthy is that you support Christian workers. Let me unpack this for you.
- We need to see that the main concern here is support for Christian workers. It is not simply Christians in general but those who make their living spreading the gospel. We know that from verse 7. **(SHOW SLIDE 16) READ 7 - <sup>7</sup>For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles.** They went out for the sake of the Name. The name is a synonym for *“Jesus.”*
  - So John is talking about the need to support those Christians like pastors or missionaries or workers who are giving their full time efforts to seeing people know Christ.
- In John’s day the main way you supported such workers was through hospitality. You see, most inns also served as brothels, making a stay there unappealing. And so travelling Christian missionaries, leaders, and pastors would stay in other Christian’s homes. In verse 5 and 6 we learn that Gaius has been doing this. **(SHOW SLIDE 17) READ 5-6a - <sup>5</sup>Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, <sup>6</sup>who testified to your love before the church.**
  - I told you he was a great guy. If Gaius heard you were a Christian worker in need he would take you in, make you a steak supper, put a mint on your pillow, and when you left in the morning he would send you off with a prayer and an envelope with cash inside.
    - Apparently, John was sending more of these Christian workers Gaius’ way. Despite the opposition from Diotrephes, John wants Gaius to keep supporting these Christian workers. **(SHOW SLIDE 18) READ 6b - You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God.** Verse 8 says the same thing. **(SHOW SLIDE 19) READ 8a - <sup>8</sup>Therefore we ought to support people like these.**
- Now we learn a few things here about how to support Christian workers. **(SHOW SLIDE 20) First, Christian workers are to be supported in a manner worthy of God.** You see this in verse 6. **(SHOW SLIDE 21) READ 6 - You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God.** This is referring to financial support. It is not saying that Christian workers need to be rich but we should not treat them cheaply either.
  - You cannot pay someone enough to do funerals for children, to carry the emotional weight of counseling troubled marriages, or to give up everything to cross cultural and linguistic boundaries. You cannot pay them enough for such things. But you should support them financially: *“in a manner worthy of God.”*
    - There you have the gospel again. How does God give? Is he stingy? No, there can be no higher standard of generosity. God sacrificed his one and only Son. This is how we are to give.
      - Do we sacrificially give to Christian workers?

- Now lest I be seen as trying to get things for myself let me just say this. I am very content with how I am treated. I am grateful to our personnel committee for all their work on staff salaries.
  - But I know that many of you will continue on to other churches. Let me say this to you: make sure your pastors, staff, and missionaries are fairly paid and well taken care of. Support them in a manner worthy of God – the generous God.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 22) Second, Christian workers are to be supported primarily by Christians.**
  - Look at verse 7. **(SHOW SLIDE 23) READ 7 - <sup>7</sup>For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles.** These itinerant missionaries would not as a matter of policy seek their support from unbelievers and did not receive their support from them. There are many good causes that we may support along with the world but we must support our brothers and sisters whom the world does not support.
    - Look at verse 8. **READ 8a - <sup>8</sup>Therefore we ought to support people like these.**
  - This is why I love giving to the church. A portion of every dollar goes to supporting pastors, missionaries, children and youth workers.
- Finally, lest Gaius or we today find this to be a begrudging duty, John gives us the reason why we should do this. He says you must consider it a privilege. Why is it such a privilege to support Christian workers? In verse 8 he says that **(SHOW SLIDE 24) supporting Christians workers makes you a fellow worker with them.**
  - **(SHOW SLIDE 25) READ 8 - <sup>8</sup>Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.**
    - When you support Christian workers you are partnering with them. You are part of their work. When you support missionaries you are part of their work.
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 26)** John's words remind me of the man who saw three men laying bricks. He walked up to the first man and asked, ***"What you are doing?"*** A little annoyed, the first man said, ***"What does it look like I am doing? I am laying bricks."*** He walked over to the second bricklayer and asked the same question. The second man responded, ***"Oh, this is what I do for a living."***
  - He then asked the third man the same question, ***"What are you doing?"*** The third man look up and smiled. ***"I am building a cathedral."***
- When you give to support Christian workers you aren't just doing your duty to give; you are partnering with Christian workers. You are part of this preaching ministry. You are part of mission work overseas. You are part of seeing kids and youth come to know Christ.
  - What a privilege to support such ministries. It is truly more blessed to give than to receive. How are you doing on this? Are you giving to support Christian workers?
- So friends, these four areas teach us what it means to be spiritually healthy. Do a healthy check on yourself? What is the Spirit speaking to you about today?