

## Second and Third John– John Karmelich

1. Let me give my lesson title first: The word "truth". That's one of John's favorite words to describe what all Christians should believe and effect how we live as believers. For those of you who have been reading my lessons for awhile, you know that one of my favorite expressions is, "I believe in Jesus, now what?" Well the "now what" can also be summarized by the word "truth". That's what the author of 2nd and 3rd John wants us to be full of. Before I can explain any more on the topic of what John meant by truth, I'd like to back it up for a moment, to explain the big perspective of why the topic of truth matters and then I'll discuss specifically what John means by "truth".
2. First I admit, it's unusual of me to combine the study of two bible books in one lesson. I'm doing that here because both 2nd John and 3rd John are both short epistles written by the same author around the same time period. To explain why they're here, remember that the Gospel of John as well as 1st John were written by the same author probably a fairly short time prior to these two epistles. My point is the writings of John's Gospel and his epistles are connected:
  - a) John wrote the Gospel of John with the purpose of proving that Jesus is God.
  - b) John wrote 1st John to all Christians to prove that we can know for sure we're saved and exactly what that means.
  - c) John wrote 2nd and 3rd John, shortly after 1st John, to individual Christians to show them and us what we are supposed to be doing now that we know the "what". To expand upon the question I stated earlier, if we believe that Jesus was, is, and always will be fully God, as well as the concept that Jesus became human and remains fully human alive to this day then we're all eternally saved based on that belief. That last sentence is a summary of the Gospel of John and 1st John in one thought. Again, the question is "now what"? Both 2nd and 3rd John give a pretty good summary of the "now what" answer. God desires we live our Christian life according to His truth. The truth is our faith that Jesus is who I just said He is, and we're eternally saved based on that belief. The truth including the concept that we use our lives to make a difference for Him by putting others as a priority over our self, and thus bringing joy to our lives by thinking that way.
  - d) For those of you who've read my studies on 1st John, this is old news. What is new in 2nd and 3rd John are examples of people who are living in this truth and John is commending both recipients of these letters for how they've lived so far in God's truth (that the bible as we know it is true) and continue to live that way.
  - e) To state the obvious, if that's all there is to these two epistles, we'd be done by now. Since we have two short epistles that are both essentially on the topic of God's truth I thought it would be an interesting "change up" to my usual studies to combine both of these epistles in one study. Besides, both are short enough that they can easily be combined as such. In the original Greek language both letters are less than 300 hundred words. We can easily fit both letters on one piece of paper. In summary, since both are fairly short, and both have been written by the same person, I'm going to throw a "curve ball" at my usual studies as I combine both of these epistles in one study.
3. Before I get to the text itself, let me give a quick refresher on the who, what, when and where's of both of these epistles. Although an author's name isn't given, it's been accepted since the earliest days of Christianity that the same John, who wrote the Gospel of John and 1st John, also penned 2nd and 3rd John. For the Christian novice, also remember that this John is not John the Baptist as the "Baptist" dies in the middle of the Gospel stories. The when and where is also not debated. John was one of the 12 apostles. Later in his life he became the "overseer" (like a Catholic bishop or Cardinal) over all the churches that were in Asia Minor, part of "Turkey" today. Most scholars date these two letters in the 80's or 90's of first century. John became the only apostle to die from "natural causes" as opposed to being killed for his faith, although there were attempts to kill him.

4. With my questions answered about the background of these two letters, let me give an overview of these two letters and explain why they are included as part of the bible:
- a) 2nd John was written to someone called "the chosen lady". Some bible scholars are very convinced this refers to a specific church or a group of people. Others argue it refers to Mary, the mother of Jesus. Others like myself simply believe it was an elderly woman that John respected because she's lived for a long time believing the truth of the Gospel message and her deeds matched her actions. Which reminds me, a great definition of the word "truth" is when "The word and deed become one". That simply means if we can act based on what we believe, whatever that truth is becomes evident by our actions. John's convinced that whoever this chosen lady is, she lived based on the belief that Jesus is who John says she was.
  - b) This is also important because 3rd John is written to a man named Gaius. John states that he lived in the truth as well. My point is both letters are addressed to two people that we read of John respecting because they lived based on their belief that Jesus is God and He did die for our sins, to put it simply. John respects both recipients for living in the truth.
  - c) Coming back to 2nd John, he commends her because he realizes that her children are also living by the truth of Jesus and "their deeds match their beliefs" and that realization brings John joy. I've stated in earlier lessons that joy is an internal positive feeling based on our attitude and not based on circumstances. John says a great source of joy is realizing that our children walk in God's love. Personally I can't think of anything that brings me more joy than seeing my own children as well as those I care about trust in Jesus for their lives and letting Him guide our lives. That's a wonderful source of joy I can't match elsewhere.
  - d) Then John warns this lady to watch out for false teachers, as they were "everywhere" back then as well as today. He's not talking about preachers of other religions, but those who claim to be Christians but are denying fundamental truths such as Jesus being both fully God as well as fully human "then and now". As I've preached heavily in previous studies of 1st John, it's essential to accept both. Because Jesus as fully God shows us how God by Himself paid the sin we deserve and did not make for example, an innocent angel suffer on our behalf. Jesus is fully human then and now so that we realize something can relate to us as humans to understand whatever it is we're going through at the moment. John's saying the danger of false teachers is when they deny those fundamental truths about our faith, we fail to realize what God's done for us and what He continues to do for us as He's guiding us to make a difference for Him with our lives.
  - e) John ends 2nd John with a desire to see this lady in person so they could share their joy as a team. It's about realizing we can have fellowship with any Christian who accepts those basic truths about God so we can have joy together. For example, I find that as a Christian I'm much more comfortable at times being around "strangers" who share my beliefs than I am being around family members who don't "get it". That's because fellow believers also want to be kind to others and put other's needs as priority over their own, and that type of love is contagious and brings joy to anyone who shares in that type of giving love.
  - f) Third John parallel's 2nd John in many ways, as opposed to being written to an unnamed woman, 3rd John is written to a named man. John commends him for living by the truth of the Gospel. John then condemns someone named Diotrephes who's a false teacher that the recipient of 3rd John has to deal with. Then John commends a man named Demetrius who apparently also walks in God's truth. It ends like 2nd John with a desire for John to meet the recipient of that letter in person so they can share God's joy together.
  - g) Putting 2nd and 3rd John together, the combined point is John writes two short letters to two different people to express John's joy that they're being obedient to the Gospel as they are walking in God's truth. They both warn of false teachers and in both cases John wants to spend more time with them so they can have joy together in Jesus. My point to all of us is that if we want to have more joy in Jesus, let's learn more about how we have that joy.

5. 2nd John, Verse 1: The elder, To the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in the truth--and not I only, but also all who know the truth--<sup>2</sup> because of the truth, which lives in us and will be with us forever:
- a) John starts this letter by referring to himself as "the elder". For all you Presbyterians out there reading this, the word "elder" is an English translation of Presbyterian. The word is simply referring to one who's been "around the block for a while". John's probably in his 80's or his 90's when he wrote this. Since he at this point has been living the Christian life for a long time, and is the only original apostle left alive at that time, he can definitely call himself an elder and people would respect him as someone who's "put his time where his mouth is" as he's lived based on what's he's believed.
  - b) The letter is addressed to the "chosen lady". Without repeating a lot of what I stated in the introduction, some argue the "chosen lady" is a code word for a particular church. There are many other scholars who argue it just refers to a particular person. Personally I think it just refers to an unnamed person who John knew. This letter was written during a time of persecution and it's also possible the person or group is unnamed as to safeguard them in case the letter was intercepted. By the way the named person that 3rd John was written to was a very common name at that time, so one can make the case that even if that epistle fell in the wrong hands, others wouldn't know who that was.
    - i) My point here is simply that if God wanted us to know more about who these two epistles were written to, it would have been made known to us. I'm convinced the letters are for us to study about God's truth and not so much to be concerned over who were the actual recipients of these letters.
    - ii) Coming back to 2nd John, notice this epistle isn't just for the "chosen lady" but also to her children. Whether it refers to literal children or the church that met with her I believe the point is the same. First remember that church "buildings" didn't exist until centuries later. Christians in the first few centuries always met in homes that belong to other Christians. This was done partially out of fear of being caught as Christianity wasn't legal back then. What's important here is that John's writing to both (lady and her children, whoever that was) to express John's joy that they're all believing in Jesus as God and human and that truth brought John joy.
    - iii) Let me back up a moment to expand upon the concept of the Gospel truth. It's the idea that we believe the bible is the word of God. It's the idea that we believe Jesus is who He claimed to be. It's the idea that we realize that God loves us because He does and there is nothing we can do to earn His love or prove our worth to Him. It is about the idea of giving of ourselves to others as we draw upon God's strength so we can make a difference for Him in the world around us. All of that is a good summary of what John meant by the truth.
  - c) I needed to explain all of that in order to understand the joy John wanted to have by being around these people. For those of us who've been Christians for awhile, ask yourself does anything bring you more joy than seeing say your children or those you love trust in God and walk in His truth? Recently I watched my oldest daughter go on her first missionary trip as a Christian. That brought me more joy than if she was won some great prize or did some major accomplishment. Nothing brings me more joy than seeing those I love "walk in" the truth of who Jesus is, and their deeds match what they believe.
  - d) Coming back to these opening verses, notice John uses the word "truth" three times in the opening two verses. Whatever John meant by the "truth" it was important enough to him to mention it over and over again. While John never formally defines truth in any of his epistles or the Gospel of John, by studying all of John's writings it becomes obvious what he meant by "the truth" is the truth of the Gospel stories. That's why my introduction also mentioned John's other writings: So we can understand the truth of the Gospel accounts so we can use our lives to have joy with others who also accept the truth of the Gospel.

- e) I should pause at this point and mention something else about the "Truth". One can't get it by studying what nonbelievers have to offer. I've met a few Christians who've come to God because it seemed logical. I've also met some who got saved because their spouse is the one who "dragged them" to church. My point is it doesn't really "sink in" unless God through the Spirit convinces us of the truth of the Gospel message. That's why Jesus said in the Gospel of John Chapter 3 that the Holy Spirit is like the wind where we don't really understand how the wind moves, so we don't fully grasp how the Holy Spirit works.
- i) What I mean by that is we don't get how some people "get it" and others don't. I have met some very brilliant people in specific professions, yet they're still blind to the truth of the Gospel. That's why we can't convert people by arguing them into the kingdom. We can defend the truth of the Gospel and I respect apologetic type of ministries for that purpose. However, for people to truly change, it takes an "act of God" for a person's heart to change, which is why we compare the Holy Spirit to the wind because in both cases we can't understand how it "moves". We'll see the evidence of wind by leaves blowing, but we don't understand where that wind is starting from or how it dies down. In the same way, we can't grasp why some do get the Gospel message and others reject it.
  - ii) With that said, realize that God loves to work through people to lead others to the truth of the Gospel message. That's why He calls on us to pray for others so others can be saved. In the Gospel of John (14:12), Jesus talks about the fact that believers will do greater miracles than the one's He performed. Realize that all the miracles Jesus did were temporary. Whether Jesus brought somebody back from the dead or healed them of a disease, they still died again one day. However, the miracles we get to do as Christians is pray and lead others to eternal life. Those miracles do last an eternity longer than all the miracles that Jesus performed then.
- f) I state all of that because John's writing both of these epistles as John loves to be around others who also have the same joy of realizing we've been chosen by God to be with Him forever and have the power to lead others closer to God. That realization of that truth is what brings John joy and he loves to share that joy with others. The others include these two recipients of these two letters. Speaking of which, let's get back to them.
6. Verse 3: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, will be with us in truth and love.
- a) This was a standard greeting given in letters in John's day. If you study Paul's letters, he loved the same type of greeting to start his epistles. This may seem like a strange tangent, but when you carefully study Paul's letters, whenever he wrote to a church, he'd start the letter with "Grace and peace". When Paul wrote to individuals, he'd say "grace, mercy and peace" as to remind those individuals that God not only loves us unconditionally and we have peace based on that love, but we also get mercy in that God forgives us of our sins in this lifetime. The old expression goes, "Grace is a blessing that we don't deserve. Mercy is forgiveness for what we did do wrong." Paul adds mercy to letters written to people as to remind them that God gives us both as we use our lives to make a difference for Him.
    - i) I mention all of that as part of my support that I believe "the elect lady" is a person and not a "church". As Paul included mercy when he wrote to those who got the idea that God is a god of both grace and mercy, I'm convinced that whoever John wrote this letter to, also understood the distinction and included both as part of the introduction to this short letter.
  - b) At this point, it's probably important that I pause for a moment to explain the "trinity": As I've stated many times in my studies, the word "trinity" is not in the bible. I don't see that as a problem. The term "trinity" is a solution to a problem, not a problem itself. It's a way of explaining how God can be more than one and "one" at the same time. The reason each is separate is that each has a separate function, yet each is God and each is one.

- i) Let me explain that a little better with an illustration. If there's a group of judges deciding a court case, they may all be equal in power, but someone has to be the leader. If two men or two women slow dance together, someone has to be a leader and someone has to follow. That's why we pray to God the Father as He leads the "trinity". God the Son always existed, but Jesus has a separate role to pay the price for our sins and as human be able to relate to our weaknesses and help us draw on God's love so we can walk in His truth for our lives.
  - ii) In summary, the point here is we need to have the correct understanding of both God the Father's love for us as well as God the Son's love for us in order to walk in the "truth" that John describes in these verses. That doesn't mean only Christians are kind people. I've met some wonderful nonbelievers who are kind. However, to draw upon God's love for us as a source for the power to be kind to others is a much better way to live than to depend upon "willpower" to make a difference. In effect, that's John's point in these opening verses.
7. Verse 4: It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us. <sup>5</sup> And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. <sup>6</sup> And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.
- a) What fascinates me about Verse 4 is the word "some". If John wrote this epistle to a real lady, it means that some, but not all of her children (or extended family) believe in Jesus as being the truth. If it's written to a home-church as some scholars argue, then it simply means that some of the members of that church are the "real deal" and some are faking it.
  - b) Either way, it pains John to realize that not everyone who claims to be a Christian, is, as well as the fact that not all of our descendants "get it" no matter how hard we preach or no matter how hard we pray for them. Yes God works through people in order to preach the truth about Jesus to others, but God also never violates our free will. As I've preached in this epistle already, the Holy Spirit moves only upon those who freely choose to accept in the concept of Jesus as God, and to put it simply, no matter how hard we try, some get it and some don't.
  - c) Even with that stated, John focuses on the positive and not the negative. John's grateful for those associated with this "lady" who do get it. It brings John joy to see others join in, in believing Jesus is God. Not for financial gain or personal benefit, but it brings each of us a sense of joy to realize that preaching Jesus is not a waste of time, as some do get the truth and spread it to others. To state this another way, John gets joy from having a close personal relationship with God the Father and son, and John wants to share that joy with others who also enjoy that same type of relationship. I'm sharing all of this in order that we too, can increase the joy we have in our lives. One way to increase that joy is to spend time around others who also share in that same sense of joy. In other words, joy is a very contagious thing. If you're around people who are happy, doesn't that make you happy? It's a wonderful thing to be around positive people and that joy is contagious. That's what John's trying to express in these verses.
  - d) John then states the purpose of this short letter in Verse 5. He wrote it to encourage this "chosen lady" to keep on walking in God's truth. John states he's not writing to her any new commandment but the same one John's been living with all his life: To continue to draw upon God's power in order to share His love with others. John didn't write this to say in effect, "here's what you're doing right and here's what you're doing wrong", but to just remind the recipient that in order to continue receiving God's joy all we have to do is to keep on trusting in God the Father and Son to be a recipient of that love so we have His power to share that love with others. John wanted her to keep on loving others, as that is what God commands us to do and our joy increases by obeying that commandment.

- e) To state all of this another way, God's not saying to us, "Oh well, it's time to go be kind to others, I don't want to, but that's what I'm told I'm supposed to do as a Christian". That's a wrong attitude. The correct attitude is God gives us all the power we'll need so that we can show His love to others. It'd be like realizing, God loves me just because He does and there's nothing I did to earn that love. Being filled with His love gives us the power to go out and show that same type of unconditional love to others, without expecting in return for putting other's needs ahead of our own. We gather as believers to draw upon His love as a source of strength so we can make a difference for Him when we leave that gathering.
- i) By the way, that's the "truth" that John is emphasizing in this letter. Since we know that God loves us unconditionally, and we know Jesus died for our sins before we were ever aware of that love we repay God by showing His love to others as that is what He commands us to do. Not because we have to but only because we can't stand not doing it. It just becomes part of our new nature as Christians to want to be kind to others not based on willpower, but based on God's power working in us to show that kindness. That's the joy of living the Christian life in one thought.
- ii) That whole concept of drawing upon God's power to make a difference for Him is what John meant by "walk in His love" as stated in the last few verses.
8. Verse 7: Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. <sup>8</sup> Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. <sup>9</sup> Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. <sup>10</sup> If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. <sup>11</sup> Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work.
- a) I admit that as much as John loves to state how much God loves us and we can have joy in our lives by sharing His love with others, John also loves to warn about the dangers of all false teachers that exist. John even uses the dreaded word "antichrist" to refer to any and all false teachers. Remember we're not talking about "The" antichrist, which is a big topic in the book of Revelation, but talking about anyone and everyone who lives in opposition to the Gospel message.
- b) Let me explain it this way: People who don't believe Jesus is fully God and fully human then and now, don't walk around with signs that say, "I'm an antichrist, run away". Just as there are cult groups that knock on our doors today, even back then there were people who went from house to house literally trying to live off donations of Christians by them claiming they are true believers themselves. John's not saying we shouldn't be a witness to nonbelievers, but just that we shouldn't welcome them as being the same as believers.
- c) Let me explain that concept better. If someone comes to our door, claiming they're here to spread the good news about Jesus, but deny that Jesus is either fully God or fully human to this day, we may have a friendly conversation with them about Jesus, but we're not to treat them as equals in the truth of the Gospel. If we get obnoxious with them or yell in their face that you're in a cult, they're just going to walk away thinking you're the strange one. However, if we let them give their story and then show them in the bible how they are mistaken of their views about Jesus, that's how we be a good witness to them. I have learned that if you listen carefully to what such groups say, God will lead us to how it is we should respond and never be intimidated of their arguments sound impressive. It's not who's the best sounding speaker that wins the argument. The issue is always what's the truth about Jesus and that's what John wants us to be careful about.
- i) If we encounter someone coming to our door, who we don't know, be willing to take the time hear them speak, even repeat back their key phrases so that they do know they're heard correctly and after they've said what they want to say is when they're open to hear what it is we believe about Jesus and the "truth".

- d) The reason I'm getting into this whole discussion about dealing with cults claiming they are true Christians, is such people existed in John's day as well. You have to realize that in the first few centuries, there were no "church buildings". Christians only met in homes, as there were no other options. There were people who traveled from one place to another hoping to live off the generosity of others. Such people would claim to also be Christians as they spread their false beliefs that Jesus is something less than fully God or something less than fully and completely human through His death and resurrection.
- i) John's point is we shouldn't accept such people as equals just because they claim they are Christians. It may also help to realize that in John's day, "hotels" weren't places Christians wanted to stay as such places were essentially brothels. That's why whenever Christians traveled from place to place they would always look for homes of other Christians to stay when they traveled. John's saying just because a person claims to be a believer, we should hear out what they believe before giving them any sort of compensation. That's his point in these verses.
- e) What John is getting at is he wants us to have joy as we spread the gospel and spend time with other believers. If we're going to do that, we constantly have to be on the lookout for "false believers" versus the real thing. I should also discuss how we treat those who are of different churches than us. It's not like we should say, "I'm a lifelong Baptist and you're a Methodist (or whatever) so therefore, you're going to hell". There's the belief that Jesus is God and then there's "debate". Different denominations exist as we Christians debate on such issues of how people should be baptized or what type of songs we sing in church or the style of worship. Those are all debatable points among believers. The main difference between believers and nonbelievers that John is emphasizing here is whether or not some person denies the non-debatable issues about whether Jesus is fully God or fully human. That's where we as Christians have to draw the line.
- i) It's like the classic expression, "On essentials, unity, on nonessentials tolerance". Essentials would be believing the truth about God the Father and God the Son as well as believing the Bible is God's word. Nonessentials would include our view about when people should be baptized or if "tongues" are for today. Don't get me wrong, I have views on all debatable issues, but I don't reject people as not being a Christian if I disagree with their view on one of those issues. That's John's point as well. John wants us to have joy with fellow believers, and John wants us to know where to "draw the line" between what is acceptable and what isn't acceptable as a fellow believer in Jesus. That's why John's lecturing us about the danger of who is and who isn't a false teacher and what we're to do with such false teachers.
- f) To sum up these verses, John's saying that we shouldn't welcome people to be a member of our church unless they agree with the fundamentals of Christianity. They should be welcome to listen to us preach about Jesus just as we should be willing to listen to their views and not just yell in their face that they're wrong. However, there's a big difference between willing to talk to them about the truth of the bible versus welcoming them as an "equal" in our trust in God. That's what John's warning us about: Not treating someone as an equal in our belief in Jesus just because they claim to be a Christian until they say and act as someone who's fully trusting in Jesus as being fully God and fully human.
9. Verse 12: I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete.
- a) I said this is a short letter, and I meant it. John's one verse away from being done. He is saying here, he'd like to write more, but he'd rather talk face to face with the recipient of this letter than to write more. Remember what John gets "out" of being a Christian: The ability to have joy by spending time with other believers. That's the type of joy that God wants each of us to have. We get that joy by being around other believers so together we can praise God and draw upon His love so we can share that love with others around us.

10. Verse 13: The children of your chosen sister send their greetings.
- a) John's final line of this letter is to say that the sister of the recipient of this letter sends her greeting. Those that argue that the "chosen lady" is a code word for a home church will argue that John's referring to another home church. Those who say that this lady is a real person will say that John is sending his greeting from her literal sister. Personally I don't care either way. John's point is the joy we share with fellow Christians should be bigger than just our own little church-group. To care about all believers, should mean we care about other believers as well. If you know you're New Testament well, you'd know that Paul will usually end his letters with a long list of names of people who also want to share their greetings with them or Paul would give names of people he's praying for among that group Paul's writing to. My point is being a Christian means we care for the life of other believers and want to see other believers be well and grow in their faith. That's why John ends this little letter with a greeting from another Christian as if to say I am not the only one that wants you to flourish in God's truth. Other believers also want you to grow in the truth of His love and they send their greeting as well.
  - b) With that said, time to jump into 3rd John as it's also short and shares the same themes.
11. Third John, Verse 1: The elder, To my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth.
- a) As we start 3rd John, realize it's just as short as Second John, and very similar in theme. While 2nd John was written to an unnamed lady that John said walked in God's truth, in 3rd John we see a letter written to a named person who is also walking in God's truth.
  - b) Realize John wrote these two letters during a time of persecution of the Christian church. The name Gaius was a very common name. I say this because if John was worried about his letters being caught in the wrong hands, the reader wouldn't know who the elect lady was in 2nd John and the name Gaius was so popular at that time, there's no one to arrest.
  - c) Whoever this Gaius was, he was a church "elder" (think leader) and John commended him for walking in the truth. As I've beaten to death by now, the idea of the "truth" is that one has been living for years with basic truth's of the gospel message.
  - d) Before I move on, let me talk about the "once saved, always saved" debate as opposed to us living a lifetime believing in God's truth. I've always argued that if one has committed their lives to serving Jesus, they can't lose that salvation. However, proof of that salvation is about "putting our time and our income where our mouth is". Living out the rest of our life based on what we believe is proof that we can be trusted to make a difference for God based on that faith. My point is whoever this Gaius is, falls in that "camp".
12. Verse 2: 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. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.
- a) Notice one of the first things John tells this person is that he "enjoys good health and all is going well with him" as this man continues to use his life for Jesus. It's not like, "Hey I'm well aware a lot of Christians are getting killed for their faith and as you will be picked on soon enough, may you die as a good martyr!" Instead, it's a nice greeting to live long as you continue to use your life to be a church leader (elder) and continue to live in His truth as you make a difference for Him. The issue for John isn't so much the particulars of what God's called him or us to do, it is that we use our lives to make a difference for Him by us "walking in the truth" of the fundamentals of the Gospel message.
  - b) Now notice in Verse 4 that John refers to Gaius as one of his "children". I don't think John is being literal. Again, remember that John was probably in his 90's when he wrote this. I think as being one of the original disciples, he sees all believers living at that time as one of his "children" in the sense of believers coming to faith after John's time. It may also be a case where John oversaw the churches of that region and Gaius was a good church elder.

- c) Finally notice John's obsession with the word "truth". He uses it three times within these three verses. It's almost as if he's thinking, I don't particular care what is your style as a church leader or what God's called you to do within that church. What matters the most is the fact you're trusting in the truth of the Gospel message in whatever God's called you to do to make a difference for Him.
- d) Let me pause and explain how this applies to us: I suppose I'm happy whoever this Gaius was, he's living in the truth of the Gospel message. How does apply to me? I assume that whoever is reading this study already believes in Gospel truth, so what do I do next? That is one of my favorite questions in life, so to me that's a "softball" question: First, always be willing to pray about how God can use you. I'm convinced one prayer He can't stand not to answer is how we can use our lives to make a difference for Him. The answer won't be a big sign in the sky saying "go this way", but often things will happen if we're willing to make a commitment for Him as He leads us down a path He wants us to go. For example I'm currently dealing with some major changes at work, as the office I've been in for years is about to close for issues out of my control. My point is it's a waste of time to complain about things out of our control, but instead we're to see them as opportunities for Him to guide us as He desires.
- i) As I also love to state, what is it you love to do anyway even if you don't get paid for it? The key is to find ways to do things one is passionate about and use those gifts to make a difference for Jesus. It could be joining another ministry or starting one's one based on something you just love to do. Did I set out to begin a writing ministry? Of course not. I spent many years writing reports for work, and I know I have a talent for writing. By a wonderful set of "coincidences" God make it very obvious to me this is what He wants me to do and I've now been at it for years.
- ii) My point is if we are walking in God's truth in that we do believe the fundamental issues of the bible, pray about how God can use our lives for His glory.
- iii) What if you say, "my life is already full, dealing with all sorts of issues". Ask God is that all He wants you to deal with at this time? Sometimes the way God makes us available for Him is to clear up our calendar so we can be used for Him. I see how that's happening in my life for the moment and I have to continue to trust in Him even though I'm not sure where my "future" is going from here.
- iv) What if my situation is the opposite? What if I'm already involved in a ministry I do love and I'm plugging away it? Great. Ask God do you want me to continue to do what I'm doing? If God makes it obvious and makes it "fruitful" as one can see the results of one's work, stick to what He's called you to do. It'll be obvious over time what God wants you to do if we're willing to commit our time to Him.
- e) OK, now that I've explained what we're to do with God's truth, time to get back to Gaius:
13. Verse 5: Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you. <sup>6</sup> They have told the church about your love. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. <sup>7</sup> It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. <sup>8</sup> We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth.
- a) Speaking of using our lives to make a difference for Jesus, notice how John commends the recipient of this letter as he's helping fellow Christians "who are strangers to you". To use this ministry as an example again, I personally know very few people personally who are reading these studies, yet I'm doing it because I believe God's word is the truth and it gets me to want to use my time to help people grow closer to Jesus. By the way, never let that stop you from contacting me, as I love to hear from fellow believers so we too can have a time of joy together in our common faith in Him.
- b) The good news for Gaius is John's aware of his good work and commending him for it.

- c) I've lived long enough now to know that if you're making a difference for God, we don't have to go around bragging about it, word of good behavior spreads on its own. Let's be honest, isn't it wonderful to be around people full of joy? Isn't it contagious? If Gaius is using his life to be helpful to others by spreading the Gospel truth, the joy of using our time for His glory has a way of spreading all by itself. The reason Jesus wants us to show love to others including strangers is that's the best way for the Gospel to spread. Yes of course we have to explain the Gospel fundamentals, but to use a classic line, "People don't care what you know, until they know that you care". The point as it ties back to 3rd John is that whoever Gaius was, he had developed a reputation for caring about others and got to a point where such "strangers" were even going out sharing the gospel with others.
  - i) Let me ask a related question: What if you say my life is busy enough as it is. Why should I use my time to make a difference for Jesus? The question comes down to the issue of do you believe God's truth or not? Do you believe you're going to live for eternity in heaven and be rewarded based on how we've used the time we got to make a difference for Jesus? If that's the case, again, pray to God about how we are to use our time. If God makes it obvious to continue doing whatever you are doing at the present moment and you have peace about it, continue. However we should also be open to do whatever it is God wants us to do and be willing to use whatever talents we have to make a difference for Him. That's how we live in the "truth" of the Gospel John is preaching.
- d) That little speech leads me back to Gaius. He was using his life to build the faith in others around him. Which leads to John's next point. John commended Gaius for not taking any help from "pagans". That word simply means nonbelievers. Many years ago, I remember a pastor talking about non-Christian charity causes. He said something I never forget. He said, Christians should focus on Christian causes and let non-believers focus on charities for non-Christian causes. There are some wonderful charities out there for non-believers. However, if we're called to make a difference for Jesus, we need to stick to what God calls us to do and let "others" worry about other causes. No one Christian can do it all. We do what we're called to do and let others do what God called them to do. As I like to joke, I have never met a Christian who said, "My ministry is take out the trash". My point is we all have to do what's necessary as well as whatever we believe God's called us to do.
- e) John makes one final point about Gaius here. He commends him for showing hospitality to strangers. I realize some Christians are better at this than others. When my wife hires someone to say help around the house, she never hesitates to invite them to a meal. I've also read of some people in the ministry who regularly invite strangers to their house. Of course we have to be careful about who is trustworthy. This comes back to the principal of "People don't care what you know until they know that you care". One way we show we care is to be hospital to strangers as John states in this point in the letter.

14. Verse 9: I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. <sup>10</sup> So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. 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.

- a) At this point in the letter, John switches topics. He's no longer commended Gaius for the good that he's doing, but John is warning him about a man named Diotrephes. To put it simply, this is the kind of person who's "it's all about me". As opposed to using our lives to make a difference for others, John's warning about the type of person who likes to use his time to spread gossip about others. To state the obvious, nobody is perfect and we all have our flaws. If there is an issue we have with a fellow believer, we need to go tell them ourselves as opposed to spreading stories about them to others. I'm convinced the greatest or let me say the most common sin I've seen in Christian churches is gossip. While theft or murders are greater sins, gossip is the most common way damage is done in life.

- b) I heard John MacArthur talk about how this commonly plays out in church life. You'll get a young pastor who's not criticized for his preaching style or anything he's done, but there will be someone in power who's threatened by a newcomer and then will start a rumor or bully the young pastor into leaving. Unfortunately this has played out often in history.
    - i) OK, that's tragic, what does it have to do with me? Even as lay Christians we have to be aware that leaders exist in the church that are easily threatened by anyone they see as a challenge to that leadership. I recall many years ago, learning about a pastor who was the head of the church I was involved with at that time, being told to leave, literally because he was kicking out all the other pastors who he saw as a threat to him. Thankfully the board of elders recognized the problem and to make a long story short, that was that. The point for us is if we see a bunch of leaders at our church quitting, be aware the problem may not be those who are quitting.
    - ii) That in effect is John's point in these last few verses. They are a model of how it is Christians should be aware as we gather together and allow others to lead over us.
  - c) The good news is that's it for the bad news. Next we'll read of a positive church leader.
15. 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. <sup>12</sup> Demetrius is well spoken of by everyone--and even by the truth itself. We also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true.
- a) It's almost as if John wanted to show the contradiction between those in church leadership who are a problem with those in church leadership who are the right people to put there. The issue is still God's truth. A big part of the truth is having the right leaders within any particular church is having the leaders not only understand the basics of believing in the Gospel message, but having the proper attitude of caring about other's needs and issues and not expecting anything in return. The "bad dude" from the previous paragraph was all about himself and putting himself above the needs of others. The "good dude" here in these verses had a reputation for trusting in God's truth. He then used his life to be a good witness for Jesus, which is what the church demands of all of us.
  - b) Let me explain this issue another way. A short time from now, you're probably going to forget the name Gaius as being the "bad guy" and Demetrius (Verse 12) as being the good guy in church leadership. What is important is that we have church leaders who care for the members and put the interest of its members as priority over their own needs. When we are just members of that church, we show the same toward of love towards others in that church as well as the leaders. In other words people will know we are Christians by our love for one another, which is a key component of the "truth" that John's saying here.
  - c) All of that leads me perfectly back to Verse 11. The instructions in that verse are to imitate what is "good" and not "evil". Demetrius is listed as an example of the "good". What all this means is when we get together as Christians, we should have the attitude of putting the needs of others ahead of our own. It applies to all Christians, not just those on say the paid staff. In other words, the issue isn't Demetrius or Gaius or even our church leaders. It is you and me. Remember my favorite expression, "I believe in Jesus, now what? The now what is to use our lives to make a difference for Jesus as that is what He commands us to do as His followers: To use our time and our resources to make a difference for the kingdom, which is what the Great Commission is in effect all about. I should also state for the newcomer's the Great Commission is for Christians to go out into the world and make disciples of all nations. That doesn't mean we're all to quit our jobs and go be full time professional missionaries. It means we're all called to be a witness for Jesus where we are or where God leads us. In summary because we know God's truth, we use that truth to make a difference for Him in the world we live in. That's what God calls us to do in a few quick thoughts.
  - d) The other good news is we only have two verses left to cover in these two books.

16. Verse 13: I have much to write you, but I do not want to do so with pen and ink. <sup>14</sup> I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. Peace to you. The friends here send their greetings. Greet the friends there by name.
- a) You may recall that 2nd John also ended with a desire for John to stop writing as he'd like to see the recipient of that letter in person. This letter ends the same way. That's another reason why I wanted to combine the study of these two letters as they're similar that way.
  - b) OK John, time for another so what? Are all of us reading this study going to get together some day? Yes, but that day won't be in this lifetime and I won't be the one leading it. It will be Jesus teaching us. As I've stated many times in these studies, I'm convinced that heaven won't be boring, but that we spend lots of time intermingling with believers and sharing about our lives together. My point is I enjoy spending time with Christians as I learn about their lives and how they've used them to make a difference for Jesus.
    - i) I state that here, as I believe that's John's point here at the end of 3rd John as well as at the end of Second John. John's attitude was essentially, "Why should I keep on writing when we can meet face to face?" Well since we all can't get together in this lifetime unless you take the time to e-mail me, which I enjoy reading, I will look forward to the day when we can meet in heaven and share how we've used all of our lives for His glory. So as John sends his greeting to Gaius from mutual friends they had in common, let me end this study with a greeting from the fellow believers around me to you and yours. Looking forward to meeting all of you one day in heaven so we can have joy together as we share our love in God's truth.
    - ii) In the meantime, time to end this study and close in prayer.
17. Father, first we thank You that You've chosen us to spend eternity with You. As we all know by now, it's not something we've earned, but it's something You did, just because You love us. Help us to take that love and share it with others around us, not expecting anything in return. Help us to be great witnesses for You and fill us with Your Spirit so that together we'll make a difference for You and Your Kingdom. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.
18. On the next page is my bibliography for 1st, 2nd and 3rd John.

## Supplement: Bibliography

"If I have seen further, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants." (Isaac Newton)

Without prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, all these commentaries are useless. My prayer as I prepare these lessons was for God to show me the things He wanted me to learn, and second, the lessons He wanted me to pass on in my writings. I have quoted many sources throughout these lessons. If any of these writers appeal to you, I invite you to read or listen to them further via the places listed below. I have also quoted other sources not listed, and those names are usually listed in the lessons. These other authors were usually quoted from the materials listed below and taken from those sources.

First and foremost, the greatest commentary on the bible is the bible itself. Here are the bible versions I use in preparation of my lessons. I mostly quote The New International Version (NIV), Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society; The New King Deuteronomy Version (NKJV), Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.; The King Deuteronomy Version (KJV) (no copyright on that version); the English Standard Version. (ESV). The copyright information for the ESV is in point #5 below. The Living Bible (TLB) Copyright © 1971, 1986 by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, IL 60189; "The Message" copyright © 1993 by Eugene H. Peterson. All rights reserved. All the bible text used in these lessons (except the ESV) is taken from Parsons Software: Electronic Edition STEP Files Copyright © 1999, Parsons Technology, Inc., all rights reserved and from Zondervan Reference Software (32-bit edition) Version 2.6, Copyright © 1989-1998 The Zondervan Corporation.

Here are the commentaries I have referenced over these lessons. The specific commentaries on the books of 1st, 2nd and 3rd John are listed first, and then bible-wide commentaries. They're listed in alphabetical order by author. The reference to audio commentary means the information was gathered via the Internet in MP3® Format, unless otherwise stated:

1. Commentary on 1st, 2nd and 3rd John by Jon Courson. It is in book form from Harvest House Publishing. It is also available in MP3® format at <http://www.joncourson.com/>.
2. Commentary on 1st, 2nd and 3rd John by Bob Davis. They are available for free in MP3® format at <http://northcountrychapel.com/studies/>.
3. Commentary on 1st, 2nd and 3rd John by David Guzik. It is available for free in audio and text format. The web address is [http://www.enduringword.com/library\\_commentaries.htm](http://www.enduringword.com/library_commentaries.htm) Mr. Davis quotes a lot of famous authors from the 19th and 20th Century on these books and I've used some of those quotes.
4. Commentary on 1st, 2nd and 3rd by Chuck Missler, available at K-House Ministries 1-800-KHOUSE1. The web address is <http://www.khouse.org>.
5. Commentary on 1st, 2nd and 3rd John by John MacArthur. They are available for free in MP3® format at <http://www.gty.org/resources/sermons> and then click on those particular books.
6. The English Standard Version Study Bible; Copyright (2005-2009) The Standard Bible Society. The version itself is copyrighted 2008 by Crossway Bibles, a publication of "Good News Publishers".
7. The Expositor's Bible Encyclopedia, Zondervan Publications, (via CD-ROM 1998 release). This is a multi-volume encyclopedia with notes on every bible verse. It is available through Zondervan. Paperback books are published on individual Bible books from this same source. The actual text that is copied and pasted is taken from this source.
8. The Life Application Bible, Zondervan Publishing: [www.zondervanbibles.com/0310919770.htm](http://www.zondervanbibles.com/0310919770.htm).
9. The MacArthur Study Bible with commentary by John MacArthur Nelson Bibles (1997) ISBN: 0849912229.
10. I also refer sometimes to J.P. Moreland apologetic ministry which is at [www.jpmoreland.com](http://www.jpmoreland.com) and Greg Koukl's apologetic ministry, which is Stand to Reason at [www.str.org](http://www.str.org)
11. My apology if I have quoted someone else and I have forgotten to include them here.