

February 12, 2017

“Gaius”

3 John 1-4

1 This letter is from John, the elder.

I am writing to Gaius, my dear friend, whom I love in the truth.

2 Dear friend, I hope all is well with you and that you are as healthy in body as you are strong in spirit. 3 Some of the traveling teachers recently returned and made me very happy by telling me about your faithfulness and that you are living according to the truth.

4 I could have no greater joy than to hear that my children are following the truth.

This letter tells us who it is from; it is from John the apostle, the elder. Elder means elderly, older, senior or it could mean pastor ... or he could be an old pastor. Therefore, he writes from a position of authority and respect which he holds in the church.

He is writing to his dear friend, a man with a common Roman name, Gaius. This is one of the few letters in the New Testament that is addressed to an individual Christian. When John says he loves Gaius in the truth, he means “whom I truly love.”

Do you know another believer in Christ as a dear friend whom you truly love? You need someone like that in your life. Someone you can be transparent with; someone who loves you enough to tell you the truth. Wouldn't it be wonderful if not just with one person, but if we all were able to be that open and honest with one another? Wouldn't it be great if we were able to move beyond shallow relationships to really know and love one another? You may be thinking, “No that wouldn't be wonderful at all.”

We actually work very hard at protecting ourselves from anyone really knowing and hurting us. Like an iceberg we only see what is above the water line – the outward person. And we judge others as good or bad by their outward behavior. But below the surface we don't know one another, not really. And the truth is, if you could see even just a little below the surface you would discover that we are all hurting and we are all a mess. We all have things we don't want others to know or see in us. Everyone is a mess, even Christians. We are not in church because we are perfect, we are here because we are a mess and need Christ. And if we could only remember that, perhaps we would react differently to the outward behavior of one another and minister instead to the hurt below the surface. That would be to love someone in the truth.

In verse 2 John says something quite amazing to his dear friend. Let me read **verse 2** again.

Dear friend, I hope [the Greek word used here implies prayer and commonly means to pray when used in the New Testament; thought it is also used to express a strong and earnest desire for anything. So John's hope and prayer and earnest desire for Gaius is that] all is well with you and that you are as healthy in body as you are strong in spirit.

Now that is amazing to me. He prays that his physical body would be as healthy and

strong as his spirit or his spiritual life. He is saying, "May it be as well with your body as it is well with your soul." We pray and should pray for the health of others. Certainly God is concerned for both body and soul.

Would you want someone to pray that your physical health was as good as your spiritual health? Hmm, that's something you need to ponder a bit isn't it? How healthy or unhealthy would your body be if compared with your spiritual health?

We live in a society where physical fitness is honored. Athletes are heroes. Movie Stars pay large amounts of money for personal trainers. Being physically fit is something we all talk about and hate that we have to work so hard at to achieve.

We are always reading the newest book on diet and fitness, or trying the latest diet craze. There are even companies that will send food already made to your home with the correct portions for dieting. That's incredible and so is the portion they give you. Like the person who said, "I don't mean to brag, but I finished my 14-day diet food in 3 hours and 20 minutes."

Then we have these fitness bands, Ifit or Fitbit or fit apps for our phones. It keeps track of how many steps you take each day. Of course, people have learned to cheat by just waving their hand a lot while sitting still watching TV. We join gyms or purchase the latest fitness equipment or gadget so we can work out at home. We run and bike, there are even baby strollers made for juggling moms and dads.

With physical fitness the evidence is clear. You lose weight. You tone your muscles. Your entire appearance changes. Well, when we become spiritually fit, the difference will show as well. It will show in the way we interact with others. It will show in how we handle our affairs. It will show in how we manage our time. Something about us will be different.

Even in the time of the New Testament, people took serious consideration to physical fitness. Paul used examples of running races and other athletic events to describe the *Spiritual life*. But to have our *spiritual life* set the standard for our physical fitness? What a new concept! Yet John was able to say these extraordinary words about Gaius; that he prays Gaius' body would be as healthy as his soul was healthy. Wouldn't that be wonderful for that to be said about us?

In **verse 3** John tells us what was different about Gaius and the reason for his confidence in Gaius' spiritual progress.

Some of the traveling teachers recently returned and made me very happy by telling me about your faithfulness and that you are living according to the truth.

As I've been pointing out in my last few sermons, there were a number of false teachers, preachers, and prophets spreading falsehoods at the time when John and Peter were writing. John and the other apostles were concerned that these false

teaching would influence the church. Because false teachers were infiltrating the churches, strong believers who taught the truth were very important. And so the traveling teachers that John mentions were going from church to church to promote the truth the apostles were teaching as opposed to these false teachings.

Finding good accommodations was very difficult for travelers who had no friends in the area. Inns were usually not very good places to stay. These traveling teachers were helped on their way by people like Gaius who welcomed them to stay at his house and fed them. Gaius had been willing to open his home and *take care of the traveling teachers who [were] passing through* even when they were *strangers* to him.

These teachers were reporting to John and John was blessed by what he was hearing about Gaius. The confidence John had that Gaius was strong in spirit came from what the teachers said about him. They mentioned his faithfulness, his loving friendship (mentioned in v6)

3 John 6a

They have told the church here of your loving friendship.

And summed it up with this, Gaius was: *living according to the truth*.

John's favorite topics were, "truth and love".

There are two eternal things that God has committed to the trust of the church: truth and love. Truth is eternal. Truth is unmovable, unalterable, and needs not to be defended. Truth only needs to be proclaimed and lived! Love is also eternal. Love is expendable, but never exhaustible. Love never fails in any test, nor withers with age.

Truth declares, "This is the way, walk ye in it." Love replies, "I will." Truth requires a standard. Love submits to it. Jesus told his disciples. "If ye love me, keep my commandments." He who declared, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," was revealing to them that true love requires commitment to a covenant, and commitment is expressed through a lifestyle.

- Mark McCool

Our spirits or spiritual life is healthy when we are faithful to live according to the truth God has revealed to us which Jesus summed up like this: love God and love your neighbor.

We cannot fulfill the guidelines of God's Word out of the motive of obligation alone. The true motive that causes our joy to be full in Christ is through our love for Him. We do not live according to God's word because we 'have to.' We live holy because He is holy, and because we love Him we desire to identify with His likeness! This is the reason believers take on the name of Jesus Christ, Christian means little Christs pursuing Christlikeness.

The news that Gaius was faithfully living according to the truth of Christ and the teachings of Christ which was evident by his love for God and others was the cause for John to say in v4:

I could have no greater joy than to hear that my children are following the truth.

By, "*my children*" John means those under his pastoral care and those, included Gaius perhaps, who he had led to faith in Christ. And nothing gave him or any other pastor more joy than to help other people know the truth and then see them living it.

Be like Gaius, faithful, loving, living by the truth of God's word. May people say of you, I wish my body was as strong as their spirit. Amen!