

To Walk in Truth: Living a life of Integrity

Who do you trust... and why? Who do you trust with your money?

Your well-being? Your secrets? Who do you trust for help?

In ancient times, scales were used to measure goods. It was the tool of business though we now use scales as symbols for justice and law. Its function was simple: if one wants to buy 2 pounds of spice, the merchant will place a 2 pound weight on one side and add spice to the other until the scales balance. You'll get 2 pounds of spice..... assuming that really was a 2 pound weight the merchant used.

It did happen that certain merchants would use false scales, meaning they used lighter weights than what they claimed. Over time people would figure out who were the honest merchants and who were not; who were fair in their dealings and who were scamming customers for more profit. I'm sure that back then, one's reputation was key to a successful and growing business. And the only way of gaining a good reputation was through popular and consistent opinion. Meaning, a good word of mouth.

Having a good reputation meant that people were more willing to do business with a merchant because they could trust him or her. They can trust the merchant because they had fair dealings before or the merchant is known for fairness. They knew that if they gave money for 2 pounds of spice, then they can expect 2 pounds of spice. Back then, you could not assume that the governing law will protect you. Therefore you had to go by a person's reputation. They had

to discern whether or not a merchant had what we call integrity.

Integrity is about following well one's morals and ethical principles. There is a direct correlation between a person's actions and what they say. What a person says and does, are not in tension, but they fit together. There are no discrepancies or holes, but unity. So the person is said to have integrity. It is the opposite of being dishonest, hypocritical, or deceitful.

Listen to what Proverbs has to say about integrity:

[Prov 11:1-3

*The LORD detests dishonest scales,
but accurate weights find favor with him.*

*When pride comes, then comes disgrace,
but with humility comes wisdom.*

*The integrity of the upright guides them,
but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity.]¹*

[Discussion: who comes to mind when you think of "A [man or woman] of integrity"? Why?]

Integrity goes beyond the just realm of business, but applies to every person who has responsibilities. If you're a parent, it means modelling the kind of behaviour that you want your children to have. If you're married it means upholding the vows you made to your spouse. If you're a student, it means doing your own work and not plagiarizing. If you're a friend, it means guarding secrets and sticking by during hard times. If you're a Christian, it means living a life that is consistent with Christ.

¹ "UNO All Biblical references are taken from the New International Version."

Whoa, you might be thinking... is that even possible? Jesus Christ is GOD and we're just...humans. That's true. But what also is true is that we are made in God's image and we are given the Holy Spirit to empower us. So it is possible, but it's not going to happen all at once. I'm sure you know people who have "gone to church" all their lives but you wonder what bible they've been reading because their actions don't reflect the heart or character of GOD. That's why we have discipleship, we learn what it means to follow Christ. It takes study, learning, practice and discipline. And over time, usually a life-time, lo and behold... we are transformed into His likeness because we are allowing the Holy Spirit to work in us, changing us from the inside out.

[Here's a question for all of us: Do I have integrity when it comes to being a Christ-follower?]

And you may be asking me..... what on earth does this have to do with 3 John? Bear with me for bit...

Last Sunday we took a look at 2 John and what it means to love one another. We learned that to love is an act of giving and receiving within community. To love is not only a command, but also an imitation of what God has done for us, in the person of Jesus Christ.

Today we're looking at 3 John, a letter written by the same person who wrote 2 John, but it is different with respect to purpose and content. I was struck not only by how short it is, but also what the author has to say about certain people in the early church.

Unlike 2 John, 3 John was not a circulatory letter, but personal and private, making it the only one of its kind in the New Testament.² It is addressed to a specific person, Gaius, whose name was Roman and means “rejoicing.”³ It names two other people: Diotrephes and Demetrius whom we will discuss later on.

But who was Gaius? What we know is that he was a follower of Christ and was loved by the Elder. The Elder actually addressed him as “agapato” or “beloved” numerous times (In the NIV we read “friend”), He referred to him as one of his children, meaning that it was likely that he brought him to Christ.⁴ The Elder was overjoyed because he received news from people that Gaius was “walking in truth” - it meant that he was living out what he believed.⁵

Like how we learned last week that love was more than a feeling, but also action. So too is truth. One does not just believe in truth, but walks in it. You act out truth by living ethically. Gaius was a person who lived out his convictions by acting on it. This was evident by how he offered hospitality to missionaries, even strangers.⁶ His actions corresponded to what he believed about being a Christ-follower and fellow co-worker; in other words Gaius had integrity.

His “walking in the truth” compelled people to speak well of him to the Elder. They witnessed Gaius in action and gave good testimony of him. They were giving favourable reviews. Kind of like those restaurant reviews we see on the internet. Here was a man, who followed Christ in deeds by providing hospitality to

² Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians*, 585.

³ Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 51:345.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 348.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 588.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 588.

Christian missionaries. He was faithful in what he was doing, and he was encouraged to keep doing it. His faithfulness, his actions, meant he was also part-taking in the work of the Kingdom. Way to go, Gaius!

In contrast, the Elder mentioned Diotrephes who placed himself first, did not acknowledge their authority, spread false charges, and did not welcome the friends.⁷ It sounded like Diotrephes was completely the opposite of Gaius and was causing problems. Instead of welcoming the missionaries himself, he was casting out the people who did. The Elder was coming to personally deal with this apparent trouble-maker. Did he write about Diotrephes to warn Gaius? To compare? Perhaps a bit of both. In any case, Diotrephes had developed quite the reputation, but not as one “walking in the truth” but as one who could not be trusted to be Christ-like.

Demetrius, was likely the person delivering this letter and in need of accommodations. He had the testimony (that is, the recommendation) of three witnesses: the Elder, the truth in his own life, and “everyone” meaning the local house church.⁸ Notice the number of witnesses and the weight of that witness. It is substantial. And it's not just what other people say about him, but the truth evident in his life. This could be in reference to his conversion, an internal change that Demetrius himself could attest to.

Near the end of the letter, the Elder exhorted Gaius to imitate what is good and not evil. It's implied that hospitality for those doing God's work is good.

7 Ibid., 588.

8 Ibid., 594.

Refusing hospitality to them is evil. Gaius was doing good work, and by doing so imitates God.

So what's the point of the letter? First, the Elder commended Gaius on his hospitality to traveling teachers, even strangers. He encouraged Gaius to continue. Second, it could even be a letter of recommendation for traveling missionaries that were rejected by Diotrephes.⁹ Third, in some ways it was a letter that highlighted a problem with a church leader who was not exhibiting Christ-likeness.

As a while, I believe that 3 John demonstrates the connection between integrity and trust. Without integrity, there can be no trust.. or it has to be earned. If Gaius did not exhibit consistent godly behaviour, if people gave poor accounts of his actions, then the Elder would have little reason to send Demetrius to him.

If you ever read accounts of early church saints, the picture is usually quite remarkable. Saints were chosen not by religious leaders, but by public acclaim. Saints were women and men who lived with remarkable integrity and humility, to the point where they won everyone's respect and trust. Many were monks and nuns who wanted to live a simple life devoted to God, but their deeds caught people's attention. Some were elevated in the Church against their wishes... I think that won people's hearts even more.

But should we be concerned about what people think of us? Shouldn't God's opinion matter the most? If we don't live lives of integrity, we give no reason for

⁹ Ibid.

people to trust us. If we are not trusted, then we won't be heard. Without integrity, our testimony of God, of who the Father really is, becomes mere noise.

In Paul's letter to Titus 2:6-8

Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us. (NIV)

During my stay in the Holy Land, I visited the city of Hebron with a few volunteers. Hebron is located south of Jerusalem and is within the Occupied Territories. Hebron is known for the traditional burial site of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs (Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebecca, Jacob and Leah). It is also known for intense conflict because the presence of Israeli Settlers in a Palestinian city. I was introduced to an organization called Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT). Their mission is to offer non-violent alternatives to war and lethal conflict. CPT's main job in Hebron is to walk with Palestinian children to and from school so as to provide protection from aggressive Settlers. Their work in Hebron has gained them respect and trust from the local Palestinians. Though what I learned about the occupation there was disturbing, hearing about CPT was deeply encouraging and refreshing. Here were Christians who lived out their call to non-violence, by providing protection and international presence to those oppressed. I was deeply moved and challenged by their actions because they were risking their own lives for the sake of others. I'm not sure if I could do the same. But I, among many others, can testify to their integrity and their "walking in the truth."

So what can we say about ourselves, here and now? I think by and large,

we are trying to live life the best we know how. It is not always easy and the choices are not always clear. But it is in the little decisions we make, day by day, that will lead us to or away from being a people with integrity, a people whom others can trust. If we are going to be a missional church, we have to strive for integrity, for honesty and humility.

And as the Elder warned Gaius about Diotrephes, we too need to be discerning about who we trust. But we also need to think about by which standards do we judge a person for their character. How do we weigh people's words and actions? Are their actions consistent with what they say or believe? Is the fruit they are producing consistent with who they say they are?

In the same manner, we ought to weigh ourselves and examine our inner lives. Am I consistent with my actions and my beliefs? Do I ask myself what do I believe about such and such? Am I one whom others would call trustworthy and honest?

To wrap up 2nd and 3rd John – we see that the early church had problems and a genuine concern for right-thinking and right-practice. These letters are important material to see how problems could be dealt with.¹⁰ But they're also a reminder that we stand in a long line of Church history and we're still not perfect, but we are being perfected. For we follow a God who loves us and in that love we can trust Him and what He is doing. He holds the scales and we are weighed with compassion and love. Brothers and Sisters, let us come to Him with all who we are and be wholly His.

¹⁰ Ibid., 595.