

Walking In Truth

by Ron R. Ritchie

The Scriptures were given to us to show us God's heart, to show us how he intends us to live, and how he intends to live through us when we are obedient. The Scriptures act like a mirror for us. They show us God's character. When we are reflecting on him, we see where we are right and where we are wrong. It is very necessary that we get a true image of God and ourself. That is what God does for us when we look into his mirror. He does not allow us to live a life in which we create an image of our own, one which is never challenged. He does not allow us to live a life in which others create an image for us, one which goes unchecked.

Dave Roper and I have both just slipped quietly into our forty-first year. There were no bands, no parades - it just happened. Two weeks ago I asked him, "Dave, how are you feeling?" He said, "I feel like I'm twenty-three!" I replied, "I feel the same, Dave. But why is it that we breathe so heavily after football games now? Why is it that after a short run up a flight of stairs we have to sit down"? What is happening to our bodies? "

My image of myself is at about the age of twenty-three or twenty-four. I keep confirming that image by looking at old pictures of myself taken after I had finished my Charles Atlas course, standing on the beach in Morocco, flexing those muscles! It's a great image only it's starting to fade. Even the pictures are starting to fade! I thought about sending them out to be re-colored - anything to bring back that image! The image I have of myself is one without the broken nose. And the chest is high on my frame instead of down around my belt where I can watch it all day! I struggle with the fact that something is going away. I'm decaying. I seem to be running down in my physical being. Every once in a while, because reality demands it, I have to face a full-length mirror. And a full-length mirror will not lie about what I am physically. No matter what I really want to believe, it is there. What it is reflecting is reality I have to face that, because that is part of life.

The Scriptures were given to us to reflect the very life of Christ in our lives. And if we really love Jesus Christ, then we do not fear the mirror of the Scriptures. We do not seek to avoid it, or to skirt it in any way, but we continually look into it so that we are able to see reality as it is intended to be seen.

3 John is a mirror in which God allows us to reflect upon the lives of four men. Three of them lived in God's power and in his truth, one in his own power- the way he wanted to live. These four men lived in the first century, though they could have lived in any century, in any congregation, at any given time.

John, writing near the end of the first century, A.D. 85 or 90, is addressing second- or third- generation Christians. These Christians were living in and around Ephesus, in what today is western Turkey. Many of them had experienced persecution. Some had probably lost a mother or father, or grandparents, during the persecutions of Nero from A.D. 63 through 68. Other persecutions kept coming, and might have discouraged some of them to such a degree that, by the time John wrote, some of their hearts had grown cold. In Revelation 2, John had to write to his own church at Ephesus and say, "You have lost your first love." That is, "You have a great church but you forgot who the Lover is. The honeymoon is over, as far as I can determine. You are so active, so available to do "Christlike" things, but without Christ. You are in a routine, you have a program, but you forgot your first love. I want to bring you back to reality."

This is the same John who, some sixty years after the resurrection, was sharing his heart with men and women of the first century by writing several other books and letters. One is the gospel of John, written to prove that Jesus is Messiah. He wrote 1 and 2 John to show that Jesus came in the flesh, and to warn about false prophets. Here in 3 John he shares how to walk in truth. And in the book of Revelation he prepares us to understand that Christ is coming back, and what we are to expect. Let's read the first 4 verses of 3 John:

No Greater Joy 1-4

The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth. Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers. For I was very glad when brethren came and bore witness to your truth, that is, how you are walking in truth. I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.

The first life we want to reflect upon is that of "the elder." This is a term of affection - "aging one"- the last apostle. It does not imply that he was the elder of a particular church; he was an elder to many churches. As an apostle he had the right to deal with spiritual truth in any given church which existed at that time. So, "the aged one" writes.

As I thought through who John is in this passage, I could not help but think back to who he was. I was encouraged with this young man who, some sixty years before, had met Jesus Christ on the Sea of Galilee. He had been fishing with his brother James, and Jesus. came along and said, "Follow me." And he went and followed Jesus Christ. This same John left his middle-class family of good parents and hired servants. They had a religious background, and understood who John the Baptist was. After he had become a follower of Christ, he was chosen to be a disciple, one of the twelve Then he was brought into the inner circle around Jesus (consisting of Peter, James, and John) while yet a young man. I don't know how Jesus actually put it, but I can see him watching these two brothers and saying with a chuckle, "James and John, I want to give you a nickname: I want to call you 'sons of thunder'. You are loud, noisy brothers, but you're harmless, and I love you. Still, I'm going to set you into a process of becoming. I'm going to start to work in your lives, and we're going to see about this thunder. We're going to see about all this noise."

For awhile it must have looked almost hopeless. For it was John who went to Jesus and said, "Jesus, we saw a man casting out demons in your name, and I told him to stop it, because he wasn't of our group!" It was the same John who went into a Samaritan village and asked if there were a home available for Jesus to stay in overnight. When he received a negative response he went to Jesus and said, "Lord, can we call down fire from heaven, and wipe 'em out?" While he was struggling with these problems, his ambitious mother did not help him very much. She heard that there were some vacancies in the management of the kingdom, at Jesus' right and left hand, seats that were not yet filled, and she had two boys that she just knew were destined from childhood to fill those seats. She took John and James to Jesus and asked if her two sons could have them, and was quietly rebuked by the Lord.

Yet changes start to come. You watch James and John and Peter enter the inner circle. You see them at the transfiguration. You see them following Jesus as they grow and mature and understand what he is all about. They start to see that the kingdom is spiritual, not physical. They begin to see that Christ has come to die, not to live, that he has come to reign with resurrection power, not backed by an army.

It is John, this same John, who sits with Jesus at the last supper and is called by Scripture "the one whom Jesus loved". It is this John who later that evening watches the trial of Jesus Christ, and the next day watches his dear friend laid on a cross, nails driven into his hands, watches as that cross is lifted up and then jolted into a hole in the ground, sees Jesus being mocked and spat upon and pierced. It is this John whom Jesus instructs to care for His mother The account says that, from that time on, John took Mary into his household. It is this same John who sees Jesus at the Sea of Galilee and recognizes him in his resurrected body. It is this very same John who was growing and maturing, and of whom Peter asked Jesus, "What about this one? What happens to his ministry now that you've given me mine?" And Jesus said, "Peter, it is none of your business. If I want this man to live until I return, so be it. That is my decision."

It is this John who leaves with Peter after Pentacost and starts to preach Jesus Christ in the cities and villages. Soon they are put in prison by the religious leaders for preaching about the resurrection. It is this same John who goes back with Peter and preaches to the Samaritans the good news, "There will be no fire, just a resurrected Jesus Christ who loves you and gave himself for you." This same John, some fifteen years later, shows up at the counsel in Jerusalem and gives wisdom to Paul, who was asking about Jewish and Gentile Christians. "Is salvation by faith, or not," asked Paul, "because Christ told me it was. What do you men say?"

And they agreed with Paul that salvation is by faith, and faith alone.

Then John quietly disappears from the pages of Scripture for some forty years. We hear nothing about him. Suddenly he reappears in Ephesus, seventy- five or eighty years old. And what is he doing? Writing letters of encouragement to brothers and sisters who live in Ephesus, and to the seven churches in Turkey. This is John, still growing and sharing his life. What a mirror to look into! What an encouragement to see how God was reflecting his life through the apostle John. John has been given to us to encourage our hearts that we are all in the process of becoming, that God is molding us and working with us. And the mistakes that we make as we start growing in Christ are intended to mold us and mature us and teach us. God does not come down and wipe us out.

Here is the mature John writing now, the aged one, the one whom Jesus loved. You can see that this is a man who reflects the very character of Christ, a man picked by our Lord, placed into the process of becoming, who is transformed from a young, hot-tempered, loud youth on the shores of Galilee, into a loving pastor/teacher, caring for his sheep and calling them by name. Tradition tells us that when he grew too old to walk, strong young men would pick him up and bring him to the assembly. He would sit there and, in a weak, feeble voice, say, "My children, love one another as Christ has loved you." Then they would take him home again.

We have men like that today. I think of Dr. John Mitchell of Portland. He is eighty-three years old or so, and yet he stands in front of a congregation, opens his Bible, and by his enthusiasm you'd think he were a teenager. He is so excited about the Word of God, so excited about telling you what Jesus Christ has done in his life, that time has no meaning. He just wants to tell you about Jesus. And when I look at John Mitchell, I say there is hope for me!

John wrote the letter to the next person we want to reflect upon - "the beloved Gaius", a man whom John has come to love. He calls him "beloved" four times. This is his style of life. he is one who is beloved of God, and everyone knows it. They see the mark of God in his life, they are delighted by him. Gaius apparently was leading a house-church somewhere outside of Ephesus.

"...Gaius, whom I love in truth." This is agape love, in the Greek - the love that can come only from God, the only love there is that can love your enemies. It is this love that sees a man's worth and wishes him well, that always holds him in high esteem. It is a love that can only be produced by Jesus Christ."... whom I love in truth." That is, "... as we walk within the sphere of the teachings of Jesus." Not an emotional love, not a gooey, sticky love, but the love of God, which is truth. It is truth which gives boundaries and guidelines to our life. Truth and love - the two pillars which are built on the life of Christ, and which must be held in balance. Ephesians 4 tells us that we are to be "truthing in love". They go hand in hand. You do not love people without telling them the truth; you do not tell the truth without loving them. There is a delicate balance that only God can give you.

Truth is so lacking in our age. Evel Knievel will attempt to jump the Snake River Canyon today, an event which is very, very important to many of our young people. I have mixed emotions about this- I'm crying and laughing at the same time. It is really a tragedy, because this man does not know who he is. He is a man who does not understand truth. He does not know why he was created, why he is here. He is bent on destroying his life. Yesterday he was quoted in the newspapers as saying, "I don't know if I'm an athlete, a daredevil, a promoter, or just a nut." I don't know, either. It is estimated that almost two million people will see this jump by closed-circuit TV. The world is glued to this event, this carnival, which is but a caricature of life, of truth, as they should be.

Yet, in the midst of all the media hoopla surrounding this event, there came a certain small voice. A reporter interviewed some mothers who were worried about the morality of the jump, about how their children might be jumping off garage roofs and house tops after watching or hearing of this event. But the reporter went deeper:

More reassuring that perhaps the youth of America may be somewhat wise beyond its years is the observation of a local ten-year-old boy named Kirby Anthony: "He's not even going to do what he said he'd do. He said he would do it with a motorcycle!"

Did you ever hear the story of the little boy who said, "But Mother, the king has no clothes on!" It is the same small voice of truth that says, "But I thought he was going to do it with a motorcycle, not a rocket with parachutes." The ten-year-old sees right through it. Millions of people are going to see the rocketcycle. It is not the same to a ten-year-old; he sees the truth, and he has let the world know. When Jesus Christ came, he said, "I am the truth," and the world tried to put that light out.

Gaius, may you prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers." "May your spiritual life continue to grow, but may your physical life be in balance with your spiritual." Apparently Gaius may have been sick.

Then John says, "I was very glad to hear that you a- e walking in truth." That is, "Gaius, you have God's value structure, and that is exciting! I'm delighted that you are walking in truth." "I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth." That is, "Gaius, not only are you walking in the truth, but many others I have had the privilege of introducing to Jesus Christ are walking in truth. They are not mature at the outset; they grow into truth. But they don't stop walking! It is a process of becoming, not of instant maturity. What good news! How discouraging it would be if we had to be mature instantly. None of us would qualify, not one.

"Walking in truth" - truth as God describes it, truth as Christ came and told us how to live it, the truth he told us about reality, the truth of the kingdom of God, the truth of what is beyond this world, the truth that what we can see is not all there is, the truth that there is power available to live our life now, in the midst of all kinds of problems. All we have to do is ask for it, and it is ours. "I am the truth," says Jesus. "When you obey me, there is nothing but blessing, even though it is difficult

A friend and I went sailing with the owner of a sailboat. While we were going out the channel, just off Redwood City, we watched the buoys because there are mudflats on both sides. In addition, the owner gave us directions as to where the channel was, and we had a depth-finder which constantly indicated how many feet of water we had under us. Sailing along out there on top of the water, it all looks the same. Having never been that way before we didn't know all the danger spots. But the owner of the boat knew, and he used the depthfinder as a backup, so that he could be doubly accurate. My friend was at the tiller, and he kept coming closer and closer to the edge of the channel, until the depth- finder registered a red warning, giving us only five feet. If we got to three feet, it would have been all over, because we would have been aground on the mud, and then we would have had to wait for the tide to turn - a matter of several hours. The owner kept saying, "No, don't go this way, get back!" The depth- finder beeped and the red light kept coming on. Several times this happened, and suddenly, we were on the mud flats. But because we had so much headway, we spun off and got back into the channel.

I sat there and thought, "Boy, isn't that the way we so often approach the Christian life!" We are constantly thinking that we can carry it off, that we really know the channel. But we don't. The owner knew, and he kept trying to share the truth with us. He even went beyond that, and provided an instrument to tell us the truth, and even then we wouldn't obey it.

Fellow- Workers With The Truth 5-8

Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and especially when they are strangers; and they bear witness to your love before the church, and you will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. For they went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to support such men, that we may be fellow-workers with the truth.

Here we find that Gaius had opened his home. Men had come with letters of recommendations from John: "These men are legitimate. They have the message of God. So give them an opportunity to preach, and let them stay with you." Gaius not only welcomed them in, he not only treated them as though they were God himself, he sped them on their way. He took them to the airport, made sure they had enough money, fed them - whatever was necessary, he did for them. And he did it even though they were strangers. That is what hospitality means: "lover of strangers". Gaius was living and walking in the truth God had given to him

through the apostles and the written Word. John says, "Continue to support such men, and become fellow-workers with the truth." That is, "Those of you who participate with missionaries by giving them support are fellow-workers with them. You are in the same ministry they are in."

So we have this beautiful life of Gaius. We can reflect upon his life and see where we are. He is beloved by God, by the brothers who are preaching, and by John himself. He is spiritually healthy, and he is willing to share his life with his brothers. His style of life is consistent with the truth. He is not sinless; but he is consistently growing. He has a faithful ministry of hospitality, and he is faithful in sharing financially with the brothers.

Do Not Imitate Evil 9-11

At this point John stops and says, "By the way, there is a man I want to talk to you about, a man whose life I do not want yours to reflect. I do not want these characteristics to be present in your life."

I wrote something to the church, but Diotrephes who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words, and not satisfied with this, neither does he himself receive the brethren, and he forbids those who desire to do so, and puts them out of the church. Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. The one who does good is of (God); the one who does evil has not seen God.

Diotrephes was a man in the church. His name means, "nursed by Zeus". Zeus was the chief god in the Greek pantheon. It was the custom of the early Christians to have their names changed when they accepted Jesus Christ. An example of this is Joseph who, during the early days of the church, sold some land and gave the money to the apostles. The apostles renamed him "Barnabas", "son of encouragement". But Diotrephes apparently did not care to observe this custom. Names were very important in those days, and had a lot to do with the character of the man.

John tells us Diotrephes had some problems. He loved to be first His style of life was that he loved to have pre-eminence. He probably belonged to the Gnostic society. That is the only explanation I can think of for his anger with John. The Gnostics held the view that all physical matter was evil. They insisted that salvation came through certain "spiritual" revelations which only a select few (namely, themselves) possessed. They tried to put aside the fact of their own bodies by refusing to acknowledge them, feed them, or cater to them in any way. In the process, of course, they came up with the doctrine that Jesus Christ could not be the Son of God because, according to the apostles, he came in a body. And a pure God would never put on an evil body, as the apostles claimed had happened in the person of Jesus Christ. John, in 2 John, says that proponents of these views are deceivers and antichrists.

Diotrephes may have been one of them, for he "loves to be first and "does not accept what we say". He does not accept the word of the Apostle, refuses to submit to spiritual authority. John says, "I am going to call attention to his deeds. I'm not going to attack his personality, I'm simply going to reflect his deeds in the mirror of the Word and the answer will be obvious. We will know who he is." Jesus said many times, "By their fruits will you know them." John continues, "He unjustly accuses us with wicked words- words that bubble up, that are hollow, empty, that have no content, but which keep flowing constantly. This is his style of life. And not only is he not satisfied to do this to me personally," John says, "but Diotrephes does not receive the brothers. And those who desire to express their spiritual gifts by receiving the brothers he throws out of the church." What a man. Is that the kind of life that we want? Is that reflecting truth: one who loves to be first, who refuses to submit to spiritual authority, who attacks another without a just cause? James 3:16 says, "For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is a disorder and every evil thing." Diotrephes was turning away legitimate pastors so that they could not express their spiritual gifts. And he forbade others to express the gift of hospitality, even threw them out of the church. Have you been tempted at one time or another to act like this? John says, "Don't. I'll show you the mirror. I'll show you the results. Don't do it. If you want an example of good, then look at Demetrius:"

Imitate Good 11-12

Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. The one who does good is of God; the one who does evil has not seen God. Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself; and we also bear witness, and you know that our witness is true.

"Beloved, don't imitate what is evil." This is a command to Gaius. John points out that evil is the activity of Diotrephes. He is saying, "Gaius, don't be influenced by Diotrephes and his evil deeds. He is wrong in his attitude and his activities. But imitate good, and good, Gaius, is everything I've heard about you- your love, your hospitality, your sensitivity to the needs of others are all good."

"And if you want to see another example of good, look at Demetrius. [He most probably was one of the pastors who took this letter to Gaius.] Demetrius, standing there in front of you, has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself." That is, "This is his style of life. He received a good testimony when he first came to the Lord. He's been growing in the Lord. His testimony has always been like Christ. Being with him is like being with Jesus. And not only that, the truth itself verifies that he is of the truth. When he looks into the mirror of the truth, he reflects truth. There is no hypocrisy, no mask, no hiding. He simply walks up to the mirror of the Word of God, and his life is revealed to be exactly the way God intended it to be lived. What a testimony he has! As if that were not enough," John says, "we also bear witness, and you know that our witness is true." Here is Demetrius, who receives a good testimony from those in the community, from the truth itself, and from John personally.

As I was looking over the lives of these four men, I couldn't quite pull it all together until I was reading verses 13 and 14. Suddenly something jumped right off the page and gave me direction to encourage your life:

Peace Be To You 13-14

I had many things to write to you, but I am not willing to write them with pen and ink, but I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.

Suddenly a little phrase right in the middle of these two verses leaped off the page. The phrase is, "Shalom", "Shalom be to you." For if you are walking in the truth, as God intended you to walk, there will be peace within your spirit. You can count on it. You can be encouraged that you are walking as God intended you to walk. The war with God is over, and the peace of God is given to you. The very peace that he is, you are, and can have. Shalom is yours.

Prayer:

Our heavenly Father, thank you for your love, your grace, and your mercy. Thank you for John. What a faithful man, upon whose life we can reflect and see that he went through the process of becoming Christlike. You were so patient with him through the years. We thank you for Gaius, who quietly but faithfully ministered, as you would minister, in a small house-church in Turkey. Except for this letter, we would never have known of him. Thank you, Lord, that you let us have a glimpse of how to be a gracious host, and how to live as you live. We thank you for Diotrephes, in the sense that he teaches us how not to live, and we need the contrast. And, Father, we thank you for Demetrius, for his testimony in the community - that all spoke well of him because he walked in the truth. Not because he was popular, or clever, or tried harder, or worked more, but because he walked in the truth, as you intend us to walk. Father, thank you so much for shalom. We need constantly to hear your words to us: "Shalom, shalom." Amen.

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[Back to Index Page](#)

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