

IMITATE WHAT IS GOOD

3 John

The Elder, to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth: Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers. For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well, because they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth. I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church. Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God. Demetrius has a good testimony from all, and from the truth itself. And we also bear witness, and you know that our testimony is true. I had many things to write, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and ink; but I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak face to face. Peace to you. Our friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.

Here we have a letter from the Elder, presumed to be none other than the Apostle John, the Elder, to his friend Gaius. It truly is amazing that we not only have words in a letter of the Apostle John's to Gaius, some 2000 years after it was written, but that we still are not just musing on it from behind glass in a museum but we are reading it as a bit or a fragment of what we call "The Word of God." A question that can be considered is this, "if you were to write a letter to a friend of whom you cared about and had their best interests in your mind and heart, what would you say to them?" Today we take words for granted, now that we have the internet and texting and emails and so forth. Back then though, to send a letter to someone meant something. While we can look at many historical letters of prominent persons in the past and even see that, to us, much of what was said may seem insignificant to us, such as talking about their hobbies, such as gardening or stamp collecting or something or giving detailed descriptions of how all of the family members are doing, and then of course mentioning the weather, the letters from the writers of the New Testament had an imperative duty, a grave concern for the things of God and the state of the church as they had

been witnesses to the most remarkable and important event in the history of mankind.

That event of course was the coming of the Son of God, Jesus the Christ to this earth for the eternal purpose of God. When John the Baptist was in prison he sent messengers to Jesus to ask if He were the Messiah which, I think, John the Baptist sent for their own sakes, a "don't just believe what I say go see for yourself". Jesus replied with this, "Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them." (Luke 7:21-23) That gospel message was, as is recorded in Matthew 4:17, Jesus Himself was preaching, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." To this day, we are being called to repent and turn to God for His salvation and His Righteousness. That is not just in repenting from egregious sins. Egregious means, according to Webster's Dictionary as "extraordinarily or conspicuously bad". We are being called out of this world to live for God and His eternal purpose for His kingdom and our lives. That is where we are to, as the Apostle Paul stated, "reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord." We have many GOOD examples that have come before us, primarily the Apostles of Christ but most specifically we have the ultimate and perfect example to follow and that is Jesus, the Son of God, who is the King of kings and Lord of Lords. Therefore we are to keep "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." We are, as John says in his letter to Gaius, to keep "imitating what is good." God is good! Amen?

We basically have several types of examples that we could follow, by our own free will, of sorts. There are those who start off on the right path, following after Jesus, perhaps out of mere curiosity to see what Jesus is going to do for them. There are many "in the church" who just use the church for their own gain, either financially or for their own glory. We'll look at some examples of that through church history. Then there are those who really never intended to follow after Jesus, who is the Great Shepherd, the Good Shepherd, the Chief Shepherd. Best of all, according to the purpose of God, there is us, I hope and pray, who are doing our best to follow Jesus, to honor God not just with our lips, to love God with all of our heart, soul, strength, and mind **for the glory of God.** Listen to what Jesus said about honoring, serving and following Him, who was and is God incarnate, "If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor." (John 12:26)

For many people and many religions that is where they stop with Jesus. "He preached a good message and did wonderful things but

follow Him? He ended up being crucified on a cross." As I've mentioned previously, Islam teaches, as it is written in the Koran, that Jesus did not die on the cross but that God whisked Him away before his death. The Koran also says that God did not beget a son, or anyone for that matter, in numerous passages. I won't dignify the passages with a reference but you can look it up in the Koran and on the internet if you want to. I mention that partly because it is the Apostle John who recorded the words of Jesus in Him saying, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." (John 3:16-17) Mark recorded Jesus as saying this, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45) Are YOU willing to follow Jesus, trusting Him all the way to wherever He leads you?

In 3 John, the Elder John says of Gaius, "For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth." In the words of Pontius Pilate one may ask, what is truth? (John 18:38) Jesus stated, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6) The Way of Jesus is clarified for us. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another." (John 13:34) Will you follow Jesus in sharing and showing the love and the gospel of Jesus Christ, for the glory and eternal purpose of God? That is what He is expecting of all of us. To abide in the Truth, that is in Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord!

The Apostle John, who was as close to Jesus, our Lord and Savior, as to rest his head on Jesus' chest. He recorded Jesus as saying, "For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them." (John 13:15-17) Wouldn't that be something to spend some time in a conversation with the Apostle John who spent 3-3-1/2 years with Jesus in ministry while He healed the sick and raised the dead. I'll bet he would have some stories to tell that aren't written in what we call the Holy Bible. Yet we can have that fellowship with God and Christ in our spirit and in His Spirit. How does that happen, one may ask? Jesus said this, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him." (John 14:23)

So far I have used quite a few passages of Scriptures from the Apostle John. Yet how sad it is that the church has been used to distort the Truth of the eternal purpose of God that Jesus the Christ, His only begotten Son, came to die on a cross for our sins,

and that He raised from the dead on the third day, conquering death, so that we too can have eternal life IN HIM. That eternal life begins the moment you receive Christ! We are presently living in God's eternal kingdom! That is the message we can shout from the mountain tops that Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior! Glory to God! Yet as we know from ecclesiastical history, that is-church history, that cathedrals were built in the names of the Apostles: St. Paul's Cathedral, St. Peter's Cathedral, and yes St. John's Cathedral. On the internet I found a bunch of Saint John Cathedrals. There's one in Denver, Colorado, Cleveland, Ohio, Jacksonville, Florida, Lafayette, Louisiana, etc. etc. There are also numerous St. John churches in Pensacola. I'm not trying to attack well meaning Catholics or anyone who attends those places of worship (at least I hope they are) but there's something wrong in all that. Jesus the Christ, the Son of God, who was and is God in the flesh by the way, and He came to this earth to die on a cross for our sins so that we can be forgiven of our sins and be reconciled to God and have eternal life in Christ in His eternal kingdom and man thought it was important to build a temple for Saint John? Huh? What? It kind of seems like they were missing the point, the big picture, the overall message about how WE ARE the church **in Christ**! As we look at church history, what was being fought over, between the Catholic church and the different nations or factions such as what developed into the Knights Templar was basically over money, buildings and land. How many of you know, that this here is not our home? The Catholic church at one point had what was called the Knights Hospitallers or their full name was the Knights of the Order of the Hospital of Saint John of Jerusalem. They were a military branch of the Catholic church. "The original purpose of the order was to provide aid and medical care to Christian pilgrims to the Holy Land, but it soon became a military order which acquired extensive territories in Europe and whose knights made significant contributions to the Crusades in Iberia and the Middle East." ¹ The Knights Templar also seemingly had noble intentions by protecting those on the pilgrimage to Mecca or Jerusalem but what what much of what happen in what is called the Middle Ages or Dark Ages was not in sharing and showing the love and gospel of Jesus Christ.

Just some food for thought, do you suppose that "The Plague" in the middle ages had anything to do with the apostacy in the church during the Middle Ages, to which a vast number of millions of people died of that plague? What do you suppose would have been the reaction of the Apostle John in seeing how the church was "spreading the gospel" through military force? Many examples of the atrocities that were instigated by the zeal of the church was in the church taking up arms and killing people. Partly from that, is what brought forth the Reformation (or re-formation, a getting back to the basics) that was initiated in written form by Martin Luther, which gave us the five

¹ Knights Hospitaller, "https://www.worldhistory.org/Knights_Hospitaller."

solas, 1. Sola scriptura: "Scripture alone" 2. Sola fide: "faith alone" 3. Sola gratia: "grace alone" 4. Solo Christo: "Christ alone" 5. Soli Deo gloria: "to the glory of God alone". The German peasants, in what is termed the Peasant's War (1524-1525), looked at their rights, which included their religious rights as something to fight for. About 100,000 peasants died in those battles.² Not long after the defeat of the Knights Templar there was another Peasants' Revolt in the 1300s. Martin Luther by the way had been against that revolt in the 1500s to the chagrin and hostility of the peasant mob.³ Another interesting but rather sad and pathetic thing that was going on at the time was that the church was selling indulgences, which was a primary reason for what brought about the Reformation. Those indulgences were purchased by the people through the church and were able to be used for the forgiveness of sins or to get someone out of purgatory. As we know from Scripture, it is in Christ alone that we have "redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" and then concerning the heretical teaching of purgatory the Word states that "it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (**Hebrews 9:27**) and that no prayers or gift offerings will help the eternal state of anyone who has already passed on from this life. The money then received by the Catholic church was used in paying off their debts and building grand cathedrals. You ever think about how people say of the deceased, "God rest his/her soul"? That's heresy, false doctrine.

Not only that but with the Roman Catholic church they began establishing sainthood for certain persons who demonstrated a remarkable life of faith and were known to have done a miracle. Guess what? We are ALL saints **in Christ** and none of us will rise above our Master, our Lord, our God. "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." (**1 Peter 2:9**) In a textbook called Christianity Through the Centuries I came across another Sola of Luther's that I had never heard of before. It is "Sola Sacerdos"⁴ which most directly means priests alone, and actually is saying that, in Christ we are all the priests or saints of God, that is through our High Priest, that is Christ, "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus." (**1 Timothy 2:5**) We are His "Royal Priesthood"! No miracles needed other than the miracle of the rebirth in Christ Jesus! No interaction or confession to a priest of the church. That also gets us back to the basics-think of the intended fellowship with God and man in the Garden of Eden. I hope that doesn't inspire anyone though to think that they should have a

2 Peasants' War, "<https://www.britannica.com/event/Peasants-War>."

3 Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries*, pg. 286 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996)

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cathedral built with their name on it. Once again, Soli Deo gloria: "to the glory of God alone".

The Apostle John said this, "But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him." (**1 John 2:27**) For those who have been born-again, that is, those who have been born of the Spirit as Jesus put it, which is the believing on Christ, turning to Him in repentance, (as He gives of His Holy Spirit to those who obey Him-**Acts 4:32**) and then as one has received the Holy Spirit, one could be marooned on a deserted island by themselves and still live out their faith in Christ without anyone else teaching them a thing. Yet, it doesn't usually work that way with us. Also, as God has given us His Word all nicely put together in what we call the Holy Bible, He does expect for us to know what His Word says. That is the way we get to know God and His ways and what He is teaching us. So, if you're going to be stranded on an island, hopefully you'll have your Bible with you. We are though all in this together to love one another, encourage one another, and to help one another. I love this part of John's letter where he says to Gaius, "Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well, because they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles."

When we gather together on Sunday, I hope you understand that we ARE all in this together as God's own special people and that we can all be ministered to from the Word of God. But it doesn't begin and end when we are at church for we are all called to work out our own salvation in Christ, [with fear and trembling]. (**Philippians 2:12**) We are Christ's ambassadors, His representatives of His Light, His Love, and His Truth. None of us are perfect but we are called to not only live peaceably with our neighbors and to also be hospitable to one another, helping one another when we can and for us to imitate what is good and not evil. That of course takes the wisdom that comes from Christ as HE is our Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption, (**1 Corinthians 1:30**) Jesus tells us, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." (**John 15:5**) There are always going to be those who will just try to manipulate and take advantage of your good will in Christ. That is where we can be reminded by Jesus, "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (**Matthew 10:16**) and to also "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you." (**Luke 6:27-28**)

According to John's letter, Diotrephes desired to make a name for himself. As John said, he was, "prating against us [prating meaning to talk excessively and pointlessly] with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church." Just think, Diotrephes will live in infamy as one who argued pointlessly with the Apostles of Christ. If the people came against Moses and foolish people came against the Apostles, if ignorant people came against Jesus the Christ, you can expect then for those types of people to come against you and the church. Jesus will continue to remind us of that fact saying, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

How do we go about doing that? We have been given the perfect and right example in our Lord and Savior Jesus, who is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. We have been given His Word to guide us in His truth, and we have the Holy Spirit to comfort us and to guide us in His Word and to work in us His will for His purpose and pleasure. (Philippians 2:13) As Jesus told His disciples, He says to us as it is in the recorded Word of God, "For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you". The Apostle Paul tells us, similar to what John recorded Jesus as saying, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:5-11) When one reads the church history and reads of all of the wars, the Crusades, the Inquisition, and the tortures and deaths that have been done in the name of Christ I have to wonder, "did they have the same Bible as I have?" To partially answer that question, many times, no they didn't. Until the printing press, the Gutenberg press, the common folks like us had to rely on the word of the priests.

We have never been called to take up our sword (or gun) but a cross. What has been taken out of context throughout the church's history is where Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword." (Matthew 10:34) Yet right after that Matthew records Jesus as saying, "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it." (Matthew 10:38-39) I would think it would be pretty tough to be

swinging a sword in battle while dragging a cross, don't you think? As the Apostle John said to his good friend Gaius, Jesus is telling us, "Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God." When Jesus was speaking of the very last of days and the Great Tribulation He said, "**By your patience possess your souls.**" (Luke 21:19) It may seem as though we are always waiting on God. That is where we have to continue to "cling to Him **for He is your life.**" and determine in our heart and mind to continue to say, by the example of Jesus, "not my will but your will be done Lord". That is the faith that we are called to and God WILL richly reward us in the end, guaranteed, for it is a promise from God. Our goal should be to expect to have the testimony of Demetrius. "Demetrius has a good testimony from all, and from the truth itself."

From the truth itself! Jesus is the Truth. Having the testimony from the truth itself is for Jesus to welcome us into heaven saying "Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord." (Matthew 25:21)