

JOHN . . . and his yardstick of truth
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(THIRD EPISTLE OF JOHN)

The apostle John was worried. Frowns of perplexity were appearing upon his face, for the most sacred things in life were being denied. Apostles and Church leaders had been taken to their eternal home, and he alone remained of the original party. Heresy was spreading in all directions, and many people denied that Christ had come in the flesh. Their eloquence equalled their arrogance, and the doctrinal standards of the Church were being ruthlessly destroyed. John had already written two epistles in which he condemned the new teaching; but now as he sat with his pen in his hand, he had certain things to say concerning some of his fellow believers and their relationship to truth. Either his message was false or it had been sent by God, and in the light of that standard all teaching had to be examined.

A Great Fellowship

"The elder unto the well beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth" (3 John 1). Not the least among the wonders of grace was the fact that redeeming love united men of all types into a fellowship which surpassed anything else in the world. Barbarian, Scythian ; bond and free ; Jew, Greek, and Roman, took their respective places in the living edifice known as the Church of Christ. These people loved each other, for racial enmity, social dissension, and other man-made divisions ceased to exist within the boundaries of the Christian fellowship. These people called each other brethren, and when circumstances demanded, the wealthy sacrificed their possessions in order to increase the common fund from which less fortunate brethren received assistance. John had written earlier, " But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue ; but in deed and in truth " (I John 3:17, 18).

A Great Follower

" For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth " (vv. 3, 4). We cannot fail to see how John couples internal convictions with the external walk. Fellowship in the secret place provides the inspiration for a public profession-of faith. Gaius reiterated the word of the Psalmist, " Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee." The truth reigned supreme within his Christian kingdom. And every word and deed issuing from his regal heart evoked divine favor. He walked calmly with his Lord, and every detail of his conduct harmonized with God's will.

A Great Fellow-Helper

" Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to tile brethren, and to strangers ; Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well. Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellow helpers to the truth " (vv. 5-8). Once again the truth appears as John's yardstick. Every matter of life and service is measured against this infallible standard. Nothing matters but the revealed will and word of God.

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Within the ranks of the Christian Church was something far more wonderful than mere sentiment. Any man, believing the truth, and living to preach it, had the right to expect the utmost cooperation of his brethren. One man preached, and another entertained the preacher ; but both played an important part in the work of Christ. Even in those early days Diotrephes had developed a standard of Church ruling which insisted on every man subscribing to his own personal likes and dislikes. John said, "He receiveth us not." Any man who refused to accept John at the Lord's Table was a self-made god who worshipped at his own shrine. Diotrephes was the progenitor of a sect which still remains.

A Great Fame

" Demetrius hath a good report of all men, and of the truth itself . ." (v. 12). To be commended of the truth represents the greatest reward in life. This is the Lord's saying, " Well done, thou good and faithful servant." John's statement supplies a thought-provoking couplet. When a man is commended of the truth, he is also commended of men. There is something radically wrong with an unattractive Christian!

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