

# *THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST*

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

## **1, 2, & 3 JOHN AND JUDE LESSON 3 (2 & 3 John)**

### **Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

*THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST.* Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (3 Jn. 4). Welcome to our study of the Books of Second and Third John. In our two previous lessons we noted that the Book of First John teaches us about walking in the light (chapters 1 and 2) and then walking in love (chapters 3 through 5). God is light. We, therefore, must live our lives according to that light (truth). God is love (1 Jn. 4:8). Therefore, we must walk in love, and live lives that are motivated by love.

Second and Third John complement that theme by teaching us that we must walk in the truth. The idea of “walking” suggests to us that we must live a certain lifestyle. We must live our lives according to the light. We must live our lives according to love. And we must live our lives according to truth. The word “truth” is a key word in the Books of Second and Third John. That word occurs repetitively—eleven times in twenty-six verses. What does it mean to “walk in truth”? Pilate asked that in John 18:38. Here are some things we can know are true.

In Psalm 119:172 the Bible says that all of God’s commandments are true and righteous. Thus, truth has to do with the commands of God. In John 17:17 Jesus said, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.” We see that the commandments of God and the Word of God are truth. Ephesians 4:21 says that the truth is embodied in Jesus. He is the epitome of truth, as is God. In John 8:32 we are told, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” The truth is in Jesus. The truth is in God’s Word. And the truth is in God. All of these things teach us that we must live our lives by the teaching of the Bible, by the example of God, and by Jesus’ example. That is what it means to “walk in truth.”

Now, let’s let 2 and 3 John explain to us just how to do that. According to 2 John, how does a person “walk in truth”? He first must love in truth. Notice 2 John 1—“To the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all those who have known the truth.” To walk in the truth, you first must love in truth. What does it mean to “love in truth”? It means that our motives have to be true. In Ephesians 4:15 we are told that we must “speak the truth in love.” That is not to say that everything we say must be flowery or sugary. Rather, the idea is that our motive in preaching the Gospel must be a love of people’s souls. When we talk about “loving in truth,” we are talking about loving according to the standard of the Word of God (Jn. 17:17). We must have a true motive—love for the lost. We must have a standard that is true, by which we set the boundaries and guidelines of our lives. We also must have true teachings. In John 7:17 Jesus said, “If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority.” We can know true teaching by testing it. Matthew 17:5 tells us that the teaching of Jesus is true, since God’s voice came down from Heaven and said on the Mount of Transfiguration, “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!”

But to walk in truth, and love in truth, you must have true love. Love must be the motivation by which we do all things. What is the greatest commandment ever? Jesus answered that question in Mark 12:30ff. A lawyer came to Jesus and asked, "Which is the first commandment of all?" Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment." Loving God is what it means to walk in truth. We must let love be the motivating factor. God loved us enough to send His Son into the world. When we love in truth and walk in truth, we are motivated by that to live according to the Gospel.

It is important that we walk in truth because it is the truth that is going to abide forever. If you are living your life by the truth, then you are living your life by something that is not fleeting, is not passing, and is not a fad. You are living your life by something that is a constant. It is something about which you can always be sure—regardless of the age, the time, or the social climate. When we speak about things that are true, we can surely know that the Word of God is true. Notice in 2 John 2 that John speaks about "the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever." What are some things that will exist forever? We know that God will exist forever, because Psalm 90:2 says, "...from everlasting to everlasting, You are God." John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The idea is that God is from everlasting to everlasting, and that Jesus existed before the creation of the world. Thus, God is a constant truth that will abide forever.

We also can know that the Word of God is a truth that will abide forever. In Matthew 24:35 Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My word will never pass away." The Word of God will survive the test of time. Another thing that will abide forever is the souls of men. If we are going to abide forever with God, and abide by the Word of God, then we must realize that our souls are the most important things we have. Every person has an immortal soul that will live beyond this life in either Heaven (the place of wonderful joy and happiness) or Hell (the place that Jesus described as a lake of fire). Where you spend eternity is dependent upon your relationship with God, which is based on the Word of God. How desperately we need to make sure that we living our lives by truth.

Second John also teaches us that there is a great joy involved in walking according to the truth. When we live our lives by the Word of God, there is a joy that cannot compare with anything else in the world. In 2 John 3-4 John said, "Grace, mercy, and peace will be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love. I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father." Based on the love, mercy, and grace of God, we received the truth (vs. 3). And John said that he rejoiced greatly when he saw some of his children walking in truth. Walking in the truth is where we will find real joy. Joy is not found in making a name for ourselves. Joy is not found in wealth and fame. Joy is not found in pleasures. True joy that transcends the temporary is found by walking in the truth. How do we know that? Paul said in Philippians 4:4 that "Rejoice always, and again, I say rejoice." How could he say that? It was because he knew that for him to go to be with Christ was far better (Phil. 1:21). In Acts 16:25 Paul and Barnabas were in prison. They were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. How could they be happy in a situation like that? It was because they had already decided that whatever the case—whether they stayed here or died and went to their reward—they were going to be with the Lord. In Matthew 5:6 Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness." According to Psalm 1:1-2, who is the happy person? "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night." We need to know that real joy and real happiness come by living our lives

according to the truth. I can promise you that you will never have any real joy until you decide to get your life right with God. You will never experience any greater joy than knowing that you are living according to the Bible. Knowing that no matter what happens, all is well with you and God, is the most amazing joy that you can ever have.

Let me illustrate for you how “walking in truth” does not mean that we do not just have the truth in our lives, but that we actually must **do** something in order to walk in truth. Walking in truth means that we must practice what we believe and say. In Romans 12:1 Paul said, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.” There is the idea of walking in truth. Every day we must give ourselves as a sacrifice to God and the truth. In Philippians 4:9 Paul said, “The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.” We must practice the truth. This means that we must exemplify the truth so that it can be seen in our lives. In Matthew 5:16 Jesus pointed out that we do not take a lamp and put it under a basket, and how that a city set on a hill can be seen by everyone. He then said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” When we are walking in the truth, people should be able to see by our lifestyles that we are following the teaching of God. We are to walk in the footsteps of Jesus (1 Pet. 2:21). Like those mentioned in Acts 4:13, people ought to be able to see Jesus living in us. We must practice the truth. And we must live it in our lives.

But we also must defend the truth. In Jude 3 Jude said, “Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” Walking in the truth means that we must stand up and stand foursquare for the truth against error. In 1 Peter 3:15 we are told, “Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you.”

Walking in the truth also means that we must be ready to spread the Gospel. We cannot walk in truth without wanting to share that truth with others. This is what Jesus said in Matthew 28:18—“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.” Luke 19:10 tells us that “the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” As Jesus looked out on a crowd, He said to His disciples, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest” (Mt. 9:36-38). Who are the laborers? Who is represented by the field? The lost world is the field, and Christians are the laborers. We must spread the message of God.

We also see in 2 John 7-8 that “walking in truth” means that we must be able to recognize false teachers and false teaching. We must have the mindset that wants to walk in truth, but that also wants to stand against error. John said, “For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward.” We must recognize that error does exist. Romans 16:17 commands us to mark those who teach doctrines that are contrary to Christ. In 1 John 4:1-4 we are told that we must test the spirits to see if they are from God, since many false prophets have gone out into the world. We must “prove all things, and hold fast to that which is good” (1 Thess. 5:21). We must be aware that error and false teachers do exist. Look back through history, and you will find people who claimed to be great servants of God. Many of them made appeals for money. Yet they were false teachers who were living luxuriously based on funds sent to them by others. They were wolves in sheep clothing who were not living correctly, but were in error. They were not doing right. They were living immorally. They were neither walking in truth nor teaching the truth. We must be ready to stand up against error.

But the key to it all is that we must do these things because we realize that if a person goes beyond the teaching of Jesus, he or she no longer is in a relationship with God. Look at how severe it is to depart from the teaching of Christ. In 2 John 9-11 we read,

“Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.”

The person who is teaching error no longer has a relationship with God. That is a sin, and it has severed their relationship with God. Isaiah 59:1-2 tells us that sin separates us from a loving and holy God. Someone might say, “I understand what you are saying. I’ve heard people say things with which I do not agree. But is it really **that** important?” It is important because such people no longer have God as their Father. They are not teaching what is right, and the blind are now leading the blind. They are leading people down the path of error. “Walking in truth” means that we must stay true to the doctrine of Christ. We must be aware of false teachers and make sure that we do not get caught up in their false teaching.

According to what we read in 3 John, “walking in truth” also means that our main goal in life is not physical prosperity, but spiritual prosperity. In 3 John 2, John offers a beautiful statement to Gaius: “Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.” John wanted Gaius to be in good health. He wanted him to have prosperity. But first and foremost he wanted Gaius to know that his soul was what was really important. “Walking in truth” means that we realize that the most valuable possession we have is our souls, and that our souls must be our main priority. That is what Jesus taught. Do you remember the question that Jesus asked in Mark 8:36-37? “What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” Let’s say that you have all the wealth in the world, but you have not lived your life correctly. You get to Judgment and say, “God, I haven’t really done what was right, but look what I brought with me. Wouldn’t You like to have some of this?” That will not account for anything on the Day of Judgment. The main thing in this life is that we must be sure that our souls are right with God. That is why 2 Corinthians 13:5 says, “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith.” Our soul is the most important thing. Spiritual prosperity is our main goal. We must be sure that we are walking in truth and that we are growing as we ought to be.

How do we make our souls prosper? One way is to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior (2 Pet. 3:18). One way we can do that is to be like a newborn babe and desire the pure milk of the word so that we can grow thereby (1 Pet. 2:2). We do that by studying to show ourselves approved unto God. When we study, learn, and gain knowledge, we then must put that into practice by walking in the truth. Is your soul prospering? Are you walking according to the truth?

Walking in truth also means that those who are children of God must be hospitable toward fellow workers in evangelism. This is one of John’s main points in 3 John. He says that if we want to walk in truth and be a friend of the truth, then we must help fellow workers as they spread the Gospel. One way to do that is by being hospitable. In 3 John 5-8 we read,

“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.”

How could Gaius become a fellow worker for the truth? He needed to be evangelistic himself. There was no doubt about that. But being hospitable by providing funds, or a place to stay, for evangelists was one way that he could help the cause of Christ. In Hebrews 13:1 we are told that we must “let brotherly love continue.” We must be hospitable toward strangers. How would Paul have been able to do his work if he had not found Christians with whom he could stay? If he could not have found people along the way who were willing to help him, he would not have had a very good reception in some areas. And he would not have been able to go as far as he did. If we want to be fellow workers who walk in the truth, we must be hospitable. It is almost an unheard-of thing today for people to be invited into others’ homes. But it is a biblical way in which we can spread the Gospel.

In 3 John 9-10 we are introduced to an individual who definitely was **not** “walking in 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.”

What was the problem with Diotrephes? People were trying to walk in the truth and do evangelism. But what did Diotrephes do? He wanted to have “first place.” He therefore would not allow those who were members of the body of Christ to help those in other areas. He wanted to “rule the roost” and have everything under his control. He was the opposite of what 1 Peter 5:1-5 teaches. Peter said that leaders were not to be lords over the flock. But it looks like Diotrephes was trying to do exactly that. He was a prideful man. Proverbs 16:18 says that “pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” In Colossians 1:18 we are told that Christ is preeminent, and that He alone must have first place in all things. The problem with Diotrephes was that **he** wanted the preeminence. But that belonged to Jesus. No one else can have first place or be preeminent—because Christ already occupies first place.

What was wrong with what Diotrephes was doing? It certainly was against the will of God, and thus was sinful. There is no doubt about that. But Diotrephes’ actions also were contagious. They led right up to the papacy. Diotrephes—one man—wanted to have control of everything. This attitude led to Catholicism, where there was one bishop (which is unscriptural, since Acts 14:23 points out at that there were elders in every church in the New Testament, and that the elders and churches were autonomous). These types of actions led into one man ruling a group, which then led to the pope (one man ruling the whole thing). That was never God’s will. The papacy is not found in Scripture. One bishop ruling over everyone is not according to the will of God. In 1 Timothy 3 are told that there are to be elders in every congregation (Acts 14:23). Peter was not the first pope. In Acts 10:25-26 Cornelius fell down to worship Peter, but Peter said, “I am just a man.” We can see the sinful nature of things like these, which definitely do not represent an attitude of walking in the truth as we try to put ourselves in first place. God says that is not right.

In 3 John 11 John tells us that we must imitate that which is good, not that which is evil. “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.” Part of our relationship in walking in the truth means that we must be imitators of that which is good. In 1 Thessalonians 5:21 we are told that to find out what is good, we must prove all things, and then hold fast to that which is good. How do we do that? Here are some ways.

If we want to imitate good, we can find no better way of doing that than walking in the footsteps of Jesus. “To this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps” (1 Pet 2:21). If we want to imitate that which is

good, we need have the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5). We must walk in the footsteps of Jesus. We must do as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11:1—"Imitate me as I imitate Christ." We must imitate the good character and examples of men and women found in the Bible. We also must be an example and light to the world (Mt. 5:16). If we want to imitate the good, we must do what Romans 12:2 says: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. If we want to imitate the good, we must transform our lives according to the Gospel. We must leave sin behind. And we must walk in truth according to the teaching of Jesus.

The Book of 3 John closes on a positive note by introducing us to another man. We have seen Gaius, who was a friend of the truth. We have seen Diotrophes, who wanted the pre-eminence and was not walking according to truth. Now we see Demetrius in 3 John 12—"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." There was a Diotrophes in that congregation. But thank God that there also were people like Gaius and Demetrius. Demetrius had a good testimony from all. He was a man of a good reputation. And he was walking according to the truth.

I want to ask you today if you are walking according to the truth. Are you in the truth? Have you obeyed the Gospel? Are you a Christian? The Bible says that to become a Christian who is in the truth and who has been set free by that truth, you must hear the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). Once you hear that Word, and realize that it is God's Word and authority for all mankind, you must believe that Jesus is God's Son (Jn. 8:24). Having believed that Jesus is the Messiah and Savior of the world, you then must repent. In Luke 13:3 Jesus said that unless you repent, you will perish. Then you must confess Jesus' name before men (Rom. 10:10). And you must be baptized in water. On the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 when people cried out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?," the answer was, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." Are you in the truth? And are you walking according to the truth? May God help each of us to walk in truth.

**Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

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## STUDY QUESTIONS FOR 1, 2, & 3 JOHN AND JUDE LESSON 3 (2 & 3 JOHN)

1. What is the main theme of 2 and 3 John?
2. In Acts 18:38, what important question did Pilate ask?
3. According to John 17:17, what is truth?
4. According to 2 John 2, how long will truth abide?
5. What important statement did Jesus make in Matthew 24:35?
6. According to John's statement in 2 John 3-4, what gave him great joy?
7. Because the apostle Paul walked in truth, he was able to make a certain statement in Philippians 1:21. What was that statement?
8. According to Psalm 1:1-2, who is a happy person?
9. Explain how Paul's statement in Romans 12:1 ("I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service") fits with the idea of "walking in truth."
10. According to Philippians 4:9, what will Christians do if they desire to walk in truth?
11. In Peter 2:21 Peter told us one way to walk in truth. What is it?
12. Jude 3 gives us additional instruction about what it means to walk in truth. What is it?
13. If we are walking in truth, what, according to 1 Peter 3:15, should we always be ready to do?
14. According to 2 John 7-8, there are some who do **not** walk in truth. Who are they?
15. What does In 1 John 4:1 admonish us to do that will help us to always be sure that we are walking in truth?
16. What does 1 Thessalonians 5:21 teach us to do so that we always will be able walk in truth?
17. Second John 9 describes a person who is not walking in truth. Who is that person?
18. According to John's statement in 3 John 2, what was John's most important concern for his fellow Christian, Gaius?
19. In 3 John 9-10 we learn of an individual who definitely was **not** walking in the truth. What was it?
20. What was the sin of the man mentioned in 3 John 9-10?