

# **That You May Know That You Have Eternal Life**

**A Commendable Christian**

*3 John 1-8*

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## A Commendable Christian

### Scripture

The Apostle John wrote three letters toward the end of the first century. He was responsible for the churches around Ephesus. He loved the believers in the churches for which he was responsible. Some false teachers were making the rounds of the churches, teaching that Jesus was not the Son of God. So, John's letters were written to encourage Christians to know that they have eternal life.

The Second and Third Letters of John were each written on a single sheet of papyrus. The common theme in each of these letters is *hospitality* shown to traveling teachers. The Second Letter of John is concerned about *withholding* hospitality from false teachers, whereas the Third Letter of John is about *extending* hospitality to true teachers.

Today, we begin our study in the Third Letter of John. We will learn that this letter tells us about four men and their reputations. We begin by examining the reputation of the first man and learning how a commendable Christian lives.

Let's read about a commendable Christian in 3 John 1-8:

<sup>1</sup>The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.

<sup>2</sup>Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul. <sup>3</sup>For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. <sup>4</sup>I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

<sup>5</sup> Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, <sup>6</sup> who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. <sup>7</sup> For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. <sup>8</sup> Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth. (3 John 1-8)

## Introduction

In February, 2007, Anna Johnson wrote a story for *USA Today* titled, “Three Ultra-Athletes Run Across Sahara.” She wrote that Charlie Engle, Ray Zahab, and Kevin Lin know endurance better than most. For 111 days, they ran the equivalent of two marathons a day in order to cross the entire Sahara Desert on foot. They touched the waters in Senegal and then made their way through Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Libya, and Egypt to touch the waters of the Red Sea. Along the way, the trio faced blazing afternoons of over 100 degrees, jarring, freezing nights, sandstorms, tendonitis, violent sickness, and the usual aches, pains, and blisters. But the biggest challenge they faced can be summed up in one word: *water*. Finding pure, clean water gets to be a chore while in the middle of nowhere!

Crossing the Sahara Desert on foot is an amazing accomplishment. But, as someone noted, just as commendable are these marathon finishers:

- Christians who finish their lives still growing, still serving.
- Husbands and wives who stay faithful to each other “until death us do part.”
- Young people who preserve their purity until marriage,

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- in spite of crushing peer pressure.
- Pastors who stay passionate about ministry until their last breath.
- Church members who weather the rougher patches and remain joyful, loving, and faithful.<sup>1</sup>

John's Third Letter is written to a man named Gaius. It is clear that John has great affection for Gaius for he has lived a life worthy of commendation.

### Lesson

Third John 1-8 shows us how a commendable Christian lives.

Let's use the following outline:

1. A Commendable Christian Lives Spiritually (1-2)
2. A Commendable Christian Walks Truthfully (3-4)
3. A Commendable Christian Serves Faithfully (5-6)
4. A Commendable Christian Ministers Generously (7-8)

#### I. A Commendable Christian Lives Spiritually (1-2)

First, a commendable Christian lives spiritually.

John writes in verse 1, **“The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.”** As in his previous letter, John simply calls himself **“the elder.”** John writes to a man named **Gaius**. **Gaius** was a fairly common name in the first century.

When the Paul preached in Ephesus, a riot followed his preaching. Luke reports in Acts 19:29, “So the city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed together into the theater,

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2007/april/7040907.html>.

dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's companions in travel." Could this be the same Gaius to whom John was writing?

Paul concludes his letter to the Romans with final greetings. He writes in Romans 16:23, "Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you." Could this be the same Gaius to whom John was writing?

It is likely that the Gaius to whom John was writing was a leader in a local church, and probably not the same Gaius mentioned by Luke or Paul. John calls him the "**beloved**" Gaius. John refers to him as "**beloved**" four times in this short letter (in verses 1, 2, 5, and 11).

John says that he loves Gaius "**in truth.**" He used a similar expression in 2 John 1, where he wrote, "The elder to the elect lady and her children, *whom I love in truth*, and not only I, but also all who know the truth." Once again, John stresses the *truth* in his Third Letter. He uses the word "truth" six times in this Third Letter (in verses 1, 3 [two times], 4, 8, and 12). The truth to which John is referring has to do with the gospel, especially about how to have a relationship with God the Father through his Son, Jesus Christ.

Then John writes in verse 2, "**Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul.**" Ancient letters often have a prayer as part of the opening greeting. Thus John prays that Gaius' health and affairs may prosper in the same way that his soul prospers. John is thinking in terms of body and soul. He wants the best of both for Gaius. Gaius clearly was a Christian who paid attention to his spiritual life.

In our day, people pay little or no attention to our souls. This is true even for Christians. Just listen at a prayer meeting.

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The vast majority of concern is for the physical health of people. There is very little concern, at least in terms of time spent, for the souls of people. The worldwide COVID pandemic has accentuated the concern of people for their physical well-being. No one wants to get sick or, worse, die. That is a perfectly normal and proper desire.

However, it seems that little attention is paid to the health of our souls. We need to nourish our souls with the Word of God. We need to worship God with his people on the Lord's Day in person. We need to worship God every day in private. We need to spend time in focused prayer, not thinking that we have a healthy prayer life when the only time we pray is when we offer a sentence prayer here and there throughout the day. We nourish our souls by serving the Lord wholeheartedly.

By the way, I would be remiss if I did not note that 3 John 2 is a verse that has been terribly misused in the last couple of decades. It began with Oral Roberts reading this verse one morning and deciding that he had misunderstood God. He came to believe that on the basis of this verse, God intended for Christians to be healthy and prosperous. The health and wealth gospel is based on 3 John 2 in the *King James Version*, where it reads, "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." But that is not only a misunderstanding of this verse, it is a perversion of this verse. John was commending Gaius for his spiritual life, even as he was enjoying good physical health.

## II. A Commendable Christian Walks Truthfully (3-4)

Second, a commendable Christian walks truthfully.

John writes in verse 3, **"For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you**

**are walking in the truth.”** Apparently, John had received a visit from some Christians from the church of which Gaius was part. They may have been members of that congregation and were visiting John and gave him a report about Gaius. Of Gaius, they **“testified to your truth,”** meaning that he both knew the truth of the gospel and held fast to that truth. This news brought great joy to John.

A few years ago, I received an email from someone who was a fellow student at the University of Cape Town. We were both in one of the many Bible studies in our student residence on campus. I was the leader of the Bible study. He wrote to thank me for the Bible study and how it had helped him. He was now serving in a missions ministry to people in a country that is closed to missions. Receiving that email brought great joy to me as I learned that a fellow student was walking in the truth. Having received that email from my friend, I thought about others who had helped me grow in my faith and I might thank them for their role in my spiritual growth. There are always people to be thanked for helping me grow in Christ!

Then John goes on to write in verse 4, **“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.”** Once again, one sees here the heart of a pastor and his love for his flock and their spiritual well-being. He refers to his readers as **“my children,”** which means his children in the faith or those who had been converted through his ministry. It is John’s great joy to hear that his **“children”** are **“walking in the truth.”** They are remaining faithful to the gospel. They are persevering in their walk with Jesus. They are demonstrating that they are citizens of the kingdom of God.

Every faithful pastor longs to see the members of his congregation continue walking with the Lord. One of the great disappointments for a pastor is to see members unwilling to

grow in their faith or, worse, drift away from the truths that they once professed. It is hard for a pastor to see members move away to another city because they have relocated. It is harder yet for a pastor to see members stop worshiping and attending to the means of grace. It is rare for members to come forward and say that they are no longer walking in the truth. More likely, their attendance becomes less regular before it finally stops altogether. Shepherding calls, if at all answered, are met with polite “reasons” as to why their worship attendance has stopped. This drifting away from the truth breaks every faithful pastor’s heart.

### III. A Commendable Christian Serves Faithfully (5-6)

Third, a commendable Christian serves faithfully.

After the customary greeting, John begins writing the body of his Third Letter. John gives us a brief glimpse into the spread of the gospel in the first century. Traveling Christian teachers traveled from town to town. They could not afford to stay at the local inns and, even if they could afford it, they probably would not because of the bad reputation of those inns. So, local Christians offered the visiting preachers hospitality in their homes. So John writes to Gaius in verses 5-6, **“Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God.”**

John commends Gaius for his hospitality toward the visiting preachers. He writes in verse 6b, **“You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God.”** The *Didache* is an ancient church manual, dating back to the first century. It stated that visiting preachers should be given



enough food to enable him to reach his next night's lodging. It also stated that if the visiting preacher asked for money, then "he is a false prophet" (*Didache* 11:3-6). John also urges Gaius to send the visiting preachers on **"in a manner worthy of God."** It is God and not an individual who sets the standards for his servants.

Christian service and especially hospitality is a wonderful blessing to fellow Christians. My wife shared a story with me about a time when she was traveling with a friend. Their car broke down in Hershey, PA, I believe. They were able to get the car into a garage for repairs but, since it was a Saturday, the mechanic said the car would not be repaired until Monday. As I recall, my wife remembered that her pastor had sometimes talked about the wonderful hospitality of a church in that town. So, they called the church and someone answered the phone. They shared their predicament and the person had someone from the church call them. Within minutes, an older man and his wife picked up the two ladies, took them to their home, and housed them for two days while the car was being repaired. The older couple showered the two strangers with kindness, meals, and friendship. They were wonderful examples of Christians who serve faithfully.

This kind of hospitality is uncommon today. Perhaps we can start by inviting Christians over for coffee.

#### **IV. A Commendable Christian Ministers Generously (7-8)**

And fourth, a commendable Christian ministers generously.

John writes of these traveling teachers in verses 7-8, **"For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting**

**nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.”** The traveling teachers did not accept help from non-Christians so that they might not be falsely accused of trying to fleece them. The reason the traveling teachers went around as they did is **“for the sake of the name.”** They did it for the sake of Jesus. They wanted his name to become known by all. They wanted his message to be understood by all. Supporting traveling teachers joins people like Gaius to them and become **“fellow workers for the truth.”**

The Christian message must be financed by Christian people. That is John’s clear message. That is not to say that Christians should not accept help from well-meaning unbelievers. Jesus himself ate meals with Pharisees who did not believe in him (*cf.* Luke 7:36). Christians simply should not rely on non-Christians to finance the Christian enterprise. When we support ministers and missionaries we are joining them and becoming **“fellow workers for the truth.”** We may not be inclined to travel to foreign countries, learn a new language, embrace new customs, and so on. But we want to financially support those who are willing to do so. And by funding their ministry, we are joining in the glorious gospel enterprise. And by doing so, we minister generously for the sake of the name.

## Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed 3 John 1-8, let us aspire to be commended in our walk as Christians.

In his book titled *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City*, Tim Keller writes:

Often we say, “Well, I’m not very religious, but I’m a

good person – and that is what is most important.” But is it? Imagine a woman – a poor widow – with an only son. She teaches him how she wants him to live – to always tell the truth, to work hard, and to help the poor. She makes very little money, but with her meager savings she is able to put him through college. Imagine that when he graduates, he hardly ever speaks to her again. He occasionally sends a Christmas card, but he doesn’t visit her; he won’t answer her phone calls or letters; he doesn’t speak to her. But he lives just like she taught him – honestly, industriously, and charitably. Would we say this was acceptable? Of course not! Wouldn’t we say that by living a “good life” but neglecting a relationship with the one to whom he owed everything he was doing something condemnable? In the same way, if God created us and we owe him everything and we do not live for him but we “live a good life,” it is not enough. We all owe a debt that must be paid.<sup>2</sup>

Keller is right. We owe God everything. He gave us new life in his Son, Jesus. He adopted us into his family. He gives us his Spirit. He will bring us safely to glory where we will spend all eternity with him.

Do you want to know how to give everything to God? Gaius is a great example. Gaius teaches us that a commendable Christian lives spiritually, walks truthfully, serves faithfully, and ministers generously.

May that be true of each one of us. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 34.

# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church  
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can  
be found at:

1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons).
2. [www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp](http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp).
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