

Jason Upchurch - 3 John 1-8 - 6 Marks of a Faithful Church - Part 1

This morning I want to use this little book of 3 John as a launchpad to talk about core values in a church. I usually don't like talking about "core values" because it sounds like some sort of board meeting with executives and cushy chairs and PowerPoint that makes me want to take a nap.

So let me just tell you where I'm coming from.

During my sabbatical we stopped at different churches each Lord's Day. The first church we stopped at was called Omaha Bible Church. It was David who mentioned the pastor some time ago, so we visited and they really sought to bless us.

They had a little book store and I'm in there I grab a couple of books on political theology because I'm a nerd. And the guy taking payment asked about my choices. So I told him I was on Sabbatical and also on city council so I was curious about reformed political thought. He came up to me after church and said he was an elder at the church and would like me to go pick out a few more books and the church would just give them to us.

So while I'm picking out a few more books, that same elder tells the pastor what's going on and the pastor comes over and just encourages us. And we walked away with a stack of books, t shirts, hoodies, stickers - it was amazing. They asked if we needed anything else and then sent us on our way.

The next morning I was reading 3rd John with Emily and it occurred to me that within this very short book there are several themes that lend themselves as marks of a faithful church. Especially **Vss. 5-6x** really hit me. **Read**

John was encouraging the church to do what we had just experienced. So this book stayed in my mind throughout our trip. ANd as we visited different churches - all of which were a blessing in one way or another - I kept thinking these things are what RBC should be known for.

There are 6 basic values here that I want to tease out. We'll look at 3 today and three next week.

Before I start, let me say that these are ones that stuck in my head. There's always going to be people who have principles or values that are evidenced in a church. 9 Marks ministries has 9 Marks of a healthy church. Other people have 10 principles this, or 5 important things that.

I'm not looking to get a banner made of these or make this some sort of outsized continual emphasis. But I do want us to consider these and how we implement them as a church.

1) Genuine Concern for others. Read 1-4

The first thing we see in this small book is genuine concern for others. Here, that concern is mostly tied up in the word love. Gaius is loved and John wants him to know that. Five times in 15 verses Gaius is told he is loved.

Vs 1: He is the "beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth." John opens the letter by telling Gaius he is loved 2 times. He is beloved: that is, everyone loves Gaius. Every Christian anyway. He holds a special place in the heart of the church.

And John also loves him. This is John the apostle who whom Jesus loved. And John the apostle - humbly referring to himself as just an elder - makes sure Gaius knows he loves him.

Listen, part of having genuine concern for people is letting them know that they are loved and specifically that you love them. This isn't some sort of weak, effeminate "we just need to make sure we're in touch everyone's feelings" thing.

No, but it is important to reassure people that they are loved. You might not think this is a big deal, but over and over in the Bible the way God comforts us and encourages us to remind us that he loves us.

For God so loved the world
Nothing can separate us from the love of God
There is no greater love than he should lay down his life for another
The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.

As Christians we need to say this and be told this. In my family growing up, we told each other we loved each other all the time. Hanging up the phone, headed off to work, going to bed at night. Just all the time.

Some of you didn't grow up like that and expressing love is unusual or even hard. Maybe hearing it feels weird. Let me just encourage you to go ahead and get over that nonsense and tell people you love them. Look at this.

Read 1-2, 5-6, 11

One of the easiest ways to show you have concern for others is to simply tell them you love them. Especially when they're going through a hard situation. Gaius is facing a church split because a guy named Demetrius is trying to dominate the congregation.

One thing you need to hear when things are getting crazy in life is that you're loved. We're on your side, we're in your corner.

John says in **Vs. 1:** whom I love in truth. What does that mean? Does it mean John loves Gaius sincerely - like he truly loves him? Or does it mean he loves Gaius because of the truth, because of the gospel?

Most people think this is classic apostle John being intentionally vague and meaning both. He sincerely loves Gaius, and he loves Gaius because of the gospel truth that Gaius believes.

The gospel builds into us a special love for other believers that we might not even have with our own family. People you would never care for are now your beloved brothers.

We've been watching baseball this year and players switch teams in baseball more than I switch socks. You can go from being an arch nemesis with a guy to friends in a matter of days if they traded to your team mid season.

Your one-time enemy is now making clutch plays, hitting homers and pushing you to victory just like the Apostle Paul was throwing people in prison and killing Stephen one day and preaching lights out sermons the next.

That's how the gospel works. People go from sons of satan to sons of God through faith in the gospel and all of a sudden we love sincerely because we love them in the gospel.

This concern - this love - manifests itself here in at least 2 ways. **Read 2-3**

John actually cares about Gaius's health. It's not worldly to be concerned about someone's health. It's not immature.

People who love me ask me about my physical wellbeing. "How's your back?" "How's your knee doing?" "How's your headaches?" Christians are body and soul - so what happens with our body is an important feature of who we are. And just know that the older you get the more your body will break down.

2 Cor. 4: the outer man is wasting away but the inner man is being renewed day by day.

We care about people's health and bodies. Of course we also care for their soul. **Read 2**

John doesn't just care about Gaius's health, he cares about his soul. In fact, the point is he cares as much about his body as he already cares about his soul. It's both.

We need to care about peoples' souls. Today everybody talks about therapy and counseling and mental health - whatever that even means.

Most modern therapy and mental health talk is absolute gobbledegook and files in the face of biblical truth and actual care for the soul.

In pastoral ministry, counseling used to just be called soul care. Part of genuine concern for people is asking the hard questions about what's going on on the inside.

Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones, the amazing Welsh pastor 100 years ago was said he was a great pastor because he was a great medical doctor. He knew good questions to ask, diagnose the problem and recommend a solution.

We need to care about peoples' souls.

How's your walk with Jesus?

How can I be praying for you?

What are you reading in the Bible right now?

Do you know why you are anxious or depressed?

What's causing all the anger and angst in your life?

Proverbs says the wise man skillfully draws out the inner person - the soul - and then applies appropriate truth. We do that because we love people. And have genuine concern for them.

Genuine concern for people is a mark of a God-honoring church.

2) Commitment to the Truth - One of the themes of John's short letter here is truth. **Read 1-4, 8, 12, 2 John 1-11**

Truth is of utmost importance to John. What God has revealed to us in his word is our entire hope. And so we guard it and defend it and live by it.

Not just the easy stuff, but the hard stuff too.

Paul says that the church - that's every believer in every congregation - is the pillar and buttress of truth. I've seen a lot of pillars and buttresses over the last couple of months. WA DC is filled with pillars and buttresses with all the Roman inspired architecture. What do pillars and buttresses do?

They hold up massive amounts of weight. If they fail the whole building fails. The church is the pillar - the thing that holds up - the truth. If we fail to uphold the truth The entirety of the faith we profess collapses.

Jude says that we should contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. We fight for the truth of the faith.

So we genuinely care about people - their body and soul. But we also care about what they believe and truth of the gospel.

John says his love is based on truth. **Read 3**

So some brothers went and visited Gaius's church and the report back was that the church was committed to the truth. And not just that they talk about the truth but that they're walking in it. They're living by it.

John says it in a little bit of a weird way: testified to your truth. That almost sounds like modern day "you do you." Everyone is encouraged to have their own personal version of their truth. As though truth is subjective. It's not. It never has been.

For our modern context, the idea is more “they testified to your commitment to the truth.” That’s the idea. Gaius is committed to the truth.

In fact, Gaius’s commitment to the truth is what brings John the absolute most joy in life. **Read 4**

That’s pretty amazing. He has no greater joy than people walking in the truth. His children are probably those whom he has discipled over the years. And he’s glad to hear that they’re still following the Lord and committed to the truth of the gospel.

That’s what we want too isn’t it? We want people to walk in the truth. If you’re a Christian long enough you’ll see countless people abandon the truth.

They abandon it for lies, for sin, for sex, for money, for hobbies, for all kinds of reasons.

And especially if you haven’t seen a Christian friend for a long time, one of the biggest concerns is whether or not they’re still walking in the truth.

Have they abandoned the gospel or have they fallen away? Are they falling into the woke nonsense? Are they getting caught up in conspiracy theories or other nonsense?

I’ll be at a funeral this week and there’s people planning to come that I haven’t seen for 20-30 years. People I knew from church long ago. And although I’m thankful for their care and concern honestly my biggest concern is: are you walking in the truth? Are you walking with Jesus? And I know that many don’t anymore and my heart kind of aches.

And in order to walk in the truth the church has to preach the truth. When we were traveling across the country I wanted to visit solid churches. How do you figure out what those are in a short amount of time? It’s hard.

My imperfect solution was to look at 3 websites. The Gospel Coalition church finder, the 9Marks church finder, and a 1689 London baptist church finder. If a church was on any one of those sites, that usually narrowed the search quickly.

I say imperfect because the Gospel Coalition and 9Marks have not been as dedicated to the truth. They’ve gone down some weird roads in the last few years. So much so that our church is on there and I’ve asked to be taken off, but no one even manages the list anymore.

But it gets me in the ball park for reformed-ish churches that are committed to the truth. My next stop is to take the churches that pop up and look at their doctrinal statement. Do they hold to orthodoxy? Are they weird? What’s the vibe of their website? Is it weird?

I look at the staff - are there women elders? Is the pastor and his wife listed as pastors? I look at the pastor’s bio information - where did he go to school? Is he into weird stuff?

To be really honest, this isn’t that hard. It took me about 20 minutes for each Sunday and each church we went to was good. Two of the churches I would totally become a member of if we lived in the area.

Why? Because I was so glad - I had great joy - that they were walking in the truth. The same truth we hold to here is being proclaimed in all kinds of places you’ve never heard of. Small town Michigan, the suburbs of Washington DC, outskirts of Nebraska between corn fields, in the industrial parks of rural Ohio.

We’re not the only ones. Not by a long shot.

Jesus said I am the way, the truth, the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Truth is important because if we get it wrong with Jesus then the way to Father is shut.

Messing with the truth just a little bit is spiritual cyanide.

If Jesus is mostly God, but not fully God. You're dead.
If Jesus is mostly human but not fully human, you're dead.
If you're entire hope of salvation isn't in Jesus, you're dead.
You can have Jesus and keep your sin. Dead.

If God isn't creator, if there's no future resurrection, if Jesus isn't the Messiah, if you love your sin more than you love Jesus - you're dead.

You're dead in your sins.

Romans 6:17 says that salvation happens when you become committed to the heart to a form of doctrine - a body of truth.

The reason we have a doctrinal statement grounded in historical Christianity is because the truth matters. And we're committed to the truth.

Never be ashamed of being committed to the truth. You're going to be slandered. You're a fundamentalist.
Yeah, I am actually. I like the fundamental truths of the faith.

You're a right winger. You have no idea how right wing I actually am.

You're one of those extreme Christians who think our country should be Christian. No. I am one of those extremes Christians who thinks every nation should be Christian because Jesus told us to go into all the nations.

One other comment on truth that's obvious here, but truth should bring us joy. A lot of people think truth and theology and Bible suck the joy right out of us.

John says that truth being upheld by Christians is the height of his joy. You want joy in your Christian life? You need to grow in truth. Crack open your Bible, crack open theology books, listen to sermons.

God wants his church to be filled with joy. To do that, we have to walk in truth.

God honoring churches have a genuine concern for others, they are committed to the truth.

3) Generous to Christian Strangers. Read 5-8

One of the key features of the early church was generosity to traveling Christians. Travel in the ancient world was expensive and slow and hard.

Our problem when we travel is "how do I narrow down which church to go to." I mean, praise the Lord we're trying to find the crème of the crop. Their problem was "is there even a church in this town and how do I find it?"

Let me point out a couple things. First, Gaius's church is making an effort to bless outside Christians. **Read 5**

Gaius and the church are intentional to figure out how to bless people. They are proactive to engage and seek out meeting the needs of others.

Along our travels many people sought out how to bless us. Did we need anything? I'm pulling a trailer and there's a guy who's like "do you need water or power? A place to stay?" Others asked if we needed food.

Our church is part of the INC - the Inland Northwest Cooperative. We were driving through Montana and we were planning to stop at a church in Missoula. They were going to let us park in their parking lot, get all set up.

But they had a mentality of coming to church and thinking: how could I possibly bless others today? How can I help them on their way?

Notice also that these are strangers. **Read 5**

These aren't the close friends. It's natural to gravitate to close friends in the congregation. That's fine. We can be friends. But if you see a stranger in the congregation go talk with them. Don't assume other people will.

If you were having a party in your home and saw someone you didn't know in your own home you'd go talk with them. You guys, most of your houses are bigger than this church - go make an effort to bless strangers.

Notice, there's no long term relationship here. **Read 6**

They are strangers to the church and they are just passing through. But the effort isn't a wasted effort. The church is blessing the whole kingdom and the whole kingdom knows. I mean, the entire church for 2,000 years now has a record of the testimony of this little congregation's generosity to strangers.

We're not called to just invest in long term relationships. We should, you should be cultivating good friendships in the Lord. You should be regularly praying for people and reaching out to people.

But sometimes God calls us to have quick relationships.

John makes it clear, that generosity to strangers is what we ought to be doing. **Read 7-8**

If you've got brothers and sisters who are committed to the truth of the gospel and they are passing through, bless them. We do occasionally get people who are just passing through. What a privilege it would be to be the church they talk about for the rest of their life because we treated them like kings.

We'll look at the rest of the chapter next week.

Pray