

# FAITHFULNESS TO THE TRUTH

3 John 1:1-14

Key Verse: 1:1

**“The elder, To my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth.”**

3 John is a letter from St. John to a young man, Gaius. In this letter, St. John is very happy about brother Gaius' church members who are faithful to the truth. So he blesses them both physically and spiritually. St. John also gives them an instruction to be hospitable to strangers. "Strangers" meant those who were traveling around preaching the gospel of salvation, depending on God's help only. When we study this book, the epistle of 3 John, we learn that the entire flow of the contents seems to be how to make friendship in Jesus.

## **First, to my dear friend Gaius (1).**

Look at verse 1. "The elder, To my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth." Here, old and saintly John writes an epistle to Gaius, who seemed to have been a young man who was faithful to the truth, and whom St. John loved most. In verse 1, we learn an important spiritual lesson. St. John was known as the top-class apostle. But he called Gaius, the young man, "my dear friend." At that time, to be called "friend" by a renowned apostle was not an ordinary event. When we study the Bible carefully, the word "friend" has a deep meaning in it. When we think about the word "friend" in the Bible, naturally we remember the friendship between God and Abraham. Abraham is known as the friend of God. Isaiah 41:8b says, "...you descendants of Abraham my friend." Also, James 2:23b says, "...and he [Abraham] was called God's friend." In the Bible, to be a friend of God or of the saints is a great honor. Also, it involves great sacrifice and recognition of divine character. God and Abraham were good friends. Once, God saw that Sodom and Gomorrah's violence and injustice were too great. So God decided to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah after long-suffering patience (Ge 18-19). Before going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, God appeared as the three visitors to Abraham. Abraham was so happy to have the strangers to his house. He begged them to stay at his house overnight. He said to Sarah, "Quick, get three seahs of fine flour and knead it and bake some bread" (Gen 18:6). The old man, Abraham, ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and made Hebron beef steaks. Then the angel revealed that he is God Almighty and said in Genesis 18:10, "I will

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surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son." At last, God was going to give Abraham a son after 25 years of waiting. It was good news personally to Abraham and Sarah, who had a no-son problem. More than this, God told Abraham all the secrets he had had in his mind. God told a top secret to Abraham. We cannot but say he is a friend of God's. The secret was that God would destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. In Genesis 18:20,21, God revealed his top secret to Abraham, saying, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know." There was no secret in the friendship between God and Abraham, because God trusted Abraham not to reveal his secret to others. At the moment, Abraham remembered Lot who was living in Sodom and Gomorrah. So he begged God to rescue Lot. He prayed to God, saying, "If there are fifty righteous people in the city, would you really destroy it and not spare the city for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it?" (Gen 18:24) Abraham was very slow in accounting. But when he thought about the situation of Sodom and Gomorrah, he was afraid that there would not be fifty righteous people for whom God would subside his anger. So he began to cut down the number of righteous men, five by five, from fifty to ten. Here we see a real picture of friendship. There is kindness and understanding and great sacrifice in the friendship among God's people. God said to Abraham, "Ten righteous men? Okay." Actually, there were not ten righteous men. Finally, Abraham revealed why he prayed to God so persistently. It was for the sake of rescuing his nephew, Lot. God agreed to save Lot and his family members.

Divine friendship transcends human love. One day God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about" (Gen 22:2). Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. He had cut enough wood for the burnt offering and he set out for the place God had told him about (Ge 22:3). When they arrived at the mountain, Isaac said, "The fire and wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son" (Ge 22:7-8a). Then Abraham reached out his hand and took his knife to slay his son. The Lord called out from heaven, "Abraham, Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. Then God said, "Do not lay a hand on the boy. Do not do

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anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son" (Gen 22:12). The friendship between God and Abraham was indeed remarkable. Without this friendship, world salvation work could not have started. Because there was a beautiful friendship between God and Abraham, it was possible for God to carry out world salvation work, starting with Abraham. Mad dogs and poisonous snakes cannot have friendship. They tear and bite one another. We cannot say that this brutal animal activity is friendship. Friendship cannot be done without divine discipline. Abraham received divine discipline for 25 years. Finally, he grew up as a man of God from among terribly ungodly people of the world. Thus he could be a friend of God. Without friendship, nothing happens in this world.

We cannot forget the story of the friendship between Jonathan and David (1Sa 17-2Sa 1). Once, Philistines surrounded the Israelite armies at Socoh in Judah. The Philistine champion Goliath shouted like a roaring lion to have a duel, saying, "Choose a man and have him come down to me. If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects; but if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us" (1Sa 17:8b,9). For forty days Goliath came forward every morning and evening and took his stand and taunted the armies of Israel. The armies of Israel were so terrified that they lost their hearts. As soon as David arrived to see about his brothers, at his father's request, he heard about the champion Goliath's challenge to a duel and the boy David accepted it. The Philistine champion was nine feet tall; his spear shaft was like a weaver's rod and its iron point weighed 600 shekels. But the boy David said to the Philistine champion, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head" (1Sa 17:45,46). In the duel, David won with a sling shot. Thus, David became a very famous warrior of faith in Israel.

After this event, he became King Saul's army commander. But the humanistic King Saul became jealous of the boy David. When they were returning home after the victory, the women sang, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands" (1Sa 18:7). Even though King Saul made him the commander over his army, he determined to

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destroy David at the opportune time. On the other hand, King Saul's son Jonathan was different from King Saul. Jonathan became one in spirit with David and he loved him as himself (18:1), instead of being jealous of him. And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself (1Sa 18:1-3). Friendship is indeed sweet. When Jonathan saw David's greatness, he recognized him as a great man. And he gave his bow and belt to David to confirm his covenant friendship with David. In the course of time, Saul was chasing David to destroy him, as he had been doing for the last 13 years. But Jonathan promised David that he would be a friend to him forever. 1 Samuel 20:42 says, "Jonathan said to David, 'Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the Lord, saying, "The Lord is witness between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants forever.'"" Later, David was wandering around in the desert with his 400 followers (1Sa 22:1,2). His wandering was indeed sorrowful and helpless. In addition, his parents and relatives and all the helpless people came to him for help. So he became even more helpless. Probably, he thought he was too young to die. Still, his suffering was too hard to bear. In this situation, Jonathan visited David in the desert and said, "Don't be afraid. My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this" (1Sa 23:17). The two of them made a covenant again. There is a saying, "A friend in need is a friend indeed." Maybe this saying, "a friend in need is a friend indeed," came from the friendship between Jonathan and David. They loved each other so much. When they had to depart, they kissed each other and wept together--but David wept the most (20:41). Time passed by rapidly, so rapidly. During the time of King Saul's chasing after David, the armies of the Philistines grew and grew. Finally, they invaded the armies of Israel. Even King Saul and Jonathan had to fight on the battleground. King Saul and his son Jonathan fell by the sword of the Philistines. King Saul had pursued David to destroy him. But David never forgot that Saul was the Lord's anointed king and Jonathan's father. David lamented by saying, "O daughters of Israel, weep for Saul, who clothed you in scarlet and finery, who adorned your garments with ornaments of gold. How the mighty have fallen in battle!" (2Sa 1:24,25) Next, he grieved over the death of Jonathan, saying, "I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women. How the mighty have fallen!" (2Sa 1:26,27) In the lamentation of David for Jonathan, the words, "Your love for me was

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wonderful, more wonderful than that of women," might be the most poetic expression, more than that of Shakespeare, who said, "To be, or not to be; that is the question."

These days there are not real friendships among men. They have girlfriends and boyfriends, but we can scarcely find the true friendship among men. May God bless us that many young men may have friendships among men, friendships which are wonderful, more wonderful than that of women. Since young men began to have only girlfriends and young women began to have only boyfriends, this friendship was gone and disaster has risen sky high. Where there is friendship among men, the influence of friendships makes families stable, as well as societies and nations.

Jesus is the Son of God. So he doesn't have to be friends with mundane men with fallen mentality. But he did his best to make friends with his twelve disciples. It was not easy for him to make friends with them, because they were typical mundane men and mostly men from the bottom of society. They were good at political competition and eating. They were, as a matter of fact, nobodies. Even though Jesus is the Son of God and came to this world to become the atoning sacrifice by shedding his blood for the sin of the world, he made friends with the twelve apostles until a vine and branch relationship was established. He said in John 15:13-14, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command." Jesus recognized his twelve disciples, who were very immature, as his friends, even though they were his disciples. Jesus strongly stressed the friendship among men. Jesus believed that when the Twelve became true friends in God, they would change the world and world mission would be possible. In light of this lesson, we must learn that, among our men fellowship directors and vice-directors, we must make friends with one another as Jesus made friends with his disciples. Then we can change the world by God's grace. We can reach out to 187 countries with our missionaries. We must pray to change the worldly consensus that young people only want to have girlfriends and boyfriends, even from among married people. We must really pray for them to have many men friends among men, and many women friends among women. As history proves, when we have friendships between men and men and between women and women, families will be stable, society will be stable, and this country will be stable as well. Maybe you would say,

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"Why is it so important to make friends among young men and among young women?" But in history, friends among men are so important. For example, as we know well, Martin Luther (1483-1546) was a low-class Catholic monk. But he did not like the corruption of the Church. So he wrote 99 theses and displayed them in public. His life was at risk from religious temple police and the pressure of the church. After his discussion with men of the church hierarchy at Worms, on the way home, Philipp Melanchthon (1497-1560) kidnapped him and kept him in a castle. In the castle, Luther translated the Septuagint into the German Bible. For this, Melanchthon gave his heart for his friend Luther. There is no Luther without Melanchthon. Another example is John Calvin (1509-1564). In Calvin's time, the Catholic hierarchy massacred Christians, condemning them as heretics. But Calvin wrote "The Institutes of the Christian Religion" to the king of France at the age of 22. Without the help of his friend Huldreich Zwingli (1484-1531), Calvin's writing for the defense of the Protestant church and new Christendom in Geneva would have been impossible. In short, without Zwingli, there is no Calvin. Likewise, we must have at least one friend. Then God will bless our friendship among us and make us great men in this generation.

Let's read verse 1 again. "The elder, To my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth." St John was an eminent Christian leader at that time. Gaius was a young man, unknown to the Christian world. But St. John called him "friend," instead of calling him, "Hey, you boy." It was possible for St. John to call him "friend," because he honored God as God and honored God's servants both young and old, as God's servants. We can make friends when we have self-esteem, the fear of God, divine respect and divine love. As UBF leaders, among men, there are many friends. Still, let's ask God's mercy to have faith to have many more friends among men.

## **Second, faithfulness to the truth (2-4).**

St. John was very happy to hear that Gaius' church members were faithful to the truth. So he blessed them. Look at verses 2-3. "Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well. It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth." According to these

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verses, St. John blessed that all may go well with Gaius and that he would have good health, and also that he may have spiritual health. In the past, we greeted by saying, "How are you?" It meant a greeting about the other person's well-being. But these days, many say as their greeting, "How are you doing?" They don't greet the other person, but talk about his business. They imply, "How are you doing in getting instant benefits?" We have to go back to saying the greeting, "How are you?" instead of "How are you doing?" We must not only say, "How are you?" but we must also bless with the blessings of God as St. John mentioned in 2 John 1:3, "Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, will be with us in truth and love."

St. John was very happy to hear about their faithfulness to the truth and also that they walked in the truth. We must understand the meaning of faithfulness. Faithfulness is the expression of our own personal faith to Jesus. Unfaithful people never committed themselves to God. Unfaithful people neglect to be loyal to Jesus. Unfaithful people are very proud and critical like one lady in our fellowship. Without faithfulness we cannot please God. So whatever we do for the glory of God, we must do with a life-giving spirit. St. John said in Revelation 2:10b, "Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life." Hebrews 13:8 says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." Jesus was faithful to the will of God, even to death on the cross. St. Paul was faithful when he was old and tired. One of the prison epistles is Philemon. That letter reveals God's compassion on human beings so well. Among Paul's prison mates, there was Onesimus, who stole his owner's money and secretly got into Rome. He was arrested and put in prison and he became a prison mate of St. Paul. He was a devious and dangerous young man. In the past, those who stole money as slaves were supposed to be hanged. But he ventured to go to Rome by running away from his master. He was a dangerous person to approach. But St. Paul taught him the Bible one to one. He was changed. Paul wrote an epistle to Philemon and sent Onesimus back to him, asking him to treat Onesimus as one of the brothers. Paul could do that because he was faithful to his Lord Jesus. In his epistle to Philemon, he didn't mention anything about his hardship in the prison. He pleaded with Philemon and his church members to accept Onesimus as one of their brothers, even though he was a runaway slave. Truth is that faithfulness comes from the love of

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God. When we realize the love of God, that God sent his one and only Son as the atoning sacrifice, and shed his blood for the sin of the world, we can be faithful to God. Unfaithfulness seems to be beneficial. But unfaithful people are living in the darkness, not in the truth. Here the "truth" refers to Jesus.

## **Third, be hospitable to stranger-brothers (5-13).**

In the past, the proclamation of the gospel of salvation was possible by those who travelled from town to town, village to village and country to country. But usually Christian Bible teachers did not have money. They used to find fellow Christian brethren and stay with them. They never received help from the pagans. We call them stranger-brothers, because they are brothers in Christ, but they are strangers. They were like the horse-riding preachers during Whitefield's time. During John's time, all Christians were gospel preachers. But the number of churches could be counted on one's fingers. These stranger-brothers came so frequently. There was a danger of being arrested by pagan authorities for those welcoming a stranger-brother. Yet they had an even more difficult problem. It was to feed them while they were staying as long as they stayed. As we know, in ancient times, very rich people could afford to eat two meals a day. But ordinary people barely ate one meal a day. So we can guess how difficult it was to treat these constantly crowding stranger-brothers. But St. John urges them to treat them well. Look at verse 8. "We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth." In America, to give hospitality to a stranger-brother is very difficult. But thank God that UBF brethren are eager to give good hospitality to stranger-brethren. We must be ready to give good hospitality to stranger-brethren at our 1997 UBF International Summer Bible Conference. There is one American shepherd who is so hospitable to Christian brethren. So he invited many guests to his apartment. He even invited his senior shepherd to his dinner table more than five times during the last ten years. In the Old Testament teaching, to give hospitality to strangers is emphasized frequently. The people of Sodom and Gomorrah were very selfish. But Abraham's nephew Lot was very hospitable. When the angels visited him, he invited them to his house. Abraham was the most exemplary person in giving hospitality. When he was ready to give hospitality to the three strangers, he met God. He also heard the good news that he would have a

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son after one year.

In the church there was a man named Diotrephes, who loved to be first. But his act of faith was less than nothing. What he was doing was gossiping maliciously, speaking about Christian brethren. In addition, he refused to welcome the brothers and did not give hospitality to them. He also stopped those who wanted to give hospitality. If they invited strangers to their houses, he put them out of the church. St. John was very sorry about Diotrephes because he spoke very subtle things to deceive Christian brethren, and he was not hospitable to the brethren (9-10). St. John encourages them to be good Christians who can give good hospitality to strangers. Look at verse 11. "Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God." There was a young man called Demetrius. He was very hospitable to the stranger-brethren. So his testimony was regarded as true. St. John wanted Christian brethren to be like Demetrius. Giving good hospitality is what is pleasing to God. Those who are not hospitable are not doing what is good to God, and vice versa.

Today we learned how to make a good friendship in Jesus. We also learned that we must be faithful to our Lord Jesus and that we must also be very hospitable to our Christian brethren. All these are possible when we realize the love of God through his Son who became an atoning sacrifice for the sin of the world.