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Synergy

Postcards from John, Part 11

3 John 8

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

The Christian church should be an example of synergistic support as it lives for Christ and shares His truth to the world around it. This is where the parts of the body of Christ strive to work to meet the physical, financial, and spiritual needs it has to enable the body as a whole to serve God heartily and productively. The church should be a place where the definition of synergy is lived out – through the combining of our efforts, God can accomplish much.

Discussion Points:

The Apostle John uses the word ‘ought’ in 3 John 8 to emphasize the readers’ ownership in the teamwork that God has designed for the church to live out.

- In what ways do you see the early church in Acts living out this synergy?
- Why does the modern church need to concern itself with the same type of synergy?
- Where do you see your local church body living this out?

Throughout his letters, the Apostle Paul continually reminds and encourages his readers to participate in and support his ministry through the physical provisions he needed to live and use to spread the gospel.

- Would you be considered to be like one of the underwriters of William Carey’s mission work in India or would you be more like one of the pastors who thought Carey’s mission was a waste? Why?
- When you hear of opportunities to support a missionary, pastor, or gospel worker, what are your initial thoughts? Do those thoughts line up with scripture?
- How does supporting full-time gospel workers tie into the truth that John refers to in 3 John?

Discussion Guide Cont.

Taking a synergistic approach may not come naturally. Thankfully we have God's Word and His Holy Spirit to help us live as He desires us to.

- In what ways are you developing a sense of synergy within the body of Christ?
- How is your spirit of generosity growing within the body of Christ?
- In what ways does God provide what is need to live as He desires us to?

Gospel Connection:

Without Jesus our worship and our ministry would be worthless. Because of the blood of our Savior, we are able to sacrifice our lives and resources to spread the gospel message to a desperate and dying world. Because of Jesus we have an eternity in heaven to look forward to and a hope that we can share.

Practical implications:

Think: How can I better pray for and support those in full-time ministry?

Pray: Praise God for the blessings that He has bestowed on me. Ask for more opportunities to use those blessings to bless others, especially those in gospel ministry.

Do: Open myself up to the opportunities God will bring my way to physically, financially or spiritually support others in the body of Christ.

Synergy

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3 John 8

Synergy is a popular word today and is recognized in virtually every aspect of our busy world.

If you look it up, you'll find synergy defined as:

The combined power of a group of agents working together that is greater than the total power achieved by individual agents working alone. (Miriam-Webster: Synergy)

In other words:

You alone can accomplish only so much; but you and someone else combining your efforts, can accomplish so much more.

In a word, synergy is teamwork . . . cooperation . . . collaboration . . . here's a word everyone knows a lot about – collusion. Now you're awake. Collusion is illegal synergy . . . where people work together secretly to influence something they aren't supposed to – it could be the price of stock on Wall Street, a contractors bid, or – as we hear every day – as it relates to political influence.

In the spiritual world, the positive side of synergy is the church – offering what you can do with others so that we accomplish the job. Think of all the moving parts on this campus today.

Synergy is disciple making. It is taking the time to reach and teach someone what you know, so that together you go on to accomplish more than you could ever accomplish alone.

Let me give you an illustration of synergy right in front of you. You're listening to me speak right now – at least that's the theory.

Every word I speak is taking the synergistic effort – the combined cooperation – of 72 different muscles.

Different muscles are working together synergistically in order for me to speak these words. Seventy-two muscles cooperating . . . I

didn't know I had that many muscles that were still cooperating.

Let me give you another illustration on the impact of synergy, which is really disciple-making – here's something I read recently.

When a female ant of a certain species – which I cannot pronounce – goes out to bring back food, she will choose a younger ant to accompany her.

As the older ant runs along the path to food she's already found, by the way – the student will follow behind, but will often fall behind, stopping to identify landmarks, exploring each side of the path. And that creates a gap between them – and the teaching ant will repeatedly have to stop.

Then, each time, when the younger ant is ready, it will run forward and tap the teacher on her back legs. And off they'll run again. Stopping and starting, stopping and starting, again and again.

As you can imagine, this process is especially tiring to the older ant – that's like you trying to get dinner ready with a 3-year-old in the kitchen – or your husband - I'm sure he's trying to be helpful.

Well, researchers have observed that if the teacher was able to travel by herself, she could travel four times faster.

Instead, the student ant ends up learning how to do it and is able to teach other young ants, which increases the potential of the entire colony.

Now, get this – some teacher-ants in this species, for some unknown reason, decide to keep doing it all themselves. They actually sling the young ant onto their back, upside down, and carry them to the food source and then drop them off to help them haul the food back.

It all works faster. They both load up with food and head back home. However, this young ant isn't able to go back alone, because it can't remember how to get back to the food source – and that's because it was carried there by the adult, upside down.ⁱ

Synergy never takes place and the work of one ant never multiplies into the lives of others, in what we could easily apply to the process of disciple making.

Yes, it will take you longer . . . but in the end you've doubled – and then tripled the work force.

Synergy takes place when you take your place – whatever God gives you and wherever God places you – but you recognize that you're there to work with others, to cooperate with others; to pool your resources with others; to combine your efforts with others – so that together you accomplish more than you could ever accomplish alone.

And this is exactly the idea in the mind of an old disciple maker named John – let me show you as we turn again in our *New Testaments to the Third letter from John*.

Let's back up and get a running start at **3 John verse 5** where Gaius is being commended for helping these vocational church leaders who had come through town.

In fact, I want you to follow along in your text and I'm going to read my own amplified paraphrase to include some of the interpretation we pulled out of this text in our last study together.

Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and especially when they are strangers; and they have testified to your love before in the church. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. For they went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles (3 John 5-7).

Paraphrase: *My dearly loved friend, you are acting faithfully in all the ways you serve these church workers, and especially those whom you've never met before; they have testified in a church service of your loving*

hospitality. Keep doing such a beautiful job as you care for them, just like you would care for God if He showed up at your home. For they took the gospel out on the road, to tell the world about Jesus – the Name above every name; and they were determined not to rely on the financial support of unbelievers.

And that's where we left off . . . now, let's unpack what John writes next in **verse 8**.

Therefore we ought to support such men so that we may be fellow workers with the truth (3 John 8).

I want to prayerfully attempt to capture the meaning and passion of John's words by giving you two key words that summarize his closing statement on this subject.

1. The first word is ownership.

John writes,

Therefore we ought to support such men (3 John 8a).

The word John uses for **ought** is a strong word which refers to a moral obligation.ⁱⁱ

And in this context, John is making the case for the church to effectively support vocational church workers. These men included traveling evangelists, teachers, church-planters – what we refer to here at Colonial as vocational pastors, church staff members, global partners and global staff members who work in other countries around the world.

Now you need to understand that in the early days of the church, there wasn't anything like a vocational, fully funded ministry occupation – whether you were a pastor or a global worker or an evangelist or a church planter or engineer or teacher on some mission field, or however you might serve the Lord – as we put it – “full time”.

John is suggesting that very thing! In fact, he uses the present tense for this obligation which lets us know that this is a standing obligation of the church.ⁱⁱⁱ

This was a radical idea.

In our last session, I mentioned William Carey – a man who would pioneer in modern days the ministry in India – he's known to us today as the Father of Modern Missions.

He asked four businessmen to hold the ropes of support so that he could descend into the gold mine of India. He couldn't go without their support and they couldn't reach India without him going. There had to be synergy. And so they made that now famous rope-holding pledge to support William Carey.

But even before he decided to leave for India, he began to take as much time as he could to study the word and preach and evangelize in his region. In fact, several pastors noted that their pews were filling up with the results of William Carey's disciple making efforts.

But as a result, his work as a shoe cobbler was beginning to pile up and his life was becoming really difficult with this bi-vocational challenge.

In fact, I read in his biography how a friend sort of got onto him one day for "neglecting his shoemaking business" to which Carey replied, "Neglecting my business? My business, is to extend the kingdom of Christ. I only make shoes to pay expenses."^{iv}

It wasn't long before Carey wrote a pamphlet urging the church to support individuals who wanted to give their lives to the ministry.

The name of his booklet was, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (William Carey—May 12, 1792).

How's that for a book title? It became a best seller . . . and it created a firestorm. *What do you mean we're obligated?!*

It was nothing more than this phrase in **3 John verse 8** expanded – and applied.

John writes – notice again:

Therefore we ought to support such men (3 John 8a).

We have a moral and spiritual obligation to finance church workers. And the word John uses for **support** is a descriptive combination word – hupolambano. Hupo means *under* and lambano means *to receive or to catch – to catch underneath*. Or, in our language today we could translate this word, to underwrite.^v

This is exactly what John is saying – *Therefore we ought to underwrite such men.*

When we assume the expenses of these traveling evangelists and preachers and church planters and global workers – you are underwriting them.

Jesus introduced this idea when He sent his disciples out on what we would call a short term service trip and he instructed them with this classic directive, loaded with meaning for future development in the church – when you arrive at a town, He said, find lodging with someone sympathetic to your gospel message – and then Jesus said,

Stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is worthy of his hire (Luke 10:7).

When my three brothers and I traveled with our missionary parents on deputation in the summer – visiting supporting families – as we pulled into the driveway of some home where they were potentially going to feed us dinner – we were reminded never to complain no matter what they fed us.

My mother would repeat this little poem we kids knew by heart: Where He leads me I will follow, what He feeds me I will swallow.

And that was the end of it. I might complain about vegetables at home. I might even hide those little green peas under my plate at home – as my mother once discovered. She and I were talking recently and reminiscing about what a perfect child I was – I remembered better than she did. We didn't have a dog under the table to feed that stuff to, so I'd pack those peas under my plate and then I'd run outside to play before she found out. So she actually went out and bought clear glass plates. What a tragic day that was.

What He feeds me I will swallow . . . even vegetables.

Well, Jesus is basically supporting the concept of full-time ministry support.

Later on, the Apostle Paul wrote to the Roman church, graciously hinting at what he hoped would happen:

Whenever I go to Spain – for I hope to see you in passing, and to be helped on my way there by you, when I have first enjoyed your company for a while (Romans 15:24).

In other words, I need somebody to buy my boat ride to Spain and I'm hoping you'll be the ones to do it.

He added to this concept of vocational ministry support when he wrote a little more bluntly to the Corinthians believers:

If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? (1 Corinthians 9:9-11).

And then again, Paul hinted at his dependency on the believers in Corinth when he writes in his second letter:

I will pass your way into Macedonia . . . and by you be helped on my journey to Judea (2 Corinthians 1:16).

In other words, let me give you something for you to think about . . . you know, give it some prayerful thought.

Not John . . . not here in his postcard.

A little bit of the Sons of Thunder nickname he'd earned in his earlier years is coming out here when he throws diplomatic speech out the window and dogmatically writes, ***We ought to support such men!***

Not, "here's an idea for you to think about . . . see if you can find any loose change in your cup holder or under the cushion of your sofa". No, "we must do this!

And this was new territory . . . and I have to tell you, in every century of church history, the church has always been slow to respond.

When William Carey decided to leave England for India in the late 1700's, churches didn't have foreign missions budgets; there wasn't a missionary agency to support him – it didn't exist. They had to create one!

And when four businessmen made a pledge to underwrite William Carey, church leaders and congregations thought these men had lost their minds. They thought these men didn't know to run from a bad deal with they saw one – they were going to throw their money

away on a self-educated shoe cobbler who'd never been outside his hometown.

One popular, well-known pastor in England mocked the idea and called them all a nest of consecrated cobblers.

Just a bunch of common shoemakers who are getting in way over their head. I'm not going to tell you that pastor's name – you've never heard of him anyway and I've never heard of him since he was mentioned in William Carey's biography.

On one occasion, William Carey got up to preach and someone had hung a pair of old shoes in the pulpit as a way to mock him. He simply held the shoes up and said, "Let this demonstrate that if God can use me – a shoemaker – He can use all of you."

John essentially says we can all play a part in the eternally significant synergy of our mission – but we've got to take ownership of it. This is God's commission to all of us.

We own it . . . now, let's own it!

2. The second word that emerges from John's letter is the word opportunity.

It isn't just ownership out of obligation – it's a sense of grasping the opportunity at hand.

Notice the last part of verse 8: So that we may be fellow workers with the truth (3 John 8b).

The term translated ***fellow worker*** comes from the Greek word *sunergos*. And *sunergos* gives us our word, synergy.^{vi}

Is that great or what? That's exactly what happens.

When you pray for that church worker; when you write a letter of encouragement or share a meal or provide a place to sleep or a car to drive or money or clothing; when you come here and give money on the Lord's Day and all we support together this ministry; when you fix that recurring gift into your monthly budget; when you write out a check and mail it . . . it might not be much money – but it's the most you can give – and you end up engaging in eternally significant synergy.

What an opportunity – you’re not giving because you have to, but because you get to!

And as understand and embrace both the obligation and the opportunity, you have this growing sense of joy and this sense of anticipation in sharing the ministry – sharing the need – sharing the load – sharing the demands – sharing the hopes and prayers.

You are in a synergistic relationship *with the truth* – John writes; the truth that is delivered through these ministries, through these classrooms, through your pastors, through those global workers, through those AWANA workers, through those behind-the-scenes servants of Christ.

So it isn’t just supporting a budget; it isn’t just giving; it’s ownership . . . and opportunity – it is joyful, eternally significant synergy.

Maybe you feel like that little girl who I read about recently; her mother gave her a dollar and a quarter and hoped that this would stretch her daughter’s muscles of faith and generosity. She told her, “Now sweetie, you can decide to place either one in the offering plate – it is entirely up to you.” As they were driving home after church, she asked her daughter what she had decided to do and she said, “Well, at first I had decided to give the dollar. But I heard the pastor say that God loves a cheerful giver – and I knew I’d be a lot more cheerful giving the quarter.”

You do not automatically outgrow that. But you can outrun it, as you reach for this simple command from John and run with it – running with the joy of ownership and opportunity.

So this text asks us two primary questions.

First,

Are we developing a sense of synergy?

Do we get it? Do we get the fact that God has chosen to administrate His global plan by using you who give and you who pray and you who send and you who go – imagine this, we are in reality working in synergy with none other than God!

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians this stunning truth – *We are fellow workers* (sunergeo) *with God* (1 Corinthians 3:9a).

He uses the same word John uses here in *verse 8*.

The first question is:

Are we developing a sense of synergy?

The second question is;

Are we developing a spirit of generosity?

You’re doing beautifully, John wrote this young man . . . keep it up . . . don’t stop . . . you are working in synergy – and with generosity – not only with the Lord’s servants, but with the Lord Himself.

Keep up that beautiful work . . . because He is worth it. And His servants are worth it . . . and His gospel and His name and the saving of souls and the discipling of believers and the advancement of the church around the world is worth everything . . . everything!

So let’s all become involved in eternally significant synergy.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 03/31/2019 by Stephen Davey.

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- iii D. Edmond Hiebert, The Epistles of John (BJU Press, 1991), p. 333
- iv Adapted from S. Pearce Carey, William Carey (The Wakeman Trust, 1923; reprint, 2008), p. 49
- v Wuest, p. 221
- vi Fritz Reinecker & Cleon Rogers, Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Regency, 1976), p. 801