

Sermon 3, How to Gruntle an Apostle, 2 John 4, 12

Proposition: You give joy to an apostle by walking in the truth, and you complete his joy by fellowshiping with him face to face.

- I. Make His Joy Great by Walking in the Truth, v. 4
 - A. Creed: Doctrinal Knowledge (Truth)
 - B. Commandments: Ethical Lifestyle (Walking, Command)
 - C. Lord's Prayer: Devotional Practices (from the Father)
- II. Make His Joy Full by Speaking Face to Face, v. 12
 - A. Fullness of Joy in Reading the Word, 1 John 1:4
 - B. Fullness of Joy in Prayer, John 16:24
 - C. Fullness of Joy in Being Together in Heaven, v. 12

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, John tells us in his next letter that his greatest joy in the whole world was to hear of his children walking in the truth. That is a pretty bold claim from a man who reclined on Jesus' chest and knew himself to be especially loved by the Lord Himself. Though he had known the delights of eating the last supper and knowing in-person friendship with Christ, John had to say that the delights of hearing that his children were walking in the truth outclassed them all. In other words, brothers and sisters, just as we have it in our power to please God through the work and presence of His Spirit in our lives, so we have it in our power to make an apostle, and by extension our elders and pastors, very happy indeed.

John has two references to joy in this letter, and both of them indicate that you and I can make it bigger. Now, I know that John is dead and that he personally is most likely not aware of whether you and I are walking in the truth today. But the point remains, I think: You can and should make the apostles joyful by your walking in the truth, and by your active Christian fellowship that will culminate with worship and fellowship with the apostles and prophets and saints in Heaven.

I. Make His Joy Great by Walking in the Truth, v. 4

I want to begin here by breaking down this concept of walking in the truth into three components of the Christian life. These three are the doctrinal, the ethical, and the devotional, as represented by the Creed, the Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. All three of these elements are found in John's statement in v. 4. Doctrinal knowledge is the truth that you need to know to be a Christian; walking in accordance with the command is the ethical lifestyle of obedience and integrity that you need to live as a Christian; and the practice of building a relationship with God, as exemplified by the note that the command is from the Father, creates and sustains your ability to know and obey the truth.

A. Creed: Doctrinal Knowledge (Truth)

The walking that we do is supposed to be in the truth. Now, John is not talking in the first instance about truths we discussed last week — the famous analytic truths like “All bachelors are unmarried men” and “All triangles have three sides.” What would it mean to walk in those truths? I’m not sure. Perhaps you could walk in the truth that four is more than three by living within your means and not spending more than you take in. But of course, John is not talking about just any fact, or even just any true fact. To walk in the truth is to acknowledge the truth regarding God and His Son. That is the truth in view here, as confirmed by John’s reference to the liar as being the one who denies Christ coming in the flesh. To walk in the truth requires us to believe and affirm the reality of Jesus Christ, His Father, and His Spirit. We have to know this reality, accept it, and trust it.

You and I may affirm that all bachelors are unmarried men. But it is absurd to think of personally entrusting ourselves to that particular truth. It’s a little more like knowing that the weight rating of this chair is 500 pounds and that I weigh less than 500 pounds, and therefore entrusting my bulk to the chair. But it is much, much more than that common Sunday school example of faith. Faith is most closely related to what my newborn does when his mother puts the breast in his mouth. He does not question “Is this my Mom? What kind of nutritional value does this milk have?” No. He closes his eyes, and he suckles for all he is worth. He entrusts himself completely to the woman who holds him in her arms and nourishes him.

As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word. So Peter commands us. So John means when he says that you must entrust yourself to the truth — not just intellectually affirming it, not just verbally affirming it (though you must do both of those), but much more: Giving yourself to it wholeheartedly and unreservedly. We have a saying about jumping with both feet. You can’t really jump with one foot, you know. But many people try to dip a toe into the truth about Jesus and His Father. Nonsense, says John. Intellectually familiarize yourself with the truth by all means. Say “I believe in Jesus,” and mean it. But more than that, receive Him, believe on His name, become a child of God who relates to God like a child relates to his parents.

You thought that under this section on truth I was going to say “Read systematic theology books. Study ethics books. Memorize the Shorter Catechism.” Well, all of those things are incredibly helpful for your Christian life, and I will say this: You can’t walk in the truth if you don’t know the truth. But more important than any of those is to understand the personal, relational nature of the truth. I daresay that if I called one of you up here right now and said “How do you walk in the truth that all triangles have three sides?” you would say “Huh?”

And if I said “How do you walk in the truth that “The decrees of God are His eternal purpose, according to the counsel of His will, whereby for His own glory He hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass,” many of you would likewise say “I haven’t the foggiest idea.” But the second one has application to your life — if you trust that God’s decrees are the purposes and actions of your loving Father whom you trust implicitly! If you don’t trust God, the truth that all this stuff is part of His plan is hardly more comforting than the myth that it’s all random and chaotic.

So walk in the truth. The first step to doing that is called faith, that trusts God for who He is. The second step is indeed learning who God is. You can and should do that from books, from sermons, from speaking to Him in prayer, and by talking about Him with others. Traditionally, this has been part of what we're doing in church when we say the creed together. We are trying to get a large-scale picture of God's being and plan. You most certainly, whatever your age or experience level with the faith, should be able to explain the Nicene Creed clause by clause. If someone asks you "What is this 'God the Father Almighty' stuff? What do you mean you look for the resurrection of the dead?" You should be able to explain, in general, just what you do mean by saying something like that. We're going to talk more about those things when we get to v. 12.

But a faith that confines itself to the academic study of the character of God is no faith at all. The goal of this knowledge is action. John didn't have no greater joy than to hear that his children passed a theology test. He didn't have no greater joy than to hear that they knew the Nicene Creed forwards and backwards. He had no greater joy than to hear that they were walking in the truth.

B. Commandments: Ethical Lifestyle (Walking, Command)

Indeed, the emphasis in this sentence very much falls on the verb — walking. John spoke of knowing the truth in v. 1. Now he speaks of walking in the truth. To "walk" is the Hebrew way of describing what we usually call "to live." They were walking in the truth — that is, they were doing the things the Truth commands. The truth, once again, is clearly personal here. To beat my dead horse a little more, the truth that bachelors are unmarried men doesn't require you to walk in a particular way (other than, perhaps, to not ask your bachelor friends how their wives are doing). But the truth that Jesus Christ is coming in the flesh? That demands an awful lot. That demands your whole life and all your activities and powers, because it implies the whole Christian message of Trinity, Incarnation, Death, Resurrection, Ascension, and Return.

To live in the truth, then, is to do what the Father has commanded us to do. The best summary of these commands is the Ten Commandments, God's own synopsis of His ethical and moral demands on His people. If you want to know what God wants from you, check these first. They are summed up in the command to love God and to love neighbor. To walk in the truth is to have no other gods, worship no images, honor father and mother, and all the rest of it.

Do you walk this way? Again, you need to know what the Ten Commandments say, and what they mean, in order to walk in the truth. You have to be in relationship with God before His commandments mean anything to you, though. For instance, consider the case of Peru's recently ousted president, Pedro Castillo. If I tell you that Pedro Castillo wants you to honor your father and mother, or to worship without images, you will probably say "What?"

Brothers and sisters, that in turn, like our analysis of the truth a moment ago, leads us back to the necessity of relationship.

C. Lord's Prayer: Devotional Practices (from the Father)

The command is from the Father. He has to be your Father for you to care about that. If He's not your Father, you don't care. How do you make His Fatherhood real in your life? The answer is

through devotional practices, traditionally summed up by the Lord's Prayer. You realize God's presence when you open yourself to Him, and you do that by praying, reading, worshipping, fellowshiping, and sometimes by additional practices like fasting, taking vows, giving, and even working.

The Father has told us to walk in the truth. We will walk in the truth when our supreme delight is to please our Father. And our supreme delight will be to please him when our heart has become attuned to His by spending significant time together in joy and delight.

II. Make His Joy Full by Speaking Face to Face, v. 12

Well, that leads directly to the other part of apostle-gruntling I wish to speak about today — that is, the other statement about joy in this letter. John had great joy when he heard that his children were walking in the truth — no greater joy, indeed. But he also says that speaking face to face makes his joy full. In other words, when his children were walking in the truth, the thing in the world he most wanted to do was to come and be with them. Then his greatest joy would be made full. Parents with grown children, I think many of you know exactly what John is talking about here. You have no greater joy than knowing that your children are walking in the truth. But that joy is made full only when you are actually with them. I think the quality-quantity distinction is in view here. In terms of the highest quality, nothing beats the joy of knowing that your children are walking in the truth. (The flip side is true as well: nothing crushes like the sorrow of knowing that your children are on the road to hell.) But in terms of the largest quantity of joy, nothing can substitute for being together.

Now, I say that. But John also speaks of two other things that create fullness of joy.

A. Fullness of Joy in Reading the Word, 1 John 1:4

In his first letter, he says "I write these things that our joy may be full." That large quantity of joy that is available from face-to-face fellowship is also to be found in writing and reading the word of God.

Now, if someone asks you why you're reading the Bible, would you say "That my joy may be full"? That's why John put pen to paper. Now, in the second letter, he says he would rather not write but instead see them face-to-face, so that his joy and theirs might be full.

What gives? Does writing and reading the word enhance joy, or detract from it? It enhances joy. I would simply say that the fullness of joy in reading and writing the word is a different kind of fullness from the fullness of joy that comes from physically being together.

Imagine that I write, "Dear wife, I was overjoyed to get your letter." At some other time, I say to her, "Beloved, I was overjoyed to see you in person once again."

"Well," says she, "Which one overjoyed you more?"

That kind of sour response is not fitting for a statement about fullness of joy. Both give huge quantities of joy. The face to face joy has the edge, of course, but we are glad that John took the time to write, because that has done a lot for our joy that would not have been done had he only seen his correspondents face to face.

B. Fullness of Joy in Prayer, John 16:24

Jesus also speaks of fullness of joy found through answered prayer. Once again, we see the devotional aspect coming to the fore. If you want fullness of joy, you need to read your Bible and pray. You will not be full of joy without doing those things. At least, you will not have the largest possible quantity of joy you could. You can still be joyful as you see your children walking in the truth. But your own joy will grow as you read and pray.

Well, I asked it a moment ago about reading the Bible: Would you say “I’m doing this because it gives me fullness of joy?” Now let me ask about prayer: Would you say “I’m doing this because it also gives me fullness of joy?” Brothers and sisters, how do you learn to get fullness of joy out of prayer and Bible reading? You have to know the Father. This is not fullness of pleasure. This is fullness of joy.

C. Fullness of Joy in Being Together in Heaven, v. 12

Why do the word and prayer bring fullness of joy? I dare say that it is because they are a foretaste of being together in Heaven. If you want to know what it will be like to gather with the saints, prophets, apostles, and your dearly loved brothers and sisters sitting all around you, start reading your Bible and praying. If you want to know what it will be like to see God’s face, try having a long conversation with Him. If you want to know what His voice sounds like, read the words He left for us.

A huge part of our problem is that we have taken joy — *I enjoy this!* — and traded it in for duty — *I should do this.*

Imagine someone saying “Well, I guess I really ought to suffer through the latest two-hour Marvel slugfest.” How much longer is someone with that attitude going to keep watching Marvel?

In the same way, the person who sighs, “Well, I really guess I ought to be walking in the truth” is probably not going to be walking in the truth much longer.

What makes your joy full? Does reading what John wrote give you joy? Does spending time in prayer to your Father give you joy? Does contemplating the time when we will all be together in Heaven, all enjoying God with one another, give you joy? It gave John joy. And if you spend time with God, it will give you joy too. Do it because you love it. Do it because you love Him. Amen.