

# 3 John Exposition by Maclaren

## 3 JOHN EXPOSITION BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D., Litt.D.

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### A PROSPEROUS SOUL

#### 3 John 1:2.

'Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health even as thy soul prospereth.' — 3 John 1:2.

This little letter contains no important doctrinal teaching nor special revelation of any kind. It is the outpouring of the Christian love of the old Apostle to a brother about whom we know nothing else except that John, the beloved, loved him in the truth. And this prayer — for it is a prayer rather than a mere wish, since a good man like John turned all his wishes into prayers — this prayer in the original is even more emphatic and beautiful than in our version. 'Beloved, I pray that in all things thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth,' says the Revised Version, and that slight change in the position of one clause is at once felt to be an improvement. We can scarcely suppose an Apostle praying for anybody 'above all things' that he might get on in the world. But the wish that Gains may prosper outwardly in all things, as his soul prospers, is eminently worthy of John. He sets these two types of prosperity over against one another, and says, 'My wish for you is that you may be as prosperous and robust in spiritual matters as you are in bodily and material things.'

#### I. Now note in the first place, What makes a prosperous soul?

That question might be answered in a great variety of ways, but I purpose for the present to answer it by confining myself to this letter, and seeing what we can find out about the man to whom it was addressed. 'I rejoiced greatly when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee.' There is the starting-point of true health of soul That soul and only that soul, is prosperous, in which what the Apostle calls here 'the truth' is lodged and rooted; and by 'the truth' he means, of course, the whole great revelation of God in Jesus Christ; and eminently Jesus Christ Himself who is the embodied Truth. Whether we take the phrase as meaning the abiding of Jesus Christ in the heart, or whether we take it as meaning more simply the incorporation into the very substance of the being, of the motives and principles that lie in the Gospel, comes to pretty much the same thing. The one thing which makes a man's soul healthy is to get Jesus Christ into it. That acts like an amulet that banishes all diseases and corruptions. That is like the preserving salt which, rubbed into a perishable substance, arrests corruption and makes food sweet and savoury. It is the engrafted word that is able to save the soul, and howsoever many other things may contribute to the inner well-being and prosperity of a man, such as intellectual acquirements, refined tastes, the gratification of pure affections, the fulfilment of innocent and legitimate hopes, and the like, the one thing that makes the soul prosperous is to have Christ in His word deeply planted and inseparably enshrined in its personality and being.

And how is that enshrining to be brought about? Alas, we all know the way a great deal better than we, practise it. The prosperous soul is the soul that has opened itself in docile obedience for the entrance of the quickening and cleansing word. And just as a flower will open its calyx in the sunshine, and being opened by the sunshine playing upon its elastic filaments, will,

because it is opened, receive into itself the sun that opened it and so grow; in like manner, that heart that disparts itself at the touch of Christ's hand, and welcomes Him into the inner chambers and shrine of its being, will find that where He comes He brings warmth and fragrance and growth and all blessing. The prosperous soul is the Christ-inhabited soul By willing reception, by patient waiting, by the study of God's word, by the endeavour to bring ourselves more and more under the influence of the truth as it is in Jesus, does that truth that makes prosperity take up its abode within us.

But the letter gives another of the characteristics of the truly prosperous and healthy soul. 'Thy brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth.' The Apostle is not afraid of a confusion of metaphors which shocks sticklers for rhetorical propriety. The truth is, first of all, regarded as being in the man; and then it is regarded as being a road on which, and within the limits of which he walks, or an atmosphere in which he moves. The incongruity is no real incongruity, but it strikingly brings out the great and blessed fact of the Gospel that the man who has the grace of God, the truth as it is in Jesus, within him, thereby finds that there is prepared for him a path within the limits of that truth in which he can safely walk. There will be progress if there be

prosperity. The prosperous spirit is the active and advancing spirit, not content merely with sitting and saying, 'I have the truth in my soul Thy word have I hid in my heart that I sin not against Thee'; but recognising that that truth is the law of his life, and prescribes for him a course of conduct. The prosperous soul is the soul that confines its activity within the fence which 'the truth as it is in Jesus,' who is the pattern, and the motive, and the law, and the power, has laid down for us; and within those limits makes daily and hourly advance to a more entire conformity with the example of the Lord. The prosperous soul is the soul that walks — not that sits idle — for action is the end of thought, and the purpose of the truth is to make men good, and not merely wise — a soul that acts and advances, yet never passing out of the atmosphere of the Gospel, nor going beyond the principles and motives that are laid down there.

There is a third characteristic in this letter, which we may also take for an illustration of the Apostle's idea. For he says: 'Thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest.'

Now 'faithfully' is not here used in the sense of righteously discharging all obligations and fulfilling one's stewardship, but it means something deeper than that. The root idea is 'whatever thou doest thou doest as a work of Christian faith'; or, to put it into other words, the prosperous soul is the soul all whose activity is based upon that one great truth made its own by faith, that Jesus Christ loves it, and so is all the result of trust in Him. Faith in Christ is the mother-tincture, out of which every virtue can be compounded, according to the liquid to which you add it. The basis of all, the 'stock' from which all the rest is really made, is the act of faith in Jesus Christ. And so the prosperous soul is the soul that has the truth in it, and walks in the truth which it has, and does everything because it trusts in the living God and in Jesus Christ His Son.

Is that your notion of the ideal of human nature, of the true and noble prosperity of an immortal spirit? Unless it be you have yet to learn the loftiest elevation and the fairest beauty that are possible for men. The prosperous soul filled with Christ within; and walking with Christ by its side, and drawing laws and motives, pattern and power from Him, is the soul that truly has fulfilled its ideal, and is journeying on the right road, For that is the literal meaning of the word that is rendered here 'prosper'; journeying on the right road to the true goal of human nature.

## **II. Look at the wished-for correspondence between this soul-prosperity and outward prosperity.**

'Beloved,' says John, 'I wish above all things,' or rather, 'I wish that in regard to all things, thou mayest prosper and be in health as thy soul prospereth.'

How would you like that standard applied to your worldly prosperity? Would you like not to get on any better in business than you do in religion? Would you be content that your limbs should be no more healthy than your

soul, or that you should be making no more advances in worldly happiness and material prosperity than you are in the Divine life? Would you be content to have your worldly prosperity doled out to you out of the same spoon, of the same dimensions, with which you are content to receive your spiritual prosperity 'As thy soul prospereth' — that would mean a very Lenten diet for a good many of us, and a very near approach to insolvency for some commercial men, Brethren, there is a sharp test in these words. I suppose this good Gaius to whom the letter was written was very likely in humble circumstances, and not improbably in enfeebled health. And John was probably wishing for him more than he had, when he wished him to get on as well in the world as he did in his spiritual life, and desired that his soul might prosper as much as his body. It would be a bad thing for some of us if the same standard of proportion were applied to us. Another consideration is suggested by this correspondence, and that is that it is always a disastrous thing for Christian people when outward prosperity gets ahead of inward. It is the ruin of a good many so-called Christian people. When a man gets on in the world he begins, too often, to decline in the truth. It is difficult for us to carry a full cup without spilling it. And the worst thing that could happen to many Christian people would be what they fret, and fume, and work themselves into a fever, and live careful days and sleepless nights in order to secure — and that is, outward prosperity. The best thing is that the soul should be more prosperous than the body, and the worst adversity is the outward prosperity that ruins or harms the inward life.

## **III. So, lastly, note the superiority of the inward prosperity.**

There is no overstrained spiritualism here, John has set us an example that we need not be afraid to follow. If he that leaned upon Christ's bosom, and had drunk in more of the spirit of his Master than any of the Twelve, was not afraid to pray for this good brother that he might have worldly good and health, we need not doubt that for ourselves, and for those that are dear to us, it is perfectly legitimate and right that we should desire and pray for both things. There is no unnatural, artificial, hypocritical pretence of despising the present and the outward in the words here. Although the Apostle does put the two things side by side, he does not fall into the error of casting contempt upon either. He is a true disciple of the Master who said, 'Your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.' And if your Father knows that you have need, then you may be quite sure that you will get them, and it is a He to pretend that you do not want them when you do.

But then, that being admitted, look how the higher towers above the legitimate lower. It will always be the case that if a man seeks

first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, there will be — in his simple devotion to the truth, and walking within the limits that it prescribes, and making all his life an act of faith — a direct tendency in a great many directions to secure the best possible use, and the largest possible enjoyment, from the things that are seen and temporal. 'Godliness hath promise of the life which now is'; and the first Psalm, which perhaps may have been in the Apostle's mind here, contains a truth that was not exhausted in the Old Testament days, because the man whose heart is set on the law of God, and who meditates upon that law day and night, all that he doeth shall prosper. There is in godliness a distinct and constant tendency to make the best of both worlds; but the best is not made of the present world unless we subordinate it and feel distinctly its insignificance in comparison with the future, which is also the present, unseen world.

And even when, as is often the case, the devout and inwardly prosperous soul is compassed about with sorrows that never can be stanch'd, with griefs through which anything but an immortal life would bleed itself away; or with poverty and want and anxiety arising from causes which no personal devotion can ever touch or affect—even then if the soul prospers it has the power, the magic power, of converting poison into food, and sorrow into a means of growth; and they whose spirits are joined to Jesus Christ, and whose souls ever move in harmony with Him — and therefore are prosperous souls — will find that there is nothing in this world that is really adverse to them. For 'all things work together for good to them that love God,' since he who loves God thinks nothing bad that helps him to love Him better; and since he who loves God finds occasion for loving and trusting Him more in every variety and vicissitude of earthly fortune.

Therefore, brethren, if we will follow the directions that this Apostle gives us as to how to secure the prosperity of our souls, God is faithful and He will measure to us prosperity in regard of outward things by the proportion which our faith in Him bears to His faithfulness. The more we love Him, the more certainly will all things be our servants. If we can say 'We are Christ's,' then all things are ours.

## FOR THE SAKE OF THE NAME

'For His name's sake.' — 3 John 1:7.

THE Revised Version gives the true force of these words by omitting the 'His,' and reading merely 'for the sake of the Name.' There is no need to say whose name. There is only One which could evoke the heroism and self-sacrifice of which the Apostle is speaking. The expression, however, is a remarkable one. The name seems almost, as it were, to be personified. There are one or two other instances in the New Testament where the same usage is found, according to the true reading, though it is obscured in our Authorised Version, because it struck some early transcribers as being strange, and so they tried to mend and thereby spoiled it.

We read, for instance, in the true reading, in the Acts of the Apostles, as to the disciples, on the first burst of persecution, that 'they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the Name.' And again, in Philippians, that in recompense and reward for 'His obedience unto death' — the Father hath given unto the Son — 'the Name which is above every name.' Once more, though less obviously, we find James speaking about 'the worthy name by which we are called.'

Then the other part of this phrase is quite as significant as this principal one. The word rendered 'for the sake of,' does not merely mean — though it does mean that — 'on account of,' or 'by reason of,' but 'on behalf of,' as if, in some wonderful sense, that mighty and exalted Name was furthered, advantaged, or benefited by even men's poor services. So, you see, a minute study of the mere words of the Scripture, though it may seem like grammatical trifling and pedantry, yields large results. Men do sometimes 'gather grapes of thorns'; and the hard, dry work of trying to get at the precise shade of meaning .in Scriptural words always repays us with large lessons and impulses. So let us consider the thoughts which naturally arise from the accurate observation of the very language here.

### I. And, first, let us consider the pre-eminence implied in 'the Name.'

Now I need not do more than remind you in a sentence that eminently in the Old Testament, and also in the New, a name is a great deal more than the syllables which designate a person or a thing. It describes, not only who a man is, but what he is; and implies qualities, characteristics, either bodily or spiritual, which were either discerned in or desired for a person. So when the creatures are brought to Adam that he might give them names, that expresses the thought of the primitive man's insight into their nature and characteristics. So we find our Lord changing the names of His disciples, in some cases in order to express either the deep qualities which His eye discerned lying beneath the more superficial ones, and to be evolved in due time, or declaring some great purpose which He had for them, official or otherwise.

So here the name substantially means the same thing as the Person Jesus. It is not the syllables by which He is called, but the whole character and nature of Him who is called by these syllables, that is meant by 'the Name.' The distinction between it, as so

used, and Person, is simply that the former puts more stress on the qualities and characteristics as known to us.

Thus 'the Name' means the whole Christ as we know Him, or as we may know Him, from the Book, in the dignity of His Messiahship, in the mystery of His Divinity, in the sweetness of His life, in the depth of His words, in the gentleness of His heart, in the patience and propitiation of His sacrifice, in the might of His resurrection, in the glory of His ascension, in the energy of His present life and reigning work for us at the right hand of God. All these, the central facts of the Gospel, are gathered together into that expression the Name, which is the summing up in one mighty word, so to speak, which it is not possible for a man to utter except in fragments, of all that Jesus Christ is in Himself, and of all that He is and does for us.

It is but a picturesque and condensed way of saying that Jesus Christ, in the depth of His nature and the width of His work, stands alone, and is the single, because the all-sufficient, Object of love and trust and obedience. There is no need for a forest of little pillars; as in some great chapter-house one central shaft, graceful as strong, bears the groined roof, and makes all other supports unnecessary and impertinent. There is one Name, and one alone, because in the depths of that wondrous nature, in the circumference of that mighty work, there is all that a human heart, or that all human hearts, can need for peace, for nobleness, for holiness, for the satisfaction of all desires, for the direction of efforts, for the stability of their being. The name stands alone, and it will be the only Name that, at last, shall blaze upon the page of the world's history when the ages are ended; and the chronicles of earth, with the brief 'immortality' which they gave to other names of illustrious men, are moulded into dust. 'The Name is above every name,' and will outlast them all, for it is the all-sufficient and encyclopaedical embodiment of everything that a single heart, or the whole race, can require, desire, conceive, or attain.

So then, brethren, the uniqueness and solitariness of the name demands an equal and corresponding exclusiveness of devotion and trust in us. 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord thy God is one Lord. Therefore thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind.' And in like manner we may argue — There is one Christ, and there is none other but He. Therefore all the current of my being is to set to Him. and on Him alone am I to repose my undivided weight, casting all my cares and putting all my trust only on Him. Lean on none other. You cannot lean too heavily on that strong arm. Love none other except in Him; for His heart is wide enough and deep enough for all mankind. Obey none other, for only His voice has the right to command. And lifting up our eyes, let us see 'no man any more save Jesus only.' That Name stands alone.

Involved in this, but worthy of briefly putting separately, is this other thought, that the pre-eminent and exclusive mention of the Name carries with it, in fair inference, the declaration of His Divine nature. It seems to me that we have here a clear case in which the Old Testament usage is transferred to Jesus Christ, only, instead of the Name being Jehovah, it is Jesus. It seems to me impossible that a man saturated as this Apostle was with Old Testament teaching, and familiar as he was with the usage which runs through it as to the sanctity of 'the Name of the Lord,' should have used such language as this of my text unless he had felt, as he has told us himself, that 'the Word was God.' And the very incidental character of the allusion gives it the more force as a witness to the commonplaceness which the thought of the divinity of Jesus Christ had assumed to the consciousness of the Christian Church.

## **II. But passing from that, let me ask you to look, secondly, at the power of the Name to sway the life.**

I have explained the full meaning of the preposition in my text in my introductory remarks. It seems to me to cover both the ground of 'on account of,' or 'by reason of,' and 'on behalf of.'

Taking the word in the former of these two senses, note how this phrase, 'for the sake of the Name,' carries with it this principle, that in that Name, explained as I have done, there lie all the forces that are needed for the guidance and the impulses of life. In Him, in the whole fulness of His being, in the wonders of the story of His character and historical manifestation, there lies all guidance for men. He is the Pattern of our conduct. He is the Companion for us in our sorrow. He is the Quickener for us in all our tasks. And to set Him before us as our Pattern, and to walk in the paths that He dictates, is to attain to perfection. Whosoever makes 'for the sake of the Name' the motto of his life will not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

And not only is there guidance, But there is impulse, and that is better than guidance. For what men most of all want is a power that shall help or make them to do the things that they see plainly enough to be right.

And oh, brother, where is there such a force to quicken, to ennoble, to lead men to higher selves than their dead past selves, as lies in the grand sweep of that historical manifestation which we understand by the Name of Jesus? There is nothing else that will go so deep down into the heart and unseal the fountains of power and obedience as that Name. There is nothing else that will so strike the shackles off the prisoned will, and ban back to their caves the wild beasts that tyrannise within, and put the chain round their necks, as the Name of Jesus Christ. That is the Talisman that ennobles everything, that evokes undreamed-of powers, that 'out of these stones,' the hard and unsusceptible and obstinate wills of godless men, will 'raise up children unto Abraham.' This is the secret that turns the heavy lead of our corrupt natures into pure gold.

And where does the impulsive power lie? Where, in that great continent, the whole life and work of Jesus Christ, is the dominant

summit from which the streams run down? The Cross! The Cross! The Love that died for us, individually and singly, as well as collectively, is the thing that draws out answering love. And answering love is the untiring and omnipotent power that transmutes my whole nature into the humble aspiration to be like Him who has given Himself for me, and to render back myself unto Him for His gift. Brother, if you have not known the Name of Christ as the Name of the Divine Saviour who died on the Cross for you, you do not yet understand the power to transform, to ennoble, to energise, to impel to all self-sacrifice that lies in that Name. In the fact of His death, and in the consequent fact of the communication of life from Him to each of us if we will, lie the great impulses which will blessedly and strongly carry us along the course which He marks out for us. And they who can say 'For the sake of the Name' will live lives calm, harmonious, noble, and in some humble measure conformed to the serene and transcendent beauty to which they bow and on which they rest. The impulse for a life — the only one that will last, and the only one that will lift — lies in the recognition of the Name. And so, let me remind you how our consequent simple duty is honestly, earnestly, prayerfully, always, to try to keep ourselves under the influence of that sweet compulsion and mighty encouragement which lie in the Name of Jesus Christ. How fragmentary, how interrupted, how imperfect at the best are our yieldings to the power and the sweetness of the motives and pattern given to us in Christ's Name! How much of our lives would be all the same if Jesus Christ never had come, or if we never had believed in Him! Look back over your days, Christian men, and see how little of them has borne that stamp, and how slightly it has been impressed upon them.

Our whole life ought to be filled with His Name. You can write it anywhere. It does not need a gold plate to carve His Name upon. It does not need to be set in jewels and diamonds. The poorest scrap of brown paper, and the bluntest little bit of pencil, and the shakiest hand, will do to write the Name of Christ; and all life, the trivialities as well as the crises, may be flashing and bright with the sacred syllables. Mohammedans decorate their palaces and mosques with no pictures, but with the name of Allah, in gilded arabesques. Everywhere, on walls and roof, and windows and cornices, and pillars and furniture, the name is written. There is no such decoration for a life as that Christ's Name should be inscribed thereon.

### **III. Lastly, notice the service that even we can do to the Name.**

That, as I said, is the direct idea of the Apostle here. He is speaking about a very small matter. There were some anonymous Christian people who had gone out on a little missionary tour, and in the course of it, penniless and homeless, they had come to a city the name of which we do not know, and had been taken in and kindly entertained by a Christian brother, whose name has been preserved to us in this one letter. And, says John, these humble men went out 'on behalf of the Name' — to do something to further it, to advantage it! Jesus Christ, the bearer of the Name, was in some sense helped and benefited, if I may use the word, by the work of these lowly and unknown brethren.

Now there are one or two other instances in the New Testament where this same idea of the benefit accruing to the name of Jesus from His servants on earth is stated, and I just point to them in a sentence.

In order that you may have all the evidence before you. There is the passage to which I have already referred, recording the disciples' joy that they were 'accounted worthy to suffer shame on behalf of the Name.' There are the words of Christ Himself in reference to Paul at his conversion, 'I will shew him how great things he must suffer for My Name's sake.' There is the church's eulogium on Barnabas and Paul. as 'men that have hazarded their lives for the Name of our Lord Jesus.' There is Paul's declaration that he is 'ready, not only to be bound, but to die, on behalf of the Name of the Lord Jesus.' And in the introduction of the Epistle to the Romans he connects his apostleship with the benefit that thereby accrued to the Name of Christ. If we put all these together they just come to this, that, wonderful as it is, and unworthy as we are to take that great Name into our lips, yet, in God's infinite mercy and Christ's fraternal and imperial love, He has appointed that His Name should be furthered by the sufferings, the service, the life, and the death of His followers.

'He was extolled with my tongue,' says the Psalmist, in a rapture of wonder that any words of his could exalt God's Name. So to you Christians is committed the charge of magnifying the name of Jesus Christ. You can do it by your lives, and you can do it by your words, and you are sent to do both. We can 'adorn the doctrine'; paint the lily and gild the refined gold, and make men think more highly of our Lord by our example of faithfulness and obedience. We can do it by our definite proclamation of His Name, which is laid upon us all to do, and for which facilities of varying degrees are granted. The inconsistencies of the professing followers of Christ are the strongest barriers to the world's belief in the glory of His Name. The Church as it is forms the hindrance rather than the help to the world's becoming a church. If from us sounded out the Name, and over all that we did it was written, blazing, conspicuous, the world would look and listen, and men would believe that there was something in the Gospel.

If you are a Christian professor, either Christ is glorified or put to shame in you, His saint; and either it is true of you that you do all things in the Name of the Lord Jesus and so glorify His Name, or that through you the Name of Christ is 'blasphemed among the nations.' Choose which of the two it shall be!



## FELLOW-WORKERS WITH THE TRUTH

**‘That we might be fellow-helpers to the truth.’ — 3 John 1:8.**

‘FELLOW-HELPERS to the Truth.’ A word or two may be permitted as to the immediate occasion of the expression. There seems to have been, as we learn not only from occasional references in the New Testament, but from early Christian literature, and very frequent practice in the primitive churches, of certain members having, like our friends the Quakers, ‘a concern’ for some special ministry, and being loosed from their ordinary avocations, and sent out with the sanction of the Church. These travelling evangelists went from place to place, and sought the hospitality and help of the Christian communities to which they came. My text is an exhortation from the aged Apostle to treat such brethren as they deserved, seeing that they have ‘come forth for the sake of the Name’; and should be welcomed and helped as brethren.

Now there are ambiguities about the words, on which I need not dwell So far as the grammatical construction of the originals are concerned, they may either mean what our Authorised Version takes them to mean, ‘fellow-helpers’ — or rather ‘fellow-workers’ — for the Truth; the co-operation being regarded as confined to the two sets of men, the evangelists and their hospitable receivers — or they may mean, as the Revised Version takes them, ‘fellow-workers with the Truth’ — ‘the Truth’ and the two Sets of human agents being all supposed as co-operating in one common end. The latter is, I presume, the real meaning of the Evangelist. ‘The Truth’ is supposed to be an active force in the world, which both the men who directly preach it, and the men who sustain and cheer those who do, are co-operating with. Then there is another question as to whether, by ‘the Truth’ here, we are to understand the whole body Of Christian revelation, or whether We are to see shining through the words the august figure of Him who is personally, as He Himself claimed, ‘the Way, and the Truth, and the Life.’ I believe that the latter explanation is the truer one, and more in accordance with the intense saturation in all John’s writings with the words of the Master. I can scarcely think that when he spoke thus about ‘the Truth,’ or when he spoke in another of his letters about the ‘Truth which dwelleth in us, and shall be in us for ever,’ he meant only a body of principles. I think he meant Jesus Christ Himself.

And so with that sacred and august meaning attaching to his words, I wish to look at them with you.

### **I. The possessors of the Truth are to be workers with the Truth.**

I do not say a word about the claim which is made ha this expression, that Christian people possess the absolute truth in regard to all matters’ upon which the revelation made to them in Jesus Christ touches. That is a bold assumption, but I do not need to say a word about it here. I take it for granted that you professing Christians concur in the belief that what you have received about God and Christ and God’s will concerning men, and the way of salvation, and the prospects for the future life, stands alone and complete, as ‘the Truth,’ to which all other conceptions of God and man and duty and destiny are related, but as fragmentary at the highest, and as often perversions, corruptions, and contradictions. Do not let any modern width of thought, or any impressions gathered from the new science of comparative religion, blur the distinctness and the joyousness of your confidence that in Christ we have not a peradventure of men, but the ‘Verily! verily!’ of heaven: the Truth.

And then remember that, according to the representation of my text, this Truth, wherever it enters into a man’s heart, lays hold upon him, and makes him its apostle. All moral and spiritual truth has that power. There are plenty of dry statements in various regions of science and thought the reception of which brings with it no compulsion whatever to say a word about them. No man is ever smitten with the conviction that it is his duty to go out into the world and proclaim that ‘two and two make four,’ or truths of that sort. But once lodge in a man’s heart thoughts of a moral, religious, spiritual character, and as soon as he believes them he wakes up to feel. Then I must — I must proclaim them, and get somebody else to share my convictions; It is the test of real, deep, vital possession of ‘the Truth’ that it shall be as a fire shut up in our bones, burning its way necessarily out into the light; and that no man who has it dare wrap it in a napkin and bury it in the ground.

God forbid that I should say that a silent Christian is not a genuine Christian. I know too well how far beneath the ideal we all come, but sure I am that if men have never found that when’ the Truth as it is in Jesus’ drew back her veil, and let the lambent beauty of her face blaze in upon their hearts, it made them her slaves and knight-errants for evermore, they have seen very very little of that supreme loveliness. Brethren! the truth that we believe is our mistress. and of the Christian truth that we profess to bold, we are sworn by the very fact to he the apostles and the missionaries.

Nor let us forget the solemn and elevating thought which goes along with the imagery of my text; that the Truth, for all its majesty and dignity and divinity, needs men for its helpers. The only way by which it can spread is through us and our fellows. There is no magic by which it can divide and impart itself, apart from the agency of the men who already possess it. The torch has been brought from heaven, and the light with which it blazes is celestial, but in order to enlighten the darkness of the earth it must be passed from hand to hand by a linked chain of men. The lake lies full of possible fertility and promise to flush with green verdure the barren burning desert sands; but it will lie there, its possible good unrealised for ever, unless men with their spades and excavators dig the

channels and lead the heaven-sent blessing that came from the clouds into all the barren places. The Truth needs us, but when the work is done that the workers with the Truth do, it is the Truth and not the workers that have done the work.

So, Christian men and women, I come to you with this message — recognise your dignity, the honor that is laid upon you in being allowed to be co-operators with the gospel of the glory of the Messed God. Recognise the obligation, solemn and heavy, which is laid upon you by the-very nature of the truth which we believe, by the common bonds of fellowship between man and man, to impart the message that has brought life to us; and recognise it as at ones our highest honour and our widest duty to be ‘fellow-workers with the Truth.’

## **II. The companions of Christ are to be workers with Christ.**

He, as I have pointed out, is the Incarnate Truth. And here we come upon the especial peculiarity of Christianity as a system, considered in its relation to Jesus Christ, its Founder and its Giver. You can take Plato’s philosophy and do what you like with it, and treat Plato as a negligible quantity. You can do the same with all other great teachers, even those of them who have most impressed their own individuality upon their thinkings, and theorisings, and teachings, but you cannot do that with Christianity; you cannot say, ‘Never mind who it was that said it. Attend to what was said.’ For Jesus Christ and His message, are so interwoven and interlaced in such a fashion as that you cannot get rid of Him, and keep it. He Himself is the Truth. Christ is Christianity; mad any man that has ever tried to deal with the teachings of the New Testament as a body of principles, ignoring the lips from which they came, is left with what they call a caput mortuum, a dead mass of impotent generalities. Get Christ into them, and they are all palpitating, and living, and flaming, and have power.

So, then, when I call my brethren, and feel myself bound to the task of being ‘workers with the Truth,’ is no mere devotion to the propaganda of a creed that I want to urge, but it is devotion to proclaiming the beloved hand of the person out of whom the creed is carved, and in whom all the truth is shrined and sphered. Every man that is Christ’s companion is thereby bound to be a worker with the incarnate Truth. He needs our help. True, he finds all the capital, but we are His partners, HIS representatives and agents here on earth, as He has taught us in more than one parable. The pound or the talent is His; it is given to me, but it is left with me to determine whether it shall increase and fructify or not. On the Cross He said, ‘It is finished,’ but all through the ages He is working, and all through the ages His mightiest means of working is through the men by whom He works. The Lord works with them, and they work with the Lord. They are His tools; He makes them, but He cannot do His work without them. And notwithstanding the Cross, notwithstanding the adequate powers for the regeneration of humanity, and the salvation of individuals, which lie in that message of the Gospel, the co-operation of the Church is needed if the world is to be saved. Surely it is constituted in order to fill up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ, and to carry on the unfinished development of the finished work which, done once for all on the Cross, is not done until it has been applied to the world by Christ working through His people, and by His people working with Christ. If there is a flaw in the covering that enwraps the wire, there will be no message at the other end. If you and I are non-conductors, no matter how much power may be flashed into us, that which is beyond us will want the power. The medium between Christ and the world that He died and lives to save, the medium is we Christian people.

‘Workers with the Truth.’ That is parallel with what Paul says, in the great word which he ventures upon when, having just declared that neither he nor Apollos are anything, he rises to the thought which balances that of their nothingness: ‘We are labourers together with God.’

Is not that a dignity? And what shall we say of men who have so little consciousness of union with Jesus Christ as that they have next to no sympathy with the things that fill His heart? I plead for no narrow interpretation of the duties of the ‘fellow-workers with the Truth.’ He came to redress all human misery, sin, and evil. He came not only to speak the words that save the soul with the everlasting salvation of sin forgiven, and friendship restored between God and man, but to carry light and healing and peace and hope into every region where the darkness broods, to break every chain and let the oppressed go free. Social improvements, and all the wider outlooks which Christian benevolence takes in these late years, all come into the general category of being the carrying out of Christ’s sympathies and purpose, and being part of the work of those who are ‘fellow-workers’ with Him in His toil, and who shall one day hear, ‘It is finished! The kingdoms of this world are the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ.’

## **III. Further, the workers with Christ are to be workers with one another.**

These travelling evangelists had one function. The people in the unknown church in Asia Minor, staying at home and following their secular callings, had another; and that was, to help and to further these peripatetic brethren. Co-operation means diversity of function and identity of aims and ends. For us there remains the duty still, as incumbent as it was in those early days, of recognising our own special task, of cleaving to that, and yet of furthering and helping all our brethren who, in their diverse ways, are engaged in the same great end. The men that take care of the base of operations of that army that is pressing down upon the foe are as truly fighting the enemy as the men that are in the front. It was the old law in Israel, based upon a clear understanding that all who co-operated towards one end, in whatsoever diverse ways, are united together; that ‘as his part is that goes down into the battle, so shall

his part be that abides by the stuff; they shall part alike.'

Brethren, learn your special work. Remember that you have each something to do that nobody can do as well as you. Learn your special work, and beware of narrowing your sympathies to your special work. Let them go out to embrace all, however far apart upon the wall and however different may be their tasks, they are still co-operant to one end. 'He that planteth and he that watereth are one.' Identity of purpose, and wide diversity of method, with as wide charity, and as wide sympathy, ought to mark all Christian workers.

All the thoughts that I have been trying to urge have a very direct bearing upon church as well as upon individual life. Although there is no intention, on our Apostle's part, of laying down anything like the constitution of a Christian church, in the incidental words of my text, yet the principles involved in these words do lie very deep down in the conception of what a Christian church ought to be. They make very short work of all sacerdotal assumptions. A priest doing a miracle there at the altar, and the people simple recipients of, and spectators — that, in many quarters, is the modern notion of the relation between pastor and people. John gives the truer one when he says — 'fellow-helpers to the Truth'

The words bear on a mistake that is more common in the audience, I suppose, than sacramentarian notion — namely, that a church is a place where people come to hear sermons and pay their pew-rents, and there an end. There is a dead-weight of idle people clogging the work of every Christian congregation in England. Christian professors! what do you do for the Truth, for your Lord, for your brethren? I, for my part, have to say with the Apostle, 'not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy; for by faith ye stand.' I decline all responsibility for doing more than my own share of the evangelistic work of this church. The Chinese put up mud-forts in which there is one real cannon that can be fired, and make a noise, and all the rest are dummies; painted, wooden. That is a great deal too like what a great many Christian churches are — one piece to fire, and the others for show.

'Fellow-helpers.' That defines our mutual relation. But do not be too sure that your work is only the indirect work of sustaining 'them that are such.' There is some direct work for you to do. And you are shutting your souls out from a great blessing by not doing it.

Sure I am that whoever is in union with Jesus will have his lips touched to proclaim His Name somehow. And sure I am that whoever, smitten by love and loyalty to his Master, by the ardour of affection born of the grasp of the Truth, and by real love for his fellow-men that need it, opens his lips to make Christ known, will find that there is no surer way of increasing his own grasp of the Truth, and deepening his own union with Christ. than to seek to make others share in the blessings which are his life. 'Fellow-helpers to the Truth' — and with the Truth — I pray that we may be so more and more for the days or years that may yet remain to us.

## THE CHRISTIAN'S WITNESSES TO CHARACTER

### 3 John 1:12

'Demetrius hath a good report of all men, and of the truth itself.' — 3 John 1:12.

WHAT a strange fate this Demetrius has had! He has narrowly escaped oblivion, yet he is remembered for ever and his name is known over all the world. But beyond the name nothing is certain. Who he was, where and when he lived, what he had done to earn the old Apostle's commendation are unknown. All his surroundings are swallowed up in darkness, and there shines out only that one little point of light that he 'hath a good report' — or, as the Revised Version better renders it, 'he hath the witness of all men, and of the truth itself.' A great many brilliant reputations might be glad to exchange a fame that has filled the world for a little epitaph like that.

I said we did not know anything about him. What if he should be the Demetrius whose astute appeal to profit and religion roused the shrine-makers at Ephesus and imperilled Paul's life? Of course, that is mere conjecture, and the identity of name is not a strong foundation to build on, for it was a very common one. If this disciple, thus praised by John, is our old acquaintance in Acts, what a change had come over him! Truly, to him, 'old things had passed away, all things were become new.' If we remember John's long connection with Ephesus, the conjecture will perhaps seem reasonable. At all events, we do no harm if, perhaps led by sentiment, we give as much weight as we can to the supposition that here we have, reappearing within the Church, the old antagonist, and that 'this Paul' had 'persuaded' him, too, that 'they be no gods which are made with hands,' and so had turned him to Jesus Christ. I wonder what became of his craft, and his silver shrines, if this is the same man as he who mustered the Ephesian silversmiths.

But be that as it may, I desire — keeping in mind the alteration of rendering that I have suggested — 'hath witness of all men,' and of the truth itself — to look at the sort of witnesses to character that a Christian man should be able to call.

### I. The first witness is Common Opinion.



There is something wrong unless a Christian can put popular opinion into the witness-box in his favour. Of course there is a sense in which there is nothing more contemptible than seeking for that, and in which no heavier woe can come upon us, and no worse thing can be said about us, than that all men speak well of us. But, on the other hand, whether men speak well of us or not, there should be a distinctive characteristic plainly visible in us Christians which shall make all sorts of observers say to themselves, 'Well! that is a good man anyhow. I may not like him; I may not want to resemble him; but I cannot help seeing what sort of a man he is, and that there is no mistake about his genuine goodness.' That is a testimony which Christians ought to be more ambitious of possessing than many of them are, and to lay themselves out more consciously to get, than most of them do. For bad men generally know a good one when they see him, and a great many of them

'Compound for sins they are inclined to By praising virtues they've no mind to,'

and substitute admiration of uncongenial goodness for imitation of it. It is nothing uncommon to find the drunkard praising the temperate man, and evil-livers of all sorts recognising the beauty of their own opposites. The worst man in the world has an ideal of goodness in his conscience and mind, far purer and loftier than the best man has realised.

And, again, it is a very righteous and good thing that people who are not Christians should have such extremely lofty and strict standards for the conduct of people that are. We sometimes smile when we see in the newspapers, for instance, sensational paragraphs about the crime of some minister, or clergyman, or some representative religious man. No doubt a dash of malice is present in these; but they are an unconscious testimony to the high ideal of character which attaches to the profession of Christianity. No similar paragraphs appear about the immoralities or crimes of non-religious men. They are not expected to be saints. But we are, and it is right that we should be thus expected. The world does not demand of us more than it is entitled to do, or that our Lord has demanded. There is nothing more wholesome than that Christian people should feel that there are 'lynx eyes watching them, and hundreds who will have a malicious joy if they defile their garments, and bring discredit on their profession.

I have not the smallest objection to that; and I only wish that some of us who talk a great deal about the depth of our spiritual life could hear what is thought of us by our next-door neighbours, and our servants, and the tradesmen that we deal with, and all those other folk that have no sympathy with our religion, and are, therefore, rigid judges of our conduct.

Then there is another consideration which I suggest — that a great many good people think that it is their Christianity that makes folk speak ill of them, when it is their inconsistencies and not their Christianity that provoke the sarcasm. If you wrap up the treasure of your Christianity in a rough envelope of angularity, self-righteousness, sourness, censure, and criticism, you need not wonder that people do not think much of your Christianity. It is not because Christian professors are good, but because they are not better, that ninety-nine out of a hundred of the uncharitable things that are said about them are said, and truly said.

So, dear friends, let us — not in any cowardly spirit of trying to disarm censure, nor because we have an itch to be caressed, like a parrot to have its head scratched, nor because we are pleased that men shall think well of us, but because the judgment of the world is, in some degree, a more wholesome tribunal than the judgment of our own consciences, and is, in some sense, an anticipation, though with many mistakes, of the judgment of God — let us try to have a good report of 'them that are without,' and to be 'living epistles, known and read of all men,' who will recognise the handwriting, and say, 'That is Christ's.'

Remember Daniel in that court where luxury and vice and sensuality, and base intrigues of all sort, rioted, and how they said of him, 'We shall find no occasion against him except it be concerning the law of his God.' And let us try to earn the same kind of reputation; and be sure of this that, unless the world endorses our profession of Christianity, which it may do by disliking us—that is as it may be — there is grave reason to doubt whether the profession is a reality or not.

## **II. Then there is another witness here mentioned — 'the truth itself.'**

The Gospel of Jesus Christ witnesses for the man who witnesses for, and lives by it. A law broken testifies against the breaker; a law kept testifies for him. And so, if there be an approximation in the drift of our lives to the great ideal set forth in the law of God, that law will bear witness for us. But there must be in us the things that Christianity plainly requires before 'the truth' can be put into the witness-box for us. There must be manifest self-surrender.

Let us go back to our supposition, which, of course, I freely admit is the only conjecture. If this is the Demetrius of the Acts, and he became a Christian, the first thing that 'the truth' required of him would be to shut up shop, to give up the lucrative occupation by which he had his wealth, and to cast in his lot with the men that were warring against idols. We, in our degree, will have, in some form or other, the same self-surrender to exercise.

I have a letter which tells me the story of a man who for years has been trying to serve God, in the employ of some establishment where they sell wines and spirits, but now his conscience has smitten him, and he has had to give it up, and writes to ask me if I can find him a situation. Well! he is borne witness to by the truth itself, which he has loyally obeyed. We all, as Christians, have to do the

like, and not only in the great acts of our lives to rid ourselves of everything that is contrary to the principles and commandments of the Word, but in the small things to be ever seeking to come nearer and nearer to the ideal which He requires.

When looking into the perfect law of liberty we see in its precepts our own characters reflected, if I may so say; because we keep these we may be sure that we are right. If we do not, we may be sure that we are wrong. The truth will bear witness against lives that are ordered in defiance of it, and for those which are conformed to it. It is possible that even the lofty and perfect examples of conduct and character which are in the history of the Master, and the principles that are drawn from Him, may testify of us; and if so, what quiet blessedness will be ours!

### **III. But there is a last thought here. Christ Himself will be a witness.**

I do not know that in these profound and mystical letters of the Apostle John, that great designation 'the truth' is ever employed to mean only the body of teaching contained in what we call the Gospel. I think that there is always trembling in the expression, and sometimes predominating in it, in these letters, the personal application of which our Lord, as reported by the same Apostle when he was playing the part of Evangelist, gives us the warrant, when He says, 'I am the Truth.' And if that personal meaning is, as I think it is, shimmering through these words, then we may venture to deal with it separately in conclusion, and to say that the third witness is Jesus Christ Himself.

'With me,' said Paul, 'it is a very small matter to be judged of you, or of man's judgment'; and that wholesome disregard of opinion is part of the attitude which we should bear towards popular or any human estimate — but 'he that judgeth me is the Lord.'

Now, notice Paul's tenses. He does not say, 'He that is going to judge me,' away out yonder in the indefinite future, at some great Day of Judgment after death, but he says, 'He that judgeth me'; and he means us to feel that, step by step, all through our lives, and in reference to each individual action at the time of its commission, there is an act of Christ's judgment, in infallible determination by Him of the moral good or evil of our deed. So, moment by moment, we are at that tribunal, and act by act, we please or we displease Him; and of each feeling and thought, word, and deed. He says, 'Well,' or 'Ill, is it done.'

We may have Him for our Witness as well as for our Judge. How does He witness? To-day, and all through our earthly days, He will witness by His voice in the inner man, enlightened and made sensitive to evil by His own gracious presence. I believe that conscience is always the irradiation of the 'Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world'; but I believe that the conscience of the man who is born again by faith in Jesus Christ is in a more special manner the voice of Christ Himself speaking within him. And when there rises in the heart that quiet glow which follows His approval, there is a Witness that no voices around, censuring or praising, have the smallest power to affect. Never mind what the world says if the voice within, which is the voice of Jesus Christ, testifies to integrity and to the desire to serve Him.

And covet this, dear friends, as by far the best and the happiest thing that we can possess in this world, when we hear Him, in the recesses of our hearts, saying to us, 'Well done, good and faithful servant,' then our thoughts are carried forward still further; and we may venture, with all our imperfections, to look onward to the day when again the Judge will be the Witness for us, even to the surprise of those whose acts He then attests. He Himself has taught us so, when He pictures the wondering servant saying, 'Lord, when did I do all these things, which Thou hast discovered in me?' And He has assured us that 'never will He forget any of our works,' and that at the last solemn hour, when we must be manifested before the Judgment-seat of Christ, He Himself will confess our deeds before the Father and before His holy angels. It is well to have the witness of man; it is heaven to have the witness of the Truth Himself.

## **THE PARENT'S AND PASTOR'S JOY**

### **3 John 4**

**BY C. H. SPURGEON**

**AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

"I have no greater joy than to hear that my Children walk in truth." — 3 John 4.

JOHN speaks of himself as though he were a father, and, therefore, we concede to parents the right to use the language of the text. Sure am I that many of you here present, both mothers and fathers, can truly say, "We have no greater joy than to hear that our children walk in truth." But John was not after the flesh the father of those of whom he was writing; he was their spiritual father, it was through his ministry that they had been brought into the now life; his relationship to them was that he had been the instrument of their conversion, and had afterwards displayed a father's care in supplying them with heavenly food and gracious teaching. Therefore, this morning, alter we have used the words as the expression of parents, we must take them back again, and use them

as the truthful utterance of till real pastors, "We have no greater joy than to hear that our children walk in truth."

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## I. First, then, one of THE PARENT'S HIGHEST JOYS IS HIS CHILDREN'S WALKING IN TRUTH; HE HAS NO GREATER JOY.

And here we must begin with the remark that it is a *joy peculiar to Christian fathers and mothers*. No parents can say from their hearts, "We have no greater joy than to hear that our children walk in truth," unless they are themselves walking in truth. No wolf prays for its offspring to become a sheep. The ungodly man sets small store by the godliness of his children since he thinks nothing of it for himself. He who does not value his own soul is not likely to value the souls of his descendants. He who rejects Christ on his own account is not likely to be enamoured of him on his children's behalf. Abraham prayed for Ishmael, but I never read that Ishmael prayed for his son Nebajoth. I fear that many, even among professors of religion, could not truthfully repeat my text; they look for other joy in their children, and care little whether they are walking in truth or no. They joy in them if they are healthy in body, but they are not saddened though the leprosy of sin remains upon them. They joy their comely looks, and do not inquire whether they have found favor in the sight of the Lord. Put the girl's feet in silver slippers, and many heads of families would never raise the question as to whether she walked the broad or the narrow road. It is very grievous to see how some professedly Christian parents are satisfied so long as their children display cleverness in learning, or sharpness in business, although they show no signs of a renewed nature. If they pass their examinations with credit, and promise to be well fitted for the world's battle, their parents forget that there is a superior convict, involving a higher crown, for which the child will need to be fitted by divine grace, and armed with the whole armor of God. Alas, if our children lose the crown of life, it will be but a small consolation that they have won the laurels of literature or art. Many who ought to know better think themselves superlatively blessed in their children if they become rich, if they marry well, if they strike out into profitable enterprises in trade, or if they attain eminence in the profession which they have espoused. Their parents will go to their beds rejoicing, and awake perfectly satisfied, though their boys are hastening down to hell, if they are also making money by the bushel. They have no greater joy than that their children are having their portion in this life, and laying up treasure where rust corrupts it. Though neither their sons nor daughters show my signs of the new birth, give no evidence of being rich towards God, manifest no traces of electing love or redeeming grace, or the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit, yet there are parents who are content with their condition. Non, I can only say of such professing parents that they have need to question whether they be Christians at all, and if they will not question it themselves, they must give some of us leave to hold it in serious debate. When a man's heart is really right with God? and he himself has been saved from the wrath to come, and is living in the light of his heavenly Father's countenance, it is certain that he is anxious about his children's souls, prizes their immortal natures, and feels that nothing could give him greater joy than to hear that his children walk in truth. Judge yourselves, then, beloved, this morning, by the gentle but searching test of the text. If you are professing Christians, but cannot say that you have no greater joy than the conversion of your children, you have reason to question whether you ought to have made such a profession at all.

Let us then remark, in the next place, that the joy which is mentioned in the text is *special in its object*. The expression is a thoughtful one. John did not write those words in a hurry, but he compressed a great deal into them. He says, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." Now, beloved parents, it is a very great joy to us if our children learn the truth. I hope you will not suffer one of them to grow up and leave your roof without knowing the doctrines of the gospel, without knowing the life of Christ, and the great precepts of Scripture, without having as clear an understanding as it is possible for you to give them of the great principles and plan of salvation. When we perceive that our children, when we question them, thoroughly understand the gospel, and are well rooted and grounded in its doctrines, it is a great joy to us, and well it may be. It is, however, far more a joy when those same children feel the truth; for, alas, we may know it and perish, unless we have felt its power within. Parent, was not your heart glad when you first saw the tear of repentance in the girl's eye? Did it not rejoice you when your son could say, "Father, I trust I have believed and am saved by the grace of God"? Yes, it is a greater joy that they should feel the power of truth than that they should know the letter of it. Such a joy I hope you will none of you be content to forego; it should be the holy ambition of every parent that all his house should be renewed of the Holy Ghost.

It is a great joy when our children avow their sense of the truth, when, knowing it and feeling it, they at last have the courage to say, "We would join with the people of God for we trust we belong to them." Oh, happy as a marriage day is that day, in which the parent sees his child surrendered to the people of God, having first given his heart to the Christ of God! The baptism of our believing children is always a joyous occasion to us, and so it ought to be. Our parents before us magnified the Lord when they heard us say, "We are on the Lord's side," and we cannot but give thanks abundantly when the same privilege falls to us in the persons of our children.

But, beloved, there is anxiety about all this. When you teach your children, there is the fear that perhaps they will not learn to profit; when they feel, there is still the fear lest it should be mere feeling, and should be the work of nature and not the work of the Spirit of God; and even when they profess to be the Lord's, there yet remains the grave question, Will this profession last? Will they be able to stand to it and be true to the faith until life's latest hour? But the joy of the text is higher than these three; though these have to come before it, and it grows out of them. "I have no greater joy than this, to hear that my children walk in truth." There is the point,

their practical religion, their actual exemplification of the power of the gospel upon their lives. This proves that the teaching was well received, that the feeling was not mere excitement, that the profession was not a falsehood or a mistake, but was done in truth. What bliss it would be to us to see our sons grow up, and with integrity, prudence, uprightness, and grace, walk in truth, and to behold our daughters springing up in all their comeliness, lovely with the adornment of a meek and quiet spirit, becoming in their homes while with us, or in the new homes which speedily grow up around them, patterns of everything that is tender, gracious, and kind, and true. "I have no greater joy than this," says John, and frilly all of you to whom such joy as this has been allotted can say, "Amen, Amen, it is even so." The joy before us has therefore a special possessor and a special object.

*It is a healthful joy*, beloved, in which we may indulge to the full without the slightest fear, for it is superior in its character to all earthly joys. "Not too much," is a good rule for everything which has to do with time; but this joy in our children's walking in the truth we may indulge in as much as we will; for, first, it is a spiritual joy, and therefore of a superior order. We do not joy to the full in the things which are of the eye and heard of the ear, for these are things of the flesh, which will decay; such as the garment which is eaten by the moth, and the metal which is devoured by the canker. We rejoice in the work of the Spirit of God, a work which will abide when this world shall have passed away. Hannah had some joy in the new coat which she made for young Samuel, but a far higher delight in the new heart which early showed itself in his actions. Our son promoted to be a king might cause us some delight; but to see our children made "princes in all the earth," according to that ancient promise, would be a diviner delight by far. Rejoice in it, then, without trembling, for spiritual joy will never intoxicate. Such joy arises from love to God, and is therefore commendable. We love to see our children converted, because we love God. Out of love to him, through his grace, we gave ourselves to him, and now, in after years, the same love prompts us to present our children. As Barzillai in his old age prayed David to accept the personal service of his son Chimham, so would we, when our own strength declines, present our offspring to the Lord, that they may supply our lack of service. We have said —

***"Had I ten thousand thousand tongues,  
Not one should silent be;  
Had I ten thousand thousand hearts,  
I'd give them all to thee."***

Now as we have only one tongue of our own, we are intensely earnest that our children's tongues should sound forth the praises of the Savior. We have not another life on earth to call our own, but here are lives which the Lord has given us, and we are delighted that he should have them for himself. We cry, "Lord, take this child's life and let it all be spent to thy service, from his earliest days till grey hairs shall adorn his brow." It is like the old soldier coming up to his king and saying, "I am worn out in thy service, but thou art so good a monarch that I have brought my son that he may serve thee from his youth up; let him take his father's place, and may he excel him in valour and in capacity to serve his king and country." Now, when our children walk in truth and love to God, it makes us rejoice that another heart is consecrated to his service. We may well rejoice in the salvation and in the sanctification of our sons and daughters, because this is the way in which the kingdom of Christ is to be extended in the world. The hand which has held the standard aloft in the midst of the fury of war is at last palsied in death: happy is that standard-bearer who with expiring eye can see his own son springing forward to grasp that staff, and keep the banner still floating above the host. Happy Abraham to be followed by an Isaac! Happy David to be succeeded by a Solomon! Happy Lois, to have Eunice for a daughter, and happy Eunice to have Timothy for a son! This is the apostolic succession in which we believe, and for which we pray. How, in years to come, are we to see a seed of piety flourishing in the land, and the world conquered to Christ? How, indeed, but by means of the young men of Israel? We shall be sleeping beneath the green award of the cemetery in peace; other voices will be heard in the midst of the assemblies of the saints, and other shoulders will bear the ark of the Lord through the wilderness. Where are our successors? Whence shall come these succeeding voices, and whence those nestled shoulders of strength? We believe they will borne from amongst our children, and if God grant it shall be so, we shall need no greater Joy.

I will tell you why this is peculiarly the great joy of some Christian parents — it is because they have made *ita subject of importunate prayer*. That which comes to us by the gate of prayer comes into the house with music and dallying. If you have asked for it with tears, you will receive it with smiles. The joy of an answer to prayer is very much in proportion to the wrestling which went with the prayer. If thou hast felt sometimes as though thy heart could break for thine offspring unless they were soon converted to God, then, I will tell thee, when they are converted thou wilt feel as though thy heart would break the other way out of joy to think that they have been saved. Your eyes, which have been red with weeping over their youthful follies, will one day become bright with rejoicing over holy actions which will mark the work of the grace of God in their hearts. No wonder that Hannah sang so sweetly; for she had prayed so earnestly; the Lord had heard her, and the joy of the answer was increased by the former anguish of her prayer. We have no greater joy then this, that our children walk in truth; and it is a right and allowable joy, and springs from good sources, and we need not be afraid to indulge it.

*This joy is quickening in its effect*. All who have ever felt it know what an energy it puts into them. Those of you who have never yet received it, but are desiring it, will, I trust, be quickened by the desire. This is what it means. Is one son in the family converted to God? In that fact we rejoice, but we cannot linger over joy for one, we are impelled to think of the others. If God has been pleased to

call half a household to salvation, there is a hunger and thirst in the parent's heart after this luscious delight, and that parent cries, "Lord, let them all be brought in, let not one be left behind." Are some of you this morning so happy as to see all your children converted? I know some of you are. Oh how holy and how heavenly ought your families to be when God has so favored you above many of his own people. Be very grateful, and while you are joyous, lay the crown of your joy at your Savior's feet; and if you have now a church in your house, maintain the ordinance of family worship with the greater zeal and holiness, and pray for others that the Lord in like manner may visit them also.

Beloved, have you some of your children converted while others remain unsaved? Then I charge you, let what the Lord has done for some encourage you concerning the rest. When you are on your knees in prayer say to your heavenly Father, "Lord, thou hast heard me for a part of my house, I beseech thee, therefore, to look in favor upon it all, for I cannot bear that any of my dear children should choose to remain thine enemies, and pursue the road which leads to hell. Thou hast made me very glad with the full belief that a portion of my dear ones walk in the truth, but I am sad because I can see from the conduct of others that they have not yet been changed in heart, and therefore do not keep thy statutes. Lord, let my whole household eat of the Paschal Lamb, and with me come out of Egypt, through thy grace." I am sure, beloved, this is how you feel, for every true Christian longs to see all his children the called of the Lord. Suppose it could be put to us that one child of our family must be lost, and that we should be bound to make the dreadful choice of the one to be cast away, we should never bring ourselves to it, it would be too terrible a task. God will never appoint us such a misery. We have heard of a poor Irish family on shipboard, very numerous and very needy: a kind friend proposed to the father to give up entirely one of the little ones to be adopted and provided for. It was to be entirely given up, never to be seen again, or in any way claimed as their own, and the parents were to make a selection. It is a long story, but you know how the discussion between the parents would proceed. Of course they could not give up the eldest, for the simple reason that he was the firstborn. The second was so like the mother; the third was too weak and sickly to be without a mother's care. So the excuses went on throughout the whole family, till they came to the last, and no one dared even to hint that the mother should be deprived of her darling. No child could be parted with; they would sooner starve together than renounce one. Now, I am sure if the bare giving up a child to be adopted by a kind friend would be a painful thing, and we could not come to a decision as to which to hand over, we could far less be able to surrender one beloved child to eternal destruction. God forbid we should dream of such a thing. We would cry day and night, "No, Lord, we cannot see them die. Spare them, we pray thee!" We could almost rival the spirit of Moses: "Blot my name out of the book of life sooner than my children should be castaways. Save them, Lord! save every one of them without exception, for thy mercy's sake!" We should make no differences in our prayers between one child and another. Now, I am sure that we should be quite right in such desires and emotions, and very wrong if we were able to sit down and contemplate the eternal ruin of our own offspring with calm indifference. God has made you parents, and he does not expect you to act otherwise than as a parent's relations require you to act. That which would be unnatural, cannot be right. As a Father himself the Lord yearns over his erring children, and he can never be grieved with us if we do the same. Nowhere do you meet with rebukes of natural parental love unless it unwisely winks at sin. Even David's bitter lamentation, "O Absalom, my son, my son, would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" is not censured by the Lord; neither do we find him rebuking Abraham for saying, "O that Ishmael might live before thee!" These desires are so consistent with the natural instincts which he has himself implanted, that, even if they are not always granted, they are never reprehended. Even if our child should turn out to be an Esau, or an Ishmael, or an Absalom, yet still the prayers of the father for him are not forbidden. How could they be? Do not be afraid at any time when pleading for the souls of your children; be importunate, be eager, be earnest, not for the child's life, that you must leave with God; not for the child's health, that also you may make a secondary matter; but for the child's soul. Stint not yourself in this, but wrestle as hard as you will, and say, "I will not let go except thou bless my children, every one of them! Their unregenerate state is my deepest sorrow: O Lord, be pleased to recover them therefrom."

Once more, this high joy of which we have spoken is *very solemn in its surroundings*, for it involves this alternative — "What if my children should not walk in truth?" Well, that means for us during this life many sorrows, nights of sleeplessness and days of anxiety. I have seen good men and great men crushed beneath the daily trouble caused by their children. "Children," said one, "are doubtful blessings," and he was near the truth. Blessings they are, and they can be made by God the choicest of blessings; but if they shall grow up to be dissolute, impure, ungodly, they will make our hearts ache.

***"How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is  
To have a thankless child."***

No cross is so heavy to carry as a living cross. Next to a woman who is bound to an ungodly husband, or a man who is unequally yoked with a graceless wife, I pity the father whose children are not walking in the truth, who yet is himself an earnest Christian. Must it always be so, that the father shall go to the house of God and his son to the alehouse? Shall the father sing the songs of Zion, and the son and daughter pour forth the ballads of Belial? Must we come to the communion table alone, and our children be separated from us? Must we go on the road to holiness and the way of peace, and behold our dearest ones travelling with the multitude the broad way, despising what we prize, rebelling against him whom we adore? God grant it may not be so, but it is a very solemn reflection. More solemn still is the vision before us if we cast our eyes across the river of death into the eternity beyond.



What if our children should not walk in the truth, and should die unsaved? There cannot be tears in heaven; but if there might, the celestials would look over the bulwarks of the new Jerusalem and weep their fill at the sight of their children in the flames of hell, for ever condemned, for ever shut out from hope. What if those to whom we gave being should be weeping and gnashing their teeth in torment while we are beholding the face of our Father in heaven! Remember the separation time must come. O ye thoughtless youths! Between you and your parents there must come an eternal parting! Can you endure the thought of it? Perhaps your parents will first leave this world: oh, that their departure might touch your consciences and lead you to follow them to heaven! But if you go first, unforgiven, impenitent simpers your parents will have a double woe in their hour. How sadly have I marked the difference when I have gone to the funeral of different young people. I have been met by the mother who told me some sweet story about the girl, and what she did in life and what she said in death, and we have talked together before we have gone to the grave with a subdued sorrow which was near akin to joy, and I have not known whether to condole or to congratulate. But in other cases, when I have entered the house my mouth has been closed, I have asked few questions, and very little has been communicated to me; I have scarcely dared to touch upon the matter. By-and-by the father has whispered to me, "The worst of all is, sir, we had no evidence of conversion. We would have gladly parted with the dear one we might have had some token for good. It breaks my wife's heart, sir. Comfort her if you can." I have felt that I was a poor comforter, for to sorrow without hope is to sorrow indeed. I pray it may never be the lot of any one of us to weep over our grown up sons and daughters dead and twice dead. Better were it that they had never been born, better that they had perished like untimely fruit, than that they should live to dishonor their father's God and their mother's Savior, and then should die to receive, "Depart, ye cursed," from those very lips which to their parents will say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you." Proportionate to the greatness of the joy before us is the terror of the contrast. I pray devoutly that such an overwhelming calamity may never happen to any one connected with any of our families.

So far I have conceded the text to parents, now I am going to take it for myself and my brethren.

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## **II. You may view, dear friends, the text as specifying the PASTOR'S greatest reward.**

"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." The minister who is sent of God has spiritual children, they are as much his children as if they had literally been born in his house, for to their immortal nature he stands under God in the relationship of sire. It would seem we shall have but faint memories in heaven of earthly relationships, seeing they are there neither married nor given in marriage, but are as the angels of God, and, therefore, the relationship of son and father will not exist in heaven, though I cannot but think that spirits which were grouped on earth will be associated in glory; but the duties and bonds of relationship will be ended. Relationships which relate to soul and spirit will last on. I may not look upon lay sons in heaven as my children, but I shall recognize many of you as such, for it is through your soul, or rather your new-born spirit, I am related to you. No minister ought to be at rest unless he sees that this ministry does bring forth fruit, and men and women are born unto God by the preaching of the word. To this end we are sent to you, not to help you to spend your Sundays respectably, nor to quiet your conscience by conducting worship on your behalf. No, sirs, ministers are sent into the world for a higher purpose, and if your souls are not saved, we have labored in vain as far as you are concerned. If in feeble hands of God we are not made the means of your new birth, our sermons and instructions have been a mere waste of effort, and your hearing has been a mere waste of time to you, if not something worse. To see children born unto God, that is the grand thing. Hence every preacher longs to be able to talk about his spiritual sons and daughters. John did so.

Those who are the preacher's children are often known to him; they were to John, else he could not have spoken of them as "my children," and could not have had joy in them as his children. From this I draw the inference that it is the duty of every one who receives spiritual benefit, and especially conversion, from any of God's servants, to let them know of it. John speaks about his children; but supposing there had been persons converted and John had never heard of it, suppose they had never made any profession, never joined the church, John might have lived and died without the comfort of knowing them, and without the joy of hearing that they walked in truth. Hence, permit me to remind some of you who, I trust, do know the Lord, but have never confessed his name; that you do us grievous wrong. We have sought your good, and God has blessed us to you, and you deny us the fruit of our labor, which is that we should hear that God has owned our ministry in your consciences. Do not continue to defraud the laborer of his hire. You know how refreshing to the preacher is information that he has won a soul for Jesus. As cold water to a thirsty soul in a parching desert is such good news to us. I have had many such cups of water, but I am growingly thirsty for more. I am grateful when the Lord works as he did only the other day, and I hear of it. I preached to you one morning a sermon to despairing souls. I said there might be few then present to whom it would apply. It was very grateful to me to find, a day or so after, that a friend from a considerable distance had been moved to come here that morning, and, after many years of despair, was brought into light and liberty through the sermon. Oh, how glad I felt! You cannot help preaching when you know that saving results follow. If God's Holy Spirit has blessed our word to you, do not refrain from acknowledging the blessing. Put on Christ publicly in baptism, according to his command: unite yourself with his church, and commune with the people among whom you have been born unto God.

It seems from our text that John was in the habit of hearing about his spiritual children: "I have no greater joy than to hear" — mark

that — “than *to haer* that my children walk in the truth.” That implies that, if you make a profession of your faith, people will talk about you. John could not have heard if others had not spoken. The man who makes a profession of religion, especially in a church like this, will be watched by all the world’s eyes, and not by very friendly critics either. There are those at home, who know not the Savior, who, if they can find any fault in your character, will throw it at you, and say, “That is your religion, is it!” You will be men much spoken of, and reports of you will come to us; bad or good, we shall be sure to hear of them. We practice no spy system among the members of our church, and yet somehow or other in this large church of four thousand five hundred members, it very rarely happens that a gross act of inconsistency is long concealed. Birds of the air tell the matter. The eagle-eyed world acts as policeman for the church, and with no good intent becomes a watch-dog over the sheep, barking furiously as soon as one goes astray. I assure you, I have no greater joy than when I hear that the members of the church are walking in truth. When, for instance, a Christian young man dies, and his master writes to me, saying, “Have you got another member in your church like so-and-so? I never had such a servant before. I deplore his loss, and only wish I might find another of equally excellent character.” Very different is our feeling when we hear it said, as we do sometimes, “I would sooner live with an ungodly man than with a professor of religion, for these professing Christians are a deal worse tempered, and more cantankerous than mere worldly people.” Shame, shame on anybody who makes the world justly bring up so evil a report. Our joy is that there are others against whom no accusation can justly be brought.

You noticed that the speaks of their “walk.” The world could not report their private prayers and inward emotions. The world can only speak of what it sees and understands. So John heard of their “walk,” their public character and deportment. Be careful, be careful of your private lives, my brethren, and I believe your public lives will be sure to be right; but remember that it is upon your public life that the verdict of the world will very much depend, therefore watch every step, action, and word lest you err in any measure from the truth.

What is it to “walk in truth”? It is not walking in *the* truth, or else some would suppose it meant that John was overjoyed because they were sound in doctrine, and cared little for anything else. His joyous survey did include their orthodoxy in creed, but it reached far beyond. We will begin at that point and grant that it is a great joy to see our converts standing fast in the truth; and, brethren, I am glad indeed when I hear that you hold fast the essential, fundamental, cardinal truths of our holy faith. I rejoice that the nonsense of the so-called “modern thought” has no charms for you, you have not turned aside to doubt the deity of Christ, or the fall of man, or the substitutionary sacrifice, or the authenticity and inspiration of Scripture, or the prevalence of prayer. I am thankful that you hold fast the grand old doctrines of grace, and refuse to exchange them for the intellectual moonshine so much in vogue just now. It is a great thing to hear of our people that they are abiding in the truth as they have been taught. But to *walk in truth* means something more, it signifies action in consistency with truth. If you believe that you are fallen, walk in consistency with that truth, by watching your fallen nature and walking humbly with God. Do you believe that there is one God? Walk in the truth, and reverence him and none beside. Do you believe in election? Prove that you are elect, walk in truth as the chosen, peculiar people of God, zealous for good works. Do you believe in redemption? Is that a fundamental truth with you? Walk in it, for “ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price.” Do you believe in effectual calling, and regeneration as the work of the Spirit of God? Then walk in the power of God, and let your holy lives prove that you have indeed been renewed by the supernatural work of God’s grace. Walk in consistency with what you believe.

But walking in truth means yet more, it signifies “be real.” Much of the walking to be seen in the world is a vain show, the masquerade of religion, the mimicry of godliness. In too many instances the man wears two faces under one hat, and possesses a duplicate manhood; he is not real in anything good, he is a clever actor and no more. Alas, that one should have to say it, very much of the religiousness of this present age is nothing more than playing at religion. Why, look at the Christian year of the Ritualistic party in our national church, look at it, and tell me what is it? It is a kind of practical charade, of which a sort of Passion-play is one act. The life of Christ is supposed to be acted over again, and we are asked to sing carols as if Jesus were just born, eat salt fish because he is fasting, carry palms because he is riding through Jerusalem, and actually to hear a bell toll his funeral knell as if he were dying. One day he is born, and another day he is circumcised, so that the year is spent in a solemn make-believe, for none of these things are happening, but the Lord Jesus sits in heaven, indignant thus to be made a play of. Have nothing do with such things, leave the shadows and pursue the substance. Worship Christ as he is, and then you will regard him as “the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.” When men see you, let them see that what you believe you do believe in downright earnest, and that there is no sham about you. Then they might call you a bigot, for which be thankful; take the word home, keep it as an honorable title, far too good to be flung back upon your foe. They may call you a wild enthusiast, and in return pray God to make them enthusiastic too, for in such a cause one cannot be too much in earnest. Do not go through the world like respectable shades, haunting the tomb of a dead Christ, but be alive with the life of God, alive from head to foot to divine realities; so will you walk in truth. See how truly the apostles bore themselves; they were ready to die for the truth they held, and all their lives they were making sacrifices for it. Let your truthfulness be so powerful a force that others can see that you are carried away by its force and governed by its impulses. “I have no greater joy than this.”

Why, when a preacher sees men thus walk in truth, may he make it his great joy? Because this is the end of our ministry, it is this we

aim at. We do not live to convert people to this sect or that, but to holy living before God and honest dealing with men. This is the grand thing, and when we see this achieved, we have no greater joy. This is the designs of the gospel itself. Christ loved his church and gave himself for it, that he may present it to himself, a perfect church without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. A holy people are the reward of the Redeemer's passion, well may they be the joy of those friends of the Bridegroom who stand and rejoice greatly because the Bridegroom's joy is fulfilled. The holiness of Christians is the great means of spreading the gospel. Beyond all other missions I commend the mission of holiness. They preach best for Christ who preach at the fireside, who preach in the shop, whose lives are sermons, who are themselves priests unto God, whose garments are vestments, and whose ordinary meals are sacraments. Give us a holy, consecrated people, and we will win, for these are the omnipotent legions with oldish the world shall be conquered to Christ. We joy in a holy people because they bring glory to God. Mere professors do not so; inconsistent professors dishonor God, of whom I tell you even weeping that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ. A people walking in truth crown the head of Jesus. They compel even blasphemers to hold their tongues, for when they see these holy men and women, they cannot say anything against the gospel which has produced such characters. Beloved, if you love your pastor, if you love the Bible, if you love the gospel, if you love Christ, if you love God, be a holy people. You who profess to be saved, be true, be watchful. If you would not grieve us, if you would not dishonor the gospel, if you would not crucify Christ afresh, and put him to an open shame, walk as Christ would have you walk; abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good. Be in your speech and in your temper, in your business transactions with your fellow-men, and in your communications in the family circle, men approved of God, such as you will wish to have been when your Lord shall come, for he is at the door, and blessed are those servants who are ready for his coming.

If you are not what you ought to be, I beseech you do not make a profession; and if you have made a profession, and have dishonored it, humble yourselves in the sight of God, and go once more to the fountain filled with blood, for there is forgiveness and mercy for you still. Jesus will willingly receive you, even though you have done him such despite. Return as a prodigal son to the father's house, and you shall find the fatlings killed for you, and the best robe put upon you. As we are getting near the close of the year, earnestly pray that if anything in the time past has been evil, it may suffice us to have wrought the will of the flesh; and now, henceforth, in the new year may we live in newness of life, and enjoy together the sweet privilege of hearing that our children walk in truth, while we ourselves, through grace, are walking in it too, and the church is built up, and multiplied by the Spirit of truth. May the Lord bless you all, for Jesus Christ's sake.