

The Old Paths

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“I Rejoiced Greatly ... No Greater Joy”

Jarrod Jacobs

One of the most stirring statements in the Bible is found in John's third epistle as he wrote of the joy he had when he heard of Gaius, and his faithfulness to God. John knew he was not long for this earth. Therefore, it encouraged him to know of others who would be left that stood for the truth. He rejoiced in the fact that Gaius was walking in the truth. Let us read III John 1-4: *“The elder unto the wellbeloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth. [2] Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth. [3] For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth. [4] I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.”*

At this time, John simply refers to himself as *“The elder.”* He was the only apostle still living at this time. And, as mentioned, he knew he was about to leave this earth. With this in mind, he writes to Gaius and tells him how much he appreciates all that Gaius has done. This article will not deal with all of the third epistle of John, but I wish for us to simply consider John's attitude at this time, and measure ourselves accordingly.

What Brings Us Joy?

In reading these few verses, we note that it brought John *“no greater joy”* than to hear about *“his children”* still walking in

truth. *“Children”* has reference to people he had taught and converted to the Lord. Paul used similar terms in his letters (I Cor. 4:15; Tit. 1:4; I Tim. 1:2). No doubt, the fact that Gaius was still standing for the truth in a time of hardships from without and within meant a great deal to the elder apostle. In like manner, it means a great deal to know of those today who, after suffering difficulties, still stand for *“the faith once delivered to the saints”* (Jude 3). Brethren, what brings us joy?

Do We Rejoice When We Know Of Faithful Brethren?

Are we happy to know of brethren in different parts of this country, or different parts of the world that are standing for the truth? Or, does our joy come from physical pursuits, such as our work, or recreational activities? Do we *“rejoice greatly”* when we hear about our fellow-heirs and fellow-laborers still doing what they ought? Or, are we the kind that only rejoices when we have some juicy “tidbit” to spread about the brethren?

John said he *“rejoiced greatly,”* and that he had *“no greater joy”* than in hearing of the faithful life of Gaius, as well as other brethren. In saying he had *“no greater joy,”* he was saying that there was nothing that produced greater joy for him in this life than knowing of his *“children”* walking in truth.

I have seen this same attitude especially in older brethren. They ask about the brethren in different places, not out of spite, nor malice, looking for something that is wrong; but in

genuine concern, wishing to rejoice with brethren over the good work that is going on for the Lord in various parts of this country and the world. What about us? Do we have the mind set of John and Gaius, or of Diotrephes, who *“loveth to have the preeminence”* (III Jn. 9)?

Sources Of Joy

What are sources of joy for us? Are we like John, Paul, and the other apostles, who drew strength from Christ and from their brethren? Are we the kind who must always find fault in others, or can we look for and see brethren who stand for the truth, and say that they cause us to *“rejoice greatly”*?

In like manner, can we say as John that we *“have no greater joy”* than to hear about brethren walking in truth? Or, are there other things that bring us a *“greater joy”*? Perhaps we are guilty of placing more emphasis on our boat, car, vacations, etc., than the Lord (See: Matt. 6:33). Perhaps our *“joy”* is found in placing our family before God (See: Matt. 10:34-37). Unfortunately, many today are guilty of covetousness. Paul calls it *“idolatry”* (Col. 3:5). Have we ever considered how idolatrous this country really is? You see, idolatry is the religion of sight in opposition to that of faith. Because this is true, whatever you wish to place before God becomes your idol, regardless of whether or not you physically bow down to it. Whatever you place before God becomes your *“joy.”*

Now, what is *your* joy? David said the blessed man *“delights”* in God's word (Ps. 1:2, 119:35, 92). In what do you delight? John said he rejoiced greatly in Gaius, as well as his *“children”* because of their stand. Are we rejoicing in the right things? Do we remember why we are here upon this earth (Ecc. 12:13)? Do we appreciate what it means to be a Christian?

Bet r a y e d

Author Unknown

Friend, I stand in judgment now
And feel that you're to blame
some how.
On earth, I waited with you day
by day,
And never did you point the way.

You knew the Lord in truth and
glory
But never did you tell His story,
My knowledge then was very
dim,
You could have led me safe to
Him.

Yes, I knew He'd made the earth,
But knew not of that second
birth.
And now I stand this day
condemned,
Because you failed to mention
Him.

You taught me many things
that's true.
I called you "friend" and trusted
you.
I learn, now that it's too late,
You could have kept me from
this fate.

We walked by day and talked by
night,
And yet you showed me not the
Light.
You let me live, and love, and
die,
And knew I'd never live on high.

Yes, I called you "friend" in life,
And trusted you in joy and strife.
And yet, on coming to this end,
I cannot, now call you "my
friend."

Brethren, are we truly being a
"friend" to those who do not
know the Lord?

[See: II Timothy 2:2; I Timothy
4:6; I Peter 4:11]

Characteristics Of A Compromiser

Larry Ray Hafley, Baytown, TX

1) His teaching is vague and general. It is pleasing to all and rarely if ever offends anyone (Cf. Matt. 15:12).

2) He urges "love" and "understanding" (as if they were cure-all salves) without any appeal for open reproof and plain rebuke. He speaks of "too much negative preaching" and decries "attacks" against error as "self-defeating."

3) Unrest results from his preaching. Brethren sense "something is wrong." They notice the lack of distinctive doctrine, but they say they "can't put their finger on anything." Others express fears they have been too narrow-minded, and they indicate they will re-evaluate their position with regard to errors such as institutionalism. They begin to feel embarrassed when they hear an "old-timey" gospel preacher describe the unique features of the church of Christ and deny the doctrines of denominationalism.

4) The compromiser, if questioned, gives all the "right answers," but he objects (mildly, or course) to "strict, unbending interpretations" of Scrip-

ture and expresses the fear that some who contend for the faith are much like the Pharisees. He appeals to the "general tenor" or the "spirit of Christ" as his reasons for not being as "firm" as some might like him to be on some issues. "But oh," he cries, "don't misunderstand me. I agree with your basic doctrinal conclusion." If he truly does, you would never guess it or learn it by listening to his meatless sermons.

Editor's Note:

Have you heard people speak in such terms as are mentioned above? If so, what does this tell you about that person(s)? Though one may not be maliciously trying to lead folks astray, the results are the same, nonetheless! When men strive to deprive the gospel of its distinctive nature, or try to "water-down" the gospel in such a way as to not "offend" folks who are lost in sin, we have problems! No, we don't need to be malicious with folks, but "*speak the truth in love*" (Eph. 4:15). Yet, in so doing, love demands we show folks their sin and show them how to get out of it! This is no less than Christ, the apostles, and any Old or New Testament prophet did!

Brethren, are we striving to be more like our Lord (I Pet. 2:21-22), or have we become guilty of compromising? Be honest! **FYI:** The above article by brother Hafley was first published in *Truth Magazine* on September 30, 1976!!

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