



BETHEL
PRESBYTERIAN

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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A Pastor's Heart

Have you ever noticed that...

- The longer two people are married the more they begin to resemble one another?
- The longer a person spends on the mission field, the more they reflect the culture in which they minister?

Truly to spend much time with a person, a teaching, or a culture is to be moved and so changed by that person, teaching, or culture. That is why Paul warned us, "Do not be deceived: 'Bad company corrupts good morals'" (1 Corinthians 15:33). In fact, one of the dangers of false worship is that if you bow before an idol too long, you will begin to resemble that idol.

Psalm 115:8: "Those who make [an idol] will become like them, everyone who trusts in them."

Truly you can't spend much time with a person, a teaching, or a culture without it having an impact in your life. Now, this obviously can be a bad thing, which is one of the reasons Paul exhorted the early church to "not be bound together with unbelievers...." (2 Corinthians 6:14). Yet in the case of Christ and His Kingdom, this is an altogether good and encouraging thing.

Now over the many years we have been together as a church, we have frequently made reference to the

fact that while there are formal shepherds in the body of Christ who have been entrusted with the souls of God's people; nevertheless the ministry of caring for another's soul (shepherding, ministering, serving) is a calling that rests upon each and every one of us. The following commands are to the entire body.

Galatians 6:1: "Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ."

Romans 15:1: "Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not *just* please ourselves."

James 1:27: "This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world."

Truly, you can't be a Christian and neglect the body of Christ. Loving Christ and caring for His church are interwoven. Now you must see that the longer you and I sit under this teaching and the more we respond to it, the greater will we be influenced and so changed by it!

Again, you can't spend time with a person, a teaching, or a culture without it having an impact in your life. Accordingly as we approach our text this morning- a text which reflects the heartbeat of a pastor- we do so with anticipation that what we see on the part of John will be that into which we will morph and change as we mature in our calling to refresh the saints.

- What constitutes the heartbeat of someone who refreshes the saints?
- What are the concerns that move a faithful shepherd in his ministry?
- What are the burdens and joys of one who takes seriously the call to build up the body of Christ?

We are going to answer these questions as we consider John's pastoral concern for the church in Asia Minor. Between the persecution lulls of the 70-80 A.D., the church in John's day occupied itself by grappling with the person and work of Christ. Accordingly, many spurious and heretical doctrines were proposed and entertained by God's people during this time. Now as "the elder" (2 John 1) (the shepherd of God's flock, the pastor, the one who cared greatly for the souls of God's children) John contended for the souls of the people of God during this time by penning three epistles.

A Pastor's Encouragement

And truly, we learn as much from what John taught here as from what he wrote as a caretaker of the souls of man. Let us examine what most certainly will become our heartbeat as we mature as servants of the body of Christ.

2 John 4, "**I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth**, as we have received a commandment from the Father."

Now in the Bible "rejoicing" first and foremost speaks of an expressed joy which comes from knowing that when it comes to God it is well with our soul.¹ Now related to this is its secondary sense of being filled with joy as a result of the advancement of Christ's reign and rule in the lives of other people. Thus Paul was never so happy or filled with joy as when he watched Christ mature the Thessalonians.

¹ Compare 1 Peter 1:6-8

1 Thessalonians 2:19-20, “For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? For you are our glory and joy.”

In fact, Paul’s well-being was inseparably linked to the well-being of Christ’s church.

1 Thessalonians 3:7-8, “...for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith; for now we *really* live, if you stand firm in the Lord.”

And such was the case for John.

2 John 4a, “I was very glad to find *some* of your children walking in truth...”

When John beheld the working of Christ in the lives of fellow believers, quite predictably he was filled with joy, gladness, encouragement, rejoicing! Davids, Moo, and Yarbrough explain it this way:

“...joy ha[s] always accompanied news of Jesus: There was joy at his birth (Luke 1:14; 2:10); there was joy among his disciples as they ministered (10:17); there was joy in the presence of the Lord after his resurrection (24:41, 52). Jesus had promised abundant joy to his disciples (see John 15:11; 16:20, 24). Jesus prayed to the Father that his followers would have joy after he left them (17:13)... True joy comes from participation in the kingdom of God...”²

That’s exactly what we see here and hence the first element that we learn about a Pastor’s heart! When it comes to the servant of Christ that which evokes encouragement or rejoicing is beholding the progress of the kingdom of God in the life of another. Now in this particular instance, John’s joy was compounded on account of the context, as it will be in our own lives today. John’s use of the aorist tense here (“I was glad to find...”) indicates that he recently had been paid a visit from the members of the church to which he was writing this epistle. In the New Testament it was common for writers to pen their letters from the time frame of the reader; this is known as the Epistolary Aorist. For example, at the writing of Philippians, Paul had yet to send Epaphroditus to Philippi, yet he wrote this:

Philippians 2:28, “Therefore I sent him all the more eagerly...”

Though Paul was *in the process* of sending Epaphroditus, nevertheless when the Philippians read this epistle Paul’s sending of this servant would be past! Accordingly Paul wrote as if his sending were something that happened in the past- hence the Epistolary Aorist.

Well 2 John 4 is NOT an epistolary aorist. It references a point in time in the recent past when John interacted with members of the church. At this time he delighted in the conversation and watching these brothers and sisters walk in the truth, and yet he also heard about others in the congregation who were not so diligent.

Some commentators argue that the heretics in the congregation which received 2 John formed a majority!³ And hence John wrote this epistle both to encourage the rest of the body in their faithfulness

² 1, 2, & 3 John’ page 98.

³ cf. Stephen Smalley’s comments in 1, 2, 3 John, WBC, p. 323.

AND to warn them about false teachers and false doctrine!

Now all of this leads to the important observation that the apostasy which brought the Apostle John to Asia Minor in 66 A.D. still was in process. And thus the health of the church to which John was writing indeed was tenuous. Accordingly in this context for John to fellowship with some younger Christians who were serious about Christ and the things of the Lord was to be filled with an abundant joy or as John put it: "I rejoiced exceedingly!"

From this we derive the first characteristic of a Pastor's Heart: his joy and gladness is united to the working out of God's kingdom in the lives of others!

Did you get that? This is altogether radical! Fundamental to the Kingdom of God is that its values, incentives, and goals are the exact opposite of the world in which we live.

Luke 9:24, "For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it."

****or****

Mark 9:35b, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all."

****again****

Mark 10:43b, "...but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant."

James 4:10: we learn that if you want to be exalted in the Kingdom, you must first be humbled!

In light of this we ought not to be surprised to discover, although we usually are surprised, that joy in the kingdom of God does NOT come from what we possess, a relationship with another person, or the positions of power, wealth, and influence. All of these are but passing shadows! If this is your joy, then in the words of Paul, "You are dead even while you live" (1 Timothy 5:6)!

Joy comes from the knowledge of Christ's approval of us AND/OR beholding the advancement of Christ's work in the life of another. If you want to be filled with lasting joy, make these two things your greatest delight!

When we speak of the "the advancement of God's Kingdom" this can be rather ambiguous. What specifically was the catalyst which encouraged John so much?

2 John 4a: "I was very glad to find *some* of your children walking in truth..."

The word for "walking" references the whole of a person's life. That some of the Christians of John's day were "walking in the truth" meant that Christ was impacting even the most insignificant areas of their lives.

- Their thoughts were being held captive to the obedience of Christ, 2 Corinthians 10:5.
- In their eating and drinking they were glorifying God, 1 Corinthians 10:31.

- When no one was watching, they were endeavoring to serve the Lord.

In the words of Dr. John MacArthur, “The phrase walking in truth refers to moving through life controlled by the truth...”⁴ In fact if we wanted to quantify the specifics here, we note that John delighted in and so exhorted the body of Christ to

- Walk in truth- which is an appeal to right doctrine, v. 4.
- Walk in obedience to Christ’s commands- which is an appeal to their behavior, v. 6a.
- Walk in love- which is a relational appeal revolving around personal piety, v. 6b.⁵

Love On the Part of the Body

When we as servants of Christ behold these areas of maturation being worked out in the lives of others, the result is extreme rejoicing! So that is the “Encouragement” of a servant of Christ. Now, notice John’s concern for love on the part of the body.

2 John 5, “And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another.”

At first glance this really is a surprising concern. You’d think that with Docetism winning the day that John’s first word of exhortation to the church would be to make careful search and inquiry into God’s word that their doctrine might be well-grounded- and that’s coming. Yet the first words out of John’s mouth are NOT an appeal for more study of the word, BUT an appeal to love.

John was poignantly aware of something that we too often forget. When a right profession of truth becomes our goal, apostasy and defection are just steps away. The end of all doctrine, orthodoxy, and struggle for truth is love, love for God and love for one another! Miss this and you’ve already apostatized. Paul also taught this truth.

Galatians 5:14, “For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the *statement*, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

Romans 13:10b, “...love therefore is the fulfillment of *the* law.”

When Christ was asked to state the most important commandment of God, we read this:

Matthew 22:37-40, “And He said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

And thus in the Old Testament when the prophets raised the warning flag on account of Israel’s infidelity to God, so often the first indictment revolved around their lack of love.

⁴ 1-3 John, MNTC, p. 220.

⁵ These three appeals pretty much summarizes John’s first epistle in which he gives the test of a false believer: The doctrinal test (truth), the moral test (obedience), the social test (love).

Ezekiel 34:6, , “My flock wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill, and My flock was scattered over all the surface of the earth; and there was no one to search or seek *for* them.”

Do you see why John first exhorted love on the part of the body of Christ? Listen up! If you care about God and His word, then love will be one of your first priorities! For love is the fulfillment/telos/end of all doctrine.

And thus as ones who have taken up the charge to care for each other’s souls, one of our first priorities is that love abounds in this body. It is not enough that...

- Our children come to a solid understanding of truth.
- Our worship is Biblical.
- Everyone in this body daily spends time with the Lord.
- Our marriages are solid.

John’s Final Sermon

We must not rest, we must not shrink back, and we must not step down from the calling to encourage this body until love is brought to perfection! We see it in John’s final sermon.

Tradition tells us that following his exile on the Isle of Patmos, John lived to an extremely old age. Finally, he was too weak to walk so he was carried to the services of the church on a pallet where he would whisper again and again, “Little children, love one another!”

Now lest you think that in longing for this Bethel Presbyterian Church will become a weak, effeminate church, you must see that kingdom love is NOT first and foremost a warm fuzzy feeling. RATHER kingdom love at its heart is the sacrifice of self for the benefit and welfare of others. Most often this “other” is undeserving, yet not always.

- That which drove Christ to the cross was His love for an undeserving and sinful people, Romans 5:8!
- Yet at the heart of all service in the Kingdom of God is a self-sacrificing love which longs for the glory and honor of God who most certainly is worthy/deserving of our lives and much more!

Love Informed By Truth

Now lest there be any misunderstanding here, John gives an important qualification to the concerned which he has espoused here. Yes we must love the brethren, but one must have a love informed by truth.

2 John 6, “And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, that, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.”

This was as important an exhortation in John’s day as it is in our own. See, ours is not the only age which has separated truth and love. The Greeks cornered the market on this such that any and all cultures

which have been influenced by the Greeks continue to struggle with balance here. In Eastern cultures; specifically Judaism, knowledge was right living and the apprehension of truth translated to love. There was no separation or bifurcation. Yet in the dualistic culture of Greece, knowledge could be attained without an impact on living and love and truth did not always correlate.

Accordingly camps naturally arose in the Gentile churches of John's day in which orthodoxy and love were set against each other: *Truth is most important! No, love is!*⁶ And that is why again in our text, lest the church fall prey to either extreme, John qualifies his exhortation of love with a reminder that the expression and content of Biblical love must ever and always be directed and so controlled by truth.

John 14:15: Christ said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."

1 John 5:3a: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments..."

1 John 2:5: "Whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected."

Howard Marshall put it this way:

"...the elder's point is to show that love must issue in various detailed types of action in accordance with God's commandments. It may be that the elder was thinking of people who did not realize the incompatibility of saying that they loved their fellow Christians and yet [were] stealing from them or coveting their property. The elder insists that loving one another will be seen in obedience to the commands which unfold the nature of love."⁷

This is so important because once again we tend to think that the essence of love is a feeling. Provided I have the right feeling toward someone or something, then it doesn't matter what I do.

How many of you have ever heard it said?

- *God doesn't care what we do, so long as our heart is right!*
- *What's important is the heart!*

Now don't misunderstand, motive, desire, and inclination is important when it comes to service in the kingdom of God. Attitude is a large part of our service of Christ. Yet that there is a need for an exhortation for balance between truth and love is proof that our Greek heritage continues to influence us.

Lest we think that love simply remains in the feelings, we must understand that it is God's plan that the truth of His word instruct us in our desire to sacrifice self for the benefit of others. We see this worked out beautifully in the cleansing of the leper.

Recall when a leper approached Christ. This was shocking because in that day, lepers never purposely approached a large crowd of healthy people for fear of being attacked. Well this leper was so desperate, anything was worth the cost of meeting Christ. And so he approached the Lord who then touched him

⁶ This is what John was getting at when he wrote 1 John 3:18!

⁷ The Epistles of John, NICNT, p. 68.

and healed him.

And what was the divine response to his healing?

Christ informed this cleansed leper how to give feet to his love.

Matthew 8:4, "And Jesus said to him, 'See that you tell no one; but go, show yourself to the priest, and present the offering that Moses commanded, for a testimony to them.'"

Do you see the relationship that the truth of God's word has to any and all who love the Lord? It informs/instructs them in how to express their love!

John 6a, "And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments..."

Oh Christian don't miss it: Love without law is sappy. Law without love is apostasy. What we need is both.

- The word of God instructing our love.
- The love of Christ compelling our law keeping.⁸

Now as care-takers of the souls of this body, that is what we are after! Hence, when we gather together for fellowship, don't allow your conversation to drift to the typical extremes

- Exclusive talk about the things of this world
 - Its entertainments.
 - Its problems.
 - Its politics.
 - Its games.
- God-speak...
 - Here we wax eloquently about doctrine, truth, passages of scripture, but never address the real person and so the impact that God's word ought to have in our lives.
 - Churches that engage in this discourse can be found saying when one of their own defects, "I never knew they were struggling with that!"

Our gatherings must be places where we discuss our walks and so the impact that God's word is having or ought to have in our lives. That means we are not so much interested in regurgitating the content of

- A sermon.
- A quiet time.
- A book we're reading.

⁸ I Howard Marshall said, "The relevance of the elder's point is obvious in the modern situation where we are sometimes told: 'All you need is love.' Such advice is meaningless if the nature of love is not defined and unfolded. Love expresses itself in following the divine guidelines. At the same time, merely to keep the commands out of a sense of duty or constraint or fear of punishment is not true love. Love means obedience from the heart and true concern for the good of others." (*The Epistles of John*, NICNT, p. 68) And John Stott wrote, "God has not revealed his truth in such a way as to leave us free at our pleasure to believe or disbelieve it, to obey or disobey it. Revelation carries with it responsibility, and the clearer the revelation, the greater the responsibility to believe and obey it (cf. Am. 3:2)." (*The Letters of John*, TNTC, pp. 208-209)

But we press the conversation into the realm of ethics and discuss what difference all of these things ought to have in our lives. And then during the week, we hold each other accountable!

Family of God, that is the passion and so the concern of the heart of a shepherd. That is what will become your passion and goal as you grow in your walk with Christ. In fact to claim maturation and yet to neglect this, again, is the heart of apostasy!

And so as care-takers of the souls of men, we want both truth and love. The sooner the culture of Bethel Presbyterian Church revolves around both, the greater will be the impact of our ministry!

About Bethel Presbyterian Church

The Bethel Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word is published regularly.

VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

All our sermons can be accessed via the World Wide Web. The recording for this sermon (the last few minutes were not recorded because of a power outage during the sermon) and these notes can be found at [Doctrine or Love?](#) The web address for all sermons at Bethel Presbyterian Church can be found out as follows: <http://bethelpresbyterian.sermonaudio.com>

About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on March 8, 2009. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.