

**Series:** John's Letters

**Title:** The Christian Lifestyle

**Text:** 2 John 4-6

**Date:** September 5, 2021

#### **Verse 4**

John moved on from his salutary greetings in verses 1-3 by saying, "I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth, in keeping with a command we have received from the Father." The word translated "find" was the word from which we get our English word "eureka." John used it in the perfect tense to speak of a personal experience that had abiding results.<sup>1</sup> His intent was to speak of an occasion in which he received a report about the conditions amongst the churches of Asia Minor.

The report resulted in joy for John. He "was very glad" when he heard of how his readers were living their lives. The word rendered "was glad" was an aorist tense verb in the original language. It depicted a past action in which John heard about the lifestyle of his readers. The language was qualified by a superlative that used an emphatic adjective. The apostle's intent was to convey both his joy and the cause of his joy.<sup>2</sup> One has commented, "John had often been disappointed in the kind of lives some of the young people of the early church were living, but when he met some of this elect lady's children, he experienced a glad surprise."<sup>3</sup>

One has said the verbiage conveyed the idea that John received "a glad surprise."<sup>4</sup> Considering the onslaught of Gnostic heresy, John was pleasantly surprised when he heard of faithfulness to the truth amongst his readers. Apparently his first letter had done some good. Perhaps there were stories of some repenting of erroneous beliefs. Maybe church leaders had taken personal responsibility for dismissing some from the fellowship.

Because of the response to John's letter, the churches of Asia Minor had exhibited a greater commitment to "walking in truth." The metaphor of walking was a common one amongst New Testament writers (Galatians 5:16, Ephesians 4:1, 1 John 1:7). It used the common activity of putting one foot in front of another to figuratively speak of the way in which one lives. "Walking," thus, referred to how one conducted his or her life.

Used in reference to truth, the metaphor depicted one as living in alignment with God's revealed Word. In regard to syntax, John used the word in what some call "the locative of sphere;" thus, he intended to depict the believer's lives existing in the sphere of truth.<sup>5</sup> To walk in the truth is to measure one's life by Scripture, to allow the Bible to be a standard for how one thinks, speaks, and acts. One has said, "walking in truth indicates that truth is both what we believe and how we live. It is doctrine and duty, creed and conduct."<sup>6</sup>

Notice how John referred to those who were committed to God's Word. He spoke of them as being "children." The term was one of John's favorites (1 John 3:1, 2, 10; 5:1; 2 John 2). It was one that expressed tender affection.<sup>7</sup> John liked to use it as a designation for

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<sup>1</sup> Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 600.

<sup>2</sup> Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 600.

<sup>3</sup> Weust, [CD-Rom].

<sup>4</sup> Robertson, 251.

<sup>5</sup> Brooks, James A. And Carlton L. Winbery. *Syntax of New Testament Greek*. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1979), 40-41.

<sup>6</sup> Akin, 225.

<sup>7</sup> Weust, [CD-Rom].

believers. Considering the climate within many of the churches to which he wrote, he used it as a distinguisher to address the real Christians amongst his readers, the ones who had not been swayed by false teaching. The apostle realized not all who attended the congregations of Asia Minor were living according to the truth. That's why he spoke of the way "some of" them were.

John qualified what he meant by truth with the last phrase of verse 4. He spoke of "a command we have received from the Father." The word translated "command" was one that referred to a teaching, precept, rule, or principle. Used by John, the term revealed that Christian truth is not subjective. It is objective. It is based on the fixed standard of God's revelation of Himself through His prophets and apostles (John 13:34-35; 1 John 1:1, 2:7, 3:23). Truth is not based on feelings, and it cannot be derived from false teaching. Truth is absolute. It is based on God's character and His revelation of what is real.

The children in Asia Minor who were living according to the truth were living their lives in light of God's Word. They weren't looking to the world for guidance; they were looking to the Lord. The truth of God, as handed down by the apostles, was their guiding light for faith and practice. They looked to Scripture for insight, not the shifting values of culture, the vain opinions of fallen humanity, or the false philosophies of newly-minted religions.

John's joy over some of his readers' devotion to the truth is instructive for us. Truth should be a first priority for any believer who wants to faithfully live the Christian life. Without it, a man or woman is unwise and unhappy at best. He or she is lost and doomed for eternal punishment at worst. God's truth gives light and insight. It provides a proverbial lamp for our feet and light to our path (Psalm 119:105). Through God's revelation of himself, believers know how to live and what to think about God, themselves, and life in general.

It is because of the surpassing value of truth that John would later tell his readers in his third letter the same thing he said in our current verse. In 3 John 4, he said, "I have no greater joy than this: to hear that my children are walking in truth." His valuation of truth was in agreement with other parts of Scripture. Solomon advised his son, "Buy—and do not sell — truth, wisdom, instruction, and understanding." Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). The truth of God, as given in the witness of the prophets and apostles, should be an ever-present reality and driving force in the lives of God's children. Make truth a priority in your life.

## **Verse 5**

After upholding the importance of Christian truth in verse 4, John extolled the virtue of Christian love in verse 5. He said, "So now I ask you, dear lady—not as if I were writing you a new command, but one we have had from the beginning—that we love one another" (2 John 5). The word translated "ask" is one that spoke of an earnest request. The King James Version translated it as "beseech." It was often used to mean "to demand" or "to beg someone to do something."<sup>8</sup> John's language constituted what is now known as an epistolary request. See Philippians 4:3 for an example of such a request from Paul.

John's request was specifically for the "dear lady" to commit herself to love. Remember that the moniker "lady" was a metaphorical term for the local churches of Asia Minor (2 John 1) in accordance with the New Testament understanding that the church was metaphorically the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:22-25).

Though many within the church were making renewed commitments to truth, there was a need for a revival of Christian love. John knew the church needed to remember the priority of Christ's Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-40). It is for this reason that he emphasized the fact that his appeal to love was not based on "a new command." He wanted his readers to recall that he himself had frequently upheld the importance of Christian love (1 John 2:7-8, 3:22-24, 4:21, 5:2-3), but he wanted them to also remember that such teaching was integral to the Christianity from the very "beginning" of the faith. He did so by using terminology that was

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<sup>8</sup> Friberg, Friberg, and Miller, 173.

often used in the New Testament to refer to the initial start of the gospel message and the early spread of gospel preaching (Philippians 1:5, 1 John 1:1).

A discerning believer in Asia Minor would have realized that the command to love had been around for a long time. The great Shema of the Old Testament highlighted the necessity of love by saying, "Listen, Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). Jesus Himself promoted love as the foremost of Christian virtues by saying, "This is my command: Love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12). The Lord's teaching on love had been around for a long time. John's readers should not have been surprised by his appeal. In fact, importance of love was as old as God Himself, since "God is love" (1 John 4:8).

Considering the vintage nature of Christian love, the believers in Asia Minor needed to make it a priority. They were called to "love one another." The original language of the text called for an ongoing, habit-of-life, continual activity. Though believers would stumble and sin at times, Christian charity was to be a dominating trait in their lives.

In addition, such love was to be reciprocal in nature. It is for this reason that John borrowed the phrase "one another" from Jesus (John 15:12). Christian love is not an aimless emotion. It is not a subjective feeling that results in no objective action. It always has God and people as its aim (Matthew 22:37-40). Christians who value love should soberly ask whether or not they are really loving people. To do so, they should evaluate their professions of love by the standard of the Golden Rule.

In Matthew 7:12, Jesus said, "Therefore, whatever you want others to do for you, do also the same for them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." Our Lord's teaching revealed that real love results in real action. Believers of all generations should examine themselves to make sure their lives are bearing the fruit of Christian love (Galatians 5:22). If grudges, resentment, mistreatment, preferential treatment, and selfishness are present, it stands to reason that spiritual renewal and repentance are needed.

## **Verse 6**

To further emphasize that Christian love is not a blind, subjective, emotionally-driven type of thing, John said, "This is love: that we walk according to his commands. This is the command as you have heard it from the beginning: that you walk in love" (2 John 6). The apostle's words provided a Holy-Spirit-inspired definition of Christian love. Plain and simple, Christian love involves obedience to God's commands. The word rendered "commands" referred to a rule, standard, or law for beliefs and behaviors.

Though many are right to differentiate between Christian love from religion driven by legalistic requirements, some have gone too far. When one completely dismisses God's Law, one ends up with an end result that is just as bad as the feared legalism of the Pharisees. Both the unhealthy tendency toward legalism and the unholy zeal for liberty should be avoided. Instead of throwing the proverbial baby out with the bath water, one should aim to fulfill God's Law by pursuing after God's love.

John wanted his readers to know that both love and law-keeping were necessary to living a life that pleased God. There is no such thing as Christian love that disregards God's Law. Real love loves to obey God's Law for the glory of God. John knew his readers needed to be reminded of such truth, as the heretics had deceived many into believing they could disobey God's Word and still make professions of Christian love. In 1 John 2:3-4, he said, "This is how we know that we know him: if we keep his commands. The one who says, 'I have come to know him,' and yet doesn't keep his commands, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

Christians are called to "walk in love." That is, their daily lifestyles are to be marked by the most-important of all Christian virtues. If love is genuine, it will be evidenced by faithfulness to God's commands. Real love of God results in real obedience to God. Such a reminder was needed in John's day, but it is also needed in our day too. Many, like the Gnostics of old, have degenerated Christian love into a freewheeling emotion that is devoid of any sort of restraints or standard. Love for many is nothing more than a feeling. They can't

imagine God expecting anything of them. They believe he just wants their affection, but they don't tie such affection to any sort of action. One commentator has wisely cautioned, "Love undirected by God's revealed will may easily degenerate into unwise, sentimental action...a Christian who truly seeks God's best for his brothers and sisters can only do so by obeying what God has commanded him to do."<sup>9</sup> May we exhibit fruit in line with repentance (Matthew 3:8). May our lives be marked by a love that drives us to obey all that has been written in the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 22:40).

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<sup>9</sup> Walvoord, John F. and Roy B. Zuck. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty, Old Testament*. (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 1983), 906-907.