

1 John 1, John 15–17 & Joshua 14

Spiritual Joy: Obedience, Dependence, and Separation — Caleb Wholly Following

Scripture Readings

“These things write we to you, that your joy may be full.” — 1 John 1:4

“If ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love... that my joy may be in you, and your joy be full.” — John 15:10–11

“Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.” — John 16:24

“Sanctify them by the truth; thy word is truth.” — John 17:17

“My servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land.” — Numbers 14:24

The Intent of the Apostle John: That Your Joy May Be Full

Brother Dennett remarked, over a hundred years ago, that if there was one thing characteristically lacking among true believers, it was spiritual joy. One can only imagine what he would say today. And yet the Apostle John, writing through the power of the Holy Spirit, states plainly at the close of the opening verses of his first epistle that his purpose is that our joy may be full. Not that we might be merely saved from hell, or merely kept from gross sin, but that our joy might be full.

It is worth noting who is writing this. This is the apostle who had leaned on the Lord’s bosom. He had heard Him, seen Him, contemplated Him — his hands had

handled the Word of life. That was all real. It was not a religious idea but a fact of his biography. And this apostle was exiled from his country for the testimony of the Lord Jesus, sent to live somewhere without friends or fellow believers. His circumstances were not the source of his joy. Something else was.

Psalm 81 sets out in Israel's history why God's people so often lacked joy. The Lord speaks of all He had done for them — delivering them, feeding them, answering them in trouble — and then says plainly: “My people hearkened not to my voice, and Israel would have none of me. So I gave them up into their own heart's stubbornness.” The ingredients of full joy, and the reasons it is missing, come into view: obedience, dependence, and separation. Israel failed in all three.

Obedience: John 15

“If ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have spoken these things to you, that my joy may be in you, and your joy be full.” Obedience and full joy are explicitly connected here. And the standard the Lord sets before us is not a checklist — it is Himself. As I have kept my Father's commandments. How did He do that? He was goal-oriented, not task-oriented. His goal was always, in every moment, to bring glory to the Father and pleasure to the heart of God. That was His one object. He never walked along the edge of what was allowed; He walked in perfect communion with the Father.

The word “abide” is characteristic of John's writing. It does not mean that God stops loving us if we disobey. God's love is eternal — there has never been a moment when He did not love us. But I can stop abiding in His love. Think of the sun shining today: it is not shining any less just because some places are in shadow. The sun has not changed. But I am not abiding in it if I am standing where its warmth does not reach me. The Lord is not saying He will withdraw His love if I disobey. He is saying that disobedience means I am no longer

abiding in it — no longer conscious of it, no longer warmed by it. And that is where my joy goes.

If a believer finds that his joy is not full, this is the first question to bring to the Lord: am I keeping His commandments? Not in the way Israel received commandments — a list of tasks to perform — but in the sense of living with His glory as the one object before me, as He lived with the Father's glory as His object.

Dependence: John 16

“Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give you... Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.” This is not a promise to give us whatever we want. It is a call to dependence. To ask in the name of the Lord Jesus is to ask for what He would want to see happen. I cannot invoke His name for something that only serves myself. Before I ask, I must have gone to the Lord to know whether what I am asking is His will.

This is a close relationship that John, who leaned on the Lord's bosom, understood well. The Lord knew all things and was sufficient for all things. Rather than calculating what our needs require, we ought to rest on His knowledge and His sufficiency — and that includes depending on Him to show us what to pray for. In our prayer meetings, when we are not entirely sure of the Lord's will in a particular situation, we add “according to Thy will” — and that is right and honest. Dependence is not demanding things of God. It is leaning on Him, acknowledging that He is the source of every good, and trusting that His answer — even when it is no — comes from a heart of love.

The Lord Jesus, though He was God, knelt and prayed. As a man He expressed full dependence on the Father. He left that as a model for us. Not just a ritual to observe, but an expression of what our relationship with the Father should really be — one of continual, conscious dependence.

Separation: John 17

“Sanctify them by the truth; thy word is truth.” Sanctification — being set apart to God — has more than one aspect in Scripture. Hebrews 10:10 declares that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. That is absolute and done — it was His work on the cross, and it had nothing to do with anything we did or did not do. But Romans 6 shows us another aspect: we who were once slaves of sin are now called to yield our members as slaves to righteousness. That is on us. It is possible to have been absolutely sanctified by the death of Christ and yet not be practically yielded to righteousness in my daily life.

How do we know what separation looks like? The Lord answers: “Thy word is truth.” It is the Word of God that sets us apart. If I am not reading the Word, I do not know what to obey, and I do not know how to be separate. All three aspects of spiritual joy — obedience, dependence, separation — connect back to the Word of God and to knowing the Lord. They are not three independent disciplines; they flow from walking in communion with the Lord, with His Word held near to the heart.

Caleb: Wholly Following, Faith That Never Grows a Gray Hair

All three of these aspects find their Old Testament illustration in Caleb. The name Hebron means communion, and communion was the characteristic of Caleb’s walk. He is described six times as wholly following the Lord. Six is the number of man, and even in one so faithful as Caleb, something falls short of the perfection of seven. But the testimony is consistent and remarkable: he wholly followed.

His background is striking. He was a Kenizzite — a Gentile by birth. His father Jephunneh apparently identified himself with Israel while they were in bondage in Egypt, seeing something in them and in their God that he did not have

elsewhere. Caleb grew up as a slave in Egypt. He knew what bondage was. And when Israel came out of Egypt, he came with them, and from that point the God of Israel was his object. He believed the promises. When he and the other spies went into Canaan, he brought back a report that was in his heart — a heart that had no doubt that God would give them the land.

When the ten other spies made the hearts of the people melt, Caleb stood. And Moses swore to him that day: the land whereon thy feet have trodden shall be thine inheritance. Forty-five years later, Caleb came to Joshua at Gilgal and claimed it. He was eighty-five years old, had wandered in the wilderness for thirty-eight of those years alongside a faithless generation, and had then fought through seven years of war to take Canaan. And he had not lost his strength — nor his faith. “If so be the Lord will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out.” Not one gray hair of faith.

There is a note worth keeping: the lot was cast for the inheritance of each tribe, and the whole disposal was of the Lord. But Caleb was not content to simply receive what the lot gave him. He had set his feet on Hebron forty-five years before and he wanted that place of communion. He went after it. He had an object before his heart, and he never lost it through all those years of wandering and warfare.

Caleb’s faith had an effect on those around him too. In Joshua 15 he offered his daughter Aksa to the man who would take the city of Debir. His nephew Othniel took it — no doubt shaped by Caleb’s own faithfulness. And Aksa, when she came to Othniel, asked her father for more than the south land she had been given: “Give me also springs of water.” She could see that her father’s faith was real. She wanted the springs — and Caleb gave her both the upper springs and the lower springs. Those springs are our springs: the Word of God. If we are drinking from them, we will walk in communion, in obedience, in dependence, and in separation. And Othniel, who was so shaped by Caleb’s example, became

the first judge in Israel.

We are so much more blessed than they were. They had the books of Moses; we have the whole Word of God in our hands. We are free to meet together, to be over it together, to speak about it and have fellowship in it. They had none of that. And yet the faith of Caleb, the communion of Caleb, speaks to us across the centuries as a living encouragement. May it be said of each of us, to whatever measure of grace we have received, that we wholly followed the Lord our God.

“The inheritance of Caleb was Hebron — communion — because he wholly followed the Lord God of Israel. May that be our inheritance too.”