

REACHING REAL FULFILLMENT AS A CHRISTIAN
"Part IV: Arriving At A Sustained, Stable Joy In The Lord"
(1 John 2:12-27)

Introduction: (To show the need...)

(1) One day a Christian woman who has been saved long before I came to Christ asked me for spiritual help from the Word. She was concerned about what was going to happen to her in her future, and so had responded to television ads about contacting tarot card practitioners. Some the predictions had come true, and that fact had hooked her into continuing to send money! However, she had become unhappy, restless and confused! I reminded her of the well-known 23rd Psalm, verse one which says that if God is our Shepherd, we have no other needs. If she got back to looking to the Lord, she would not need to know what was in her immediate future as it was in God's loving, able hands anyway. I also reminded her of Old Testament condemnations of seeking information from false prophets, mediums and astrologers!

When I reach her age, will I have to go through this kind of trouble, too? Can we ever get to the point where we gain a **consistently joyful walk with God?!**"

(2) A married Christian friend of mine who lives out-of-state one night called me up from a hotel room where he had just finished having a date with a call girl. He was terribly upset at this sin of adultery, and sobbed out a confession, wondering how he could live with himself. Concerned about his apparent suicidal tendencies, I told him to read and apply David's Psalm 51 confession and forgiveness experience found in the hotel's Gideon Bible. His wife inevitably found out what had happened as he needed to be tested for AIDS, so the marriage came close to breaking up! However, God is good, and they have remained married for years.

This past week that man called me up as he was in Hartford on a business trip from out of state. He reported that he was fine now, but that he had recently slipped away from being close to the Lord, and only with a near loss of his job and house had he spiritually rebounded.

Will he ever settle down into a steady, happy spiritual growth pattern, or will he continue **taking his wife and children through pain as he keeps going up and down on this roller coaster pilgrimage?!**"

(We turn to the sermon "Need" section ...)

Need: "I sometimes feel like I'm on a roller coaster of erratic ups and downs in my Christian experience! WHY?! What should I be doing about this?!"

- I. **1 John was written to make believers happy, 1 John 1:3-4.**
- II. **God's happiness for Christians is meant to be real, and thus a sustained joy! Thus, John revealed three stages toward the Christian's maturity in his happiness state:**
 - A. John addresses **all** of his Christian readers with the Greek term, *teknia*, the general word for **all** of those born in a household, 1 Jn. 2:12 (Fellowship: Three Letters From John, John G. Mitchell, p. 63).
 - B. Following this address, there exist two sets of literary triplets where "fathers" then "young men" and finally "little children" who comprise the *teknia* are given different instructions related to their respective stages of maturity in Christ, *Ibid.*, p. 63-75.
- III. We organize John's material to understand three levels of growth toward sustained joy with instructions to believers at each level:
 - A. **Stage One:** Elementary, Up-and-Down Christian Joy, 2:12,13c,18-27:
 1. Believers at this level know and appreciate their cleansing from pre-salvation sin and their relationship with God in Christ, 12,13c.
 2. However, they depend upon other Christians and Christian organizations for fulfillment in living, 2:18-19. Accordingly, they become distraught, even doubting their own salvation eternal security when they witness sin in others in churches, 2:24-25!
 3. God has the following suggestions for these Christians, 2:18-27:
 - a. We must accept the existence of apostasy in organized Christendom as an unhappy **reality**, 1 John 2:18-19.
 - b. We must shift from depending upon organizations and other people to depend on Scripture and God's Spirit for security and direction in Christian living, 1 Jn. 2:20, 22-24,27.
 - B. **Stage Two:** Intermediate, Uncertain Christian Joy, 2:13-17:
 1. Believers at this level rely on God's Spirit and Word to handle problems of personal insecurity due to spiritual conflicts around them, 1 John 2:13b,14b,c with 1 Tim. 2:1; Ep. 6:12-18.

2. However, they tend to focus only on apostasy and Satanic opposition problems and let down their spiritual guard by using the false values of this world for the Christian life, 2:15-16!
3. God has the following suggestions for these Christians, 2:15-17:
 - a. They must learn that (a) a Biblical love for God in life differs from adapting as **spiritual** goals in life (b) the meeting of body drives, aesthetic needs and personal esteem, for even with **good** intentions, the latter as a goal in life is worldliness, 15.
 - b. They must learn that living and "serving God" with worldly values is futile from eternal perspectives where serving God by Biblical directives makes our work eternally last, 17!
- C. Stage Three: Advanced, More-Sustained Christian Joy, 2:13a,14a:
 1. There is an unchanging consistency in John's repeated descriptions of "fathers" in v. 13a and 14a, showing that these believers consistently "know Him who is from the beginning," v. 13a, 14a.
 2. The phrase "knowing Him who is from the beginning" refers to communing with Christ, the Creator, 1 John 1:1, 3 with Gen. 1:1.
 3. Thus, "fathers" have learned to look to Christ as their final Source for fulfillment instead of the world or other Christians! Thus, they avoid inevitably losing their joy!
 4. God has the following suggestion for these Christians, 2:13a, 14a: mature "fathers" need to maintain their focus on Christ to avoid being robbed of their joy in life and service! (1 Jn. 1:4)

Application: *To enter a life of stable joy, we must become a "teknia" by (1) believing on Christ as Savior from sin, John 1:12-13. (2) As a believer, if we find ourselves (a) jarred at "strong Christians'" failings and doubt salvation security, we are "little children", and God wants us to show more faith in His indwelling Spirit and Scripture for certainties in belief and life. (b) If our dependence is on Scripture for obvious, evil conflict, but we still get hurt, we are "young men" who must replace worldly values with the objective values of Scripture, ("the will of God, v. 17)! (c) If we generally avoid such pain as we look only at Christ as revealed in Scripture for our rallying point for all we are and do, we are "fathers" who need to retain that dependency to sustain our joy in the Lord!*

Lesson: *Sustained happiness in the Lord that avoids painful ups and downs results from God's weaning us away from artificial sources of fulfillment to base our joy exclusively in Christ Himself!*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the sermon's lesson...)

Dr. Ted Bradley, who graduated with a doctorate from Dallas Seminary, was a teacher at the Multnomah School of the Bible in Portland, Oregon, where I went to Bible College. Dr. Bradley had a dry sense of humor, was a dear family man content to serve the Lord in the shadows of spiritually famous giants like Dr. John Mitchell and Dr. Willard Aldrich.

One fall, Dr. Bradley contracted the flu, and went to the hospital as the case seemed to blossom into a bad, dangerous bout. A nurse on the floor accidentally gave Dr. Bradley the wrong medication, and he contracted a lethal form of blood cancer!

Most people would have expressed bitterness over the situation. After all, Dr. Bradley was in his prime, was highly trained to serve the Lord, and had a family and even a new grandchild.

Instead, in a chapel message, he told the student body that God's permissive hand had allowed this problem, and that we all needed to make sure that we were in the will of God for the moment as he was, and to rest content in the unfathomable plans of Almighty God.

I remember going into Dr. Bradley's office to get counsel on a retreat I had to organize, and seeing him propping up his head in his hands out of a lack of strength. When he recognized me, he snapped to a rigid attention with a big smile on his face, saying, "Why, Don, come on in!" although I could see his face was deathly pale!

Dr. Bradley passed away within a year! He spent his last moments enjoying the company of his family and little grandchild! He went to be with Christ as a content man of God whom I'll always deeply respect and hope to emulate!

Dr. Bradley came to a point in life where he no longer sought happiness in what was around him, but in the unseen Lord. As a result, he could afford to give of himself no matter what his lot in life was, and could be benign toward a nurse who had made a terrible mistake!