

CHILDREN WALKING IN TRUTH

by J. C. Ryle

"I rejoiced greatly that I found of your children walking in truth." 2 John 4

Beloved Children,

The book from which my text is taken, is the shortest in the Bible. Look at it, when you go home, and you will find it so. It has only thirteen verses. But, as short as it is, it is full of important things, and I think the verse I have just read is one of them.

This book is an Epistle, or Letter, written by the Apostle John. He wrote it to a good Christian lady, whom he knew. This lady had children, and some of them were the children spoken of in the text.

It seems that John found some of this good lady's children at a place where he happened to go; and you see how well he found them behaving. He was able to write a good report of them to their mother, and that is the report of our text: *"I rejoiced greatly that I found of your children walking in truth."*

Now, dear children, there are only two things I want to tell you about out of this text. Some of you perhaps are thinking this very minute, "What does *walking in truth* mean?" Others perhaps are thinking, "Why did John rejoice so greatly?" I shall try to answer these two questions.

I. Firstly, I shall try to show you—when can it be said that children walk in truth.

II. Secondly, I shall try to show you—what were the reasons that made the Apostle John rejoice so greatly.

Dear children, let me ask you all one favor—let me ask you all to try to pay close attention. I shall not keep you long. Come then, and listen to what I have to tell you. May the Holy Spirit open all your hearts, and bless what I say.

I. I told you I would first try to show you this—**"When can it be said that children walk in truth?"** Let me set about it at once.

What does "walking" mean here? You must not think it means walking on our feet, as you have walked here tonight. It means rather our way of *behaving* ourselves—our way of *living*. And shall I tell you why the Bible calls this "walking." It calls it so, because a man's *life* is just like a *journey*. From the time of our birth to the time of our death, we are always *traveling* and moving on. Life is a journey from the cradle to the grave, and a person's manner of living is, on that account, often called his "walk."

But what does "walking in *truth*" mean? It means walking in the ways of true Bible religion, and not in the bad ways of this evil world. The world, I am sorry to tell you, is full of false notions and

untruths, and specially full of untruths about religion. They all come from our great enemy, the devil. The devil deceived Adam and Eve in Eden, and made them sin, by telling them an untruth. He told them they would not die if they ate the forbidden fruit—and that was untrue. And the devil is always at the same work now. He is always trying to make men, and women, and children have false notions about God and about religion. He persuades them to believe that what is really evil is good; and what is really good is evil—that God's service is not pleasant—and that sin will do them no great harm. And, I grieve to say, vast numbers of people are deceived by him, and believe these untruths.

But those people who walk in truth are very different. They pay no attention to the false notions there are in the world about religion. They follow the true way which God shows us in the Bible. Whatever others may do—their chief desire is to please God, and be His true servants. Now this was the character of the children spoken of in the text. John writes home to their mother, and says, "I found them walking in truth."

Dear children, would you not like to know whether you are walking in truth yourselves? Would you like to know the marks by which you may find it out? Listen, every one of you, while I try to set these marks before you in order. Let every boy and girl come and hear what I am going to say.

1. I tell you then, for one thing, that children who walk in truth, know the truth about SIN.

What is sin? To break any command of God, is sin. To do anything that God says ought not to be done, is sin. And God is very holy, and very pure; and every sin that is sinned displeases Him exceedingly. But, in spite of all this, most people in the world, both old and young, think very little about sin. Some try to make out they are not great sinners, and do not often break God's commandments. Others say that sin is not so terrible a thing after all, and that God is not so particular and strict as ministers say He is. These are two great and dangerous mistakes.

Children who walk in truth think very differently. They have no such proud and high feelings. They feel themselves to be full of sin—and this grieves and humbles them. They believe that sin is the abominable thing which God hates. They look upon sin as their greatest enemy and plague. They hate it more than anything on earth. There is nothing they so heartily desire to be free from, as sin.

Dear children, there is the first mark of walking in truth. Look at it. Think of it. *Do you hate sin?*

2. I tell you, for another thing, that children who walk in truth love the true SAVIOR of sinners, and follow Him.

There are few men and women who do not feel they need in some way to be saved. They feel that after *death* comes the *judgment*, and from that awful judgment they would like to be saved.

But, alas! few of them will see that the Bible says there is only one Savior, even Jesus Christ; and few go to Jesus Christ and ask Him to save them. They trust rather to their own prayers, or their own repentance, or their own church-going, or their own regular attendance at sacrament, or their own goodness, or something of the kind. But these things, although useful in their place, cannot save any one soul from Hell. These are false ways of salvation. They cannot take away sin. They are not *Christ*.

Nothing can save you or I but Jesus Christ, who died for sinners on the cross. Those only who trust entirely to Him, have their sins forgiven, and will go to Heaven. These alone will find they have an *Almighty Friend* in the day of judgment. This is the true way to be saved.

Children who walk in truth have learned all this, and if you ask them what they put their trust in, they will answer, "Nothing but Christ!" They try to follow Jesus, as the lambs follow the good shepherd. And they love Him, because they read in the Bible that He loved them, and gave Himself for them.

Little children, there is the second mark of walking in truth. Look at it. Think of it. *Do you love Christ?*

3. I tell you, for a third thing, that children who walk in truth SERVE God with a true heart.

I dare say you know it is very possible to serve God with *outward* service only. Many do so. They will put on a grave face, and *pretend* to be serious, while they do not *feel* it. They will say beautiful prayers with their lips, and yet not mean what they say. They will sit in their places at church every Sunday, and yet be thinking of other things all the time—and such service is *outward* service, and very wrong.

Bad children, I am sorry to say, are often guilty of this sin. They will say their prayers regularly, when their parents make them—but not otherwise. They will seem to attend in church when the parent's eye is upon them, but not at other times. Their *hearts* are far away.

Children who walk in truth are not so. They have another spirit in them. Their desire is to be honest in all they do with God, and to worship Him in spirit and in truth. When they pray, they try to be in earnest, and mean all the words they say. When they go to church, they try to be really serious, and to give their minds to what they hear. And it is one of their chief troubles—that they cannot serve God more heartily than they do.

Little children, there is the third mark of walking in truth. Look at it. Think of it. *Is your heart false or true?*

4. I tell you, for a last thing, that children who walk in truth, really try to do things right and true in the sight of God.

God has told us very plainly what He thinks is right. Nobody can mistake this who reads the Bible with an honest heart. But it is sad to see how few men and women care for pleasing God. Many break His commandments continually, and seem to think nothing of it. Some will tell lies, and swear, and quarrel, and cheat, and steal. Others use bad words, never pray to God at all, and never read their Bibles. Others are unkind to their relations, or idle, or gluttonous, or bad-tempered, or selfish. And all these things, whatever people may choose to think, are very wicked and displeasing to the holy God.

Children who walk in truth are always trying to keep clear of bad ways. They take no pleasure in sinful things of any kind, and they dislike the company of those who do them. Their great wish is to be like Jesus—holy, harmless, and separate from sinners. They endeavor to be kind, gentle, sincere, obedient, honest, truthful, and good in all their ways. It grieves them—that they are not more holy than they are.

Little children, there is the last mark I shall give you of walking in truth. Look at it. Think of it. *Are your doings right or wrong?*

Children, you have now heard some marks of walking in truth. I have tried to set them plainly before you. I hope you have understood them. Knowing the truth about sin—loving the true Savior, Jesus Christ—serving God with a true heart—doing the things true and right in the sight of God. There they are, all four together. Think about them, I entreat you, and each ask yourself this question, "What am I doing at this very time—am I walking in truth?"

I dare be sure that many boys and girls here know well what answer they ought to give. And God knows, too, for He sees your *hearts* as plainly as I see your *faces* this minute! Children, the all-seeing God sends you a question this night by my mouth—He says, "*Are you walking in truth?*"

Why should you not walk in the truth? Thousands of dear children have walked in truth already, and found it pleasant. The way is trodden by many little feet before your own. Thousands of boys and girls are walking in truth at this moment—and there is yet room. Dear children, think this night, "*Why should I not walk in the truth?*"

II. And now I will go on to the second thing I promised to speak of. I said I would try to show you **some of the reasons why John rejoiced to find this lady's children walking in truth.** Let me set about it. The text says, "I rejoiced greatly." Now, why did he rejoice? There must have been some good reasons. John was not a man to rejoice without cause. Listen, dear children, and you shall hear what those reasons were.

1. For one thing, John rejoiced because he was a good man himself.

All good people like to see others walking in truth, as well as themselves. I dare say you have heard how the angels in Heaven rejoice when they see one sinner repenting. Some of you, no doubt, have read it in the fifteenth chapter of Luke. Well, good people are like the angels in this—they are full of love and compassion, and when they see anyone turning away from sin, and doing what is right—it makes them feel happy.

Good people find walking in truth so pleasant, that they would like everybody else to walk in truth too. They do not wish to keep all this pleasantness to themselves, and to go to Heaven alone. They want to see all around them loving Jesus Christ, and obeying Him—all their relations, all their neighbors, all their old friends, all their young ones, indeed all the world. The more they see walking in truth, the better they are pleased.

Children, John was a good man, and full of love to souls, and this was one reason why he rejoiced.

2. For another thing, John rejoiced because it is very uncommon to see *children walking in truth*.

Dear children, I am very sorry to tell you, there are many bad boys and girls in the world. Too many are careless, thoughtless, self-willed, and disobedient. Nobody can rejoice over them.

I hear many fathers and mothers complaining about this. I hear many school teachers speak of it. I am afraid it is quite true.

There are many children who will not give their minds to anything that is good. They will not do what they are told. They like to be idle, and to have their own way. They love *playing* better than *learning*. They do things which God says are wicked and wrong, and are not ashamed. And all this is very sad to see.

John, you may be sure, had found this out, for he was an aged man, as well as an Apostle, and had seen many things. He knew that even the children of good people sometimes turn out very badly. I dare say he remembered Jacob and David, and all the sorrow their children caused them. And no doubt he knew what Solomon says in the book of Proverbs: "*Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child.*"

When, therefore, John saw this lady's children not turning out bad, like others, but walking in the way they *should* go, he might well feel it was a special mercy. I do not at all wonder that he greatly rejoiced.

3. For another thing, John rejoiced because he knew that walking in truth would make these children really happy in this life.

John was not one of those foolish people who do not like much religion, and imagine that it makes people unhappy. John knew that the more true religion people have, the more happy they are.

John knew that life is always full of care and trouble, and that the only way to get through life comfortably, is to be a real follower and servant of Jesus Christ.

Dear children, remember what I say this night: If ever you would be happy in this evil world—you must give your hearts to Jesus Christ, and follow Him. Give Him the entire charge of your souls, and ask Him to be your Savior and your God; and then you will be happy. Have no will of your own, and only try to please Him; and then your life will be pleasant.

Trust all to Christ, and He will undertake to manage all that concerns your soul. Trust in Him at all times. Trust in Him in every condition—in sickness and in health, in youth and in age, in poverty and in plenty, in sorrow and in joy. Trust in Him, and He will be a *Shepherd* to watch over you, a *Guide* to lead you, a *King* to protect you, a *Friend* to help you in time of need. Trust in Him, and He says Himself, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." He will put His Spirit into you, and give you a new heart. He will give you *power* to become a true child of God. He will give you *grace* to keep down bad tempers—to be no longer selfish—to love others as yourself. He will make your cares more light, and your work easier. He will comfort you in time of trouble. Christ can make those happy who trust in Him. Christ died to save them, and Christ ever lives to give them peace.

Dear children, John was well aware of these things. He had learned them by experience. He saw this lady's children likely to be happy in this world—so no wonder he rejoiced.

4. Lastly, John rejoiced because he knew that walking in truth in the *present* life—would lead to glory and honor in the life to come.

The *life to come* is the life we should all think most of. Many people seem only to care for what happens to them in this life. But they are sadly mistaken. This life is very short—it will soon be over. The oldest man will tell you, that it seems only a few years ago, that he was a child. The life to come is the life of real importance—it will have no end. It will be never-ending *happiness*—or never-ending *pain*. Oh, what a serious thought that is!

Children, I doubt not that John was thinking of the life to come when he rejoiced. Our Lord Jesus Christ had often told him of the glorious rewards prepared for those who walk in truth. John thought of the rewards laid up in Heaven for these children, and was glad.

I doubt not John looked forward in his heart to that day when Jesus shall come again. I dare say he saw in his mind's eye, these dear children clothed in robes as white as snow, having golden crowns on their heads, standing at Jesus Christ's right hand, enjoying pleasures forevermore. He saw them and their beloved mother meeting again in Heaven—meeting in that blessed place where parting and sorrow shall be known no more.

Dear children, these must have been sweet and pleasant thoughts. I do not wonder that John rejoiced.

And now I have finished what I have to say about our text. I have done what I promised. I have told you what it is to *walk in truth*—that is one important thing. I have told you *why John rejoiced* so much to find this lady's children walking in truth—that is the other important thing. Let me now wind up all, by saying something which, by God's help, may fasten this sermon in your minds. Alas, how many sermons are forgotten! I want this sermon to stick in your hearts, and do good.

Ask yourselves then, everyone, "Would John, if he knew me at this time, rejoice over me? Would John be pleased if he saw my *ways* and my *behavior*, or would he look sorrowful?"

O children, children—do not neglect this question. This is no light matter. It may be your life. No wise man will ever rejoice over bad children. They may be clean and pretty, and have fine clothes, and look well outwardly—but a wise man will only feel sad when he sees them—he will feel they are wrong inwardly. They do not have new hearts—they are *not* going to Heaven! Believe me, it is far better to be good—than to be handsome boy. It is far better to have grace in your hearts, than to have much money in your pockets, or fine clothes on your backs. None but children who love Christ—are the children who rejoice a wise man's heart.

Beloved children, hear the last words I have to say to you. I give you all an invitation from Christ, my Master: I say to you in His name, *Come and walk in truth!*

This is the way to gladden the hearts of your parents and relations. This is the one thing above all others, which will please your ministers and teachers. You little know how happy you make us, when you try to walk in truth. Then we feel that all is well, though we die and leave you behind us in this evil world. Then we feel that your souls are safe, though we are called away, and can help you and teach you no more. Then we feel that you are in the right way to be happy; and that you are prepared for troubles, however many may come upon you. For we know that walking in truth gives *peace* now, and we are sure that it leads to *Heaven* hereafter.

Come, then, this night, and begin to walk in truth. The devil will try to make you think it is too hard—that you cannot do it. Do not believe him—he is a liar! He wants to do you harm. Only trust in Christ, and follow Him—and you will soon say that His way is a way of pleasantness, and a path of peace. Only pray for the Holy Spirit to come into your heart, and you will soon feel strong. He can guide you into all truth. Only read the Bible regularly, and you will soon be made wise unto salvation. The Bible is the word of truth. Read and pray. Pray and read. Begin these habits, and keep them up. Do these things, and before long you will not say it is impossible to walk in truth. But come—come at once!

Children, I find Jesus Christ saying, in the third chapter of Revelation, "Behold I stand at the door and knock." Who knows but this may have been going on tonight? Who knows but Jesus may have been knocking at some of your hearts all through this sermon? If it is so—do not keep Him waiting any longer. If it is so—go to Him this night on your knees in prayer—go to Him and ask Him at once to come in. Ask Jesus to come and dwell in your heart, and take care of it as His own. Ask Him to enable you to walk in truth.

Oh, think how many children in the world have never been invited as you are!—how many boys and girls have never had the chance of being saved that you enjoy—how many, perhaps, would leap for joy, and walk in truth at once, if they were invited. Beloved children, take care. You, at least cannot say that you were not invited. Jesus invites you—the Bible invites you—I, the servant of Christ, invite you all tonight. Oh, come to Christ! Come, and be happy. Come and *walk in truth!*

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