

Letters to the Church



OCTOBER '23

DEARLY BELOVED IN THE LORD,

As we've been going through the letters of John, I've kept returning to a prayer for us to grow in gospel fellowship with the Father, the Son, and one another as a church. My inspiration is from the beloved apostle and his astounding expression of intention in 1st John 1:3 – 4.

that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

1 JOHN 1:3 – 4.



I'm praying for our growth in this because John's intention is not only for the truth to transform our heads but also our hearts. Yes, he proclaims these things to improve our doctrinal depth but also to expand our relational width. John desires for us to get out of all our narrow human isolation and come to know the completeness of joy found in gospel fellowship. He is drawing us out of ourselves and ushering us into rich communion with the Father, Son, and one another.

I don't think it's possible to be over-intellectual with the gospel, but it is possible to be under-relational. The gospel is the grand design of the Creator of heaven and earth. Our minds aren't ever going to exhaust thinking through all the details of it. Reflecting on the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God as revealed through the gospel should make us all cry out with Paul in praise: "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen." (Romans 11:36)

Yes, John does intend the gospel to captivate our minds. He wants us to plunge into the Scriptures and come to know the truth with greater accuracy. But a great danger arises if a church is all heads and no hearts. We may emphasize all the correct doctrines, but it can so easily feed our intellectual pride and tendencies toward self-righteousness.

In this kind of culture, our fellowship (with Father, Son, and one another) can become very mechanical as our bonds are more conceptual assumptions than actual connections. If we develop a “Tin Man” gospel mentality, we’re likely to become so consumed with our heady pursuits that we’re not even likely to stop to sing “If I only had a heart.” John shows us the gospel doctrine is indispensable, but the application of the gospel is relational.

The message of the cross is all about restoring broken relationships, and it provides the firm framework for them to mend. On Calvary’s hill, Christ gave himself for us to welcome us. His purpose was beyond making us right with God and releasing us from the judgment of our sins, but to embrace us and invite us in. The gospel is more than a legal statement of “you are free to go now” but a personal invitation “you are free to come in now.”

As gospel fellowship increases, gospel grace changes and sweetens all our relationships. It creates a gospel culture where people are honest in their confession, bearing one another’s burdens, and seeking to outdo one another in showing honor. Sure, we’re all works in progress, but praise God: the gospel is transforming us! We’re finding and tasting a completeness of joy. Our fleshly pride is being crucified, and humility is taking its place. Daily, our gospel relationships are becoming more meaningful and harmonious and lasting.

Sin always separates. It draws us into feedback loops of self, while the relational beauty of the gospel is magnetic. It draws souls in. We’ve all had the temptation to avoid fellowship in seasons of struggles. We’ve all said to ourselves, “I’ve got to get myself back together before I’m comfortable walking back into church.” I encourage each of us to remember: you are loved by us, by the Son, and by the Father - just as you are. These are the moments when the relational aspect of our gospel fellowship most needs to persuade not just our minds, but our hearts.

“Just As I Am” has always been a dear song to my heart, but the most recent refrain that we’ve been singing together on Sundays regularly chokes me up. Here is the gospel fellowship that welcomes each of us:

*I come broken to be mended
I come wounded to be healed
I come desperate to be rescued
I come empty to be filled
I come guilty to be pardoned
By the blood of Christ the Lamb
And I'm welcomed with open arms
Praise God, just as I am*

YOUR PASTOR & SERVANT,



SHAWN WEIR