

Putting First Things First (Increasing in Holiness) The Holiness of Joy

Intro: Our fourth priority for this year is increasing in holiness. Holiness might be simply defined as sharing in the character of God because He is a holy God. Paul gives a detailed description of this holiness in Galatians five. He calls these qualities “the fruit of the Spirit.” In other words, they are the qualities that the Holy Spirit produces in Christians that distinguish them or separate them from the unbelieving world.

The second word in this list is not one that we ordinarily associate with holiness. In most people’s minds, to be holy is to have a stubborn resistance to evil; and that means you also have to always have a scowl on your face. Even our conceptions of God may be tainted with a similar association. When we think of God, do we think of an austere being who looks mad all the time? How wrong that is! The truth is heaven is filled with joy; and the experience of God is to be a joyful one! The one who is led by the Spirit, and walking by the Spirit, will be filled with great joy in his or her life!

The importance of joy in the NT

William Barclay says that “the NT is the book of joy.” The Greek word “chara” meaning “joy, gladness, delight” is found 70 times in it. The verb form “charein” meaning “to rejoice” is found 72 times.

This word was also the ordinary greeting among the ancient Greeks, the way they said “hello.” In the NT, the fullest translation of this greeting found in the letters of Paul and James might be not be rendered merely “Greetings,” but “Joy be to you!”

It was with this word that the resurrected Jesus met the women who had come to the tomb to anoint his dead body (Mt. 28:9). “Rejoice!” he said. That must have been the most joyous greeting they ever received!

Likewise we Christians who have believed the testimony that the Savior is alive have every reason to rejoice; and we are urged to do so!

Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. (Phil. 3:1)

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! (Phil. 4:4)

Peter wrote to those like us who did not see the resurrected Lord in person:

and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, (1 Peter 1:8)

Do we have such a joy in our hearts?

If you have no joy in your religion, there's a leak in your Christianity somewhere." (Billy Sunday)

Why Christians Can Have Such Joy (Because we have) *Believed God’s word!*

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Rom. 15:13)

Faith dispels the attitudes that prevent joy from occurring such as worry, fear, and doubt. This faith comes as we focus on the word of God.

"These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full. (Jon. 15:11)

"The reason why many poor souls have so little heat of joy in their hearts, is that they have so little light of Gospel knowledge in their mind. The further a soul stands from the light of truth, the further he must needs be from the heat of comfort." (WILLIAM GURNALL)

Obeded God's will!

Obedience to the Word of God fosters joy in the hearts of the obedient
You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, (1 Thes. 1:6)
It is the result of letting God rule in our hearts.

...for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (Rom. 14:17)

Conversely, disobedience dispels joy and produces fear! Could our lack of joy be an indication of lack of obedience on our part?

Many are the sorrows of the wicked; but he who trusts in the Lord, lovingkindness shall surround him. Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous ones, and shout for joy, all you who are upright in heart. (Ps. 32:10-11)

Received God's forgiveness!

The guilt of sin is a major reason why many people lack joy

Awareness of such guilt causes stress, unhappiness, and worry.

Notice the close relationship between the Greek word "chara" (joy) and the Greek word "charis" (grace). We experience joy because we have been the beneficiaries of God's grace. We have been forgiven by Him!

And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch saw him no more, but went on his way rejoicing. (Acts 8:39)

One's joy is directly proportional to the grace one has received, or at least to the perception of grace that one has received. Receive a small gift, and your joy might be minimal. Receive a large gift, and your joyous reaction is greater.

Shared with God's people!

It is a joy just to "see" such fellowship.

Paul experienced joy by witnessing the love and fellowship in Philemon with his fellow-believers.

For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother. (Philemon 7)

How much more, the joy of "experiencing" such fellowship!

Paul rejoiced in the fellowship he had with the Philippians
But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity. (Phil. 4:10)

“In the NT there is nothing of that religion so-called which isolates a man from his fellow-men. The NT vividly knows the joy of making friends, and keeping friends, and reuniting friends, for friendship and reconciliation between man and man are the reflection of fellowship and reconciliation between man and God.” (William Barclay)

Served God's people!

There is the joy of seeing others converted.

The Christian Jews delighted to hear of the conversion of the Gentiles.

Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren. (Ac. 15:3)

There is great joy in seeing the spiritual progress of others.

I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth. (3 John 4)

And think of the joy in heaven in seeing those you have taught the gospel!

For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? For you are our glory and joy. (1 Thes. 2:19-20)

All those who are willing to become involved in serving the Lord, whether it be through teaching or the giving of one's time, energy or financial support, will experience joy from such service! We need to feel about this like Paul.

But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. (Phil. 2:17)

Beware of short-cuts!

Phillip Keller appropriately warns of a counterfeit joy produced by mood music, manipulated messages, and emotional encounters with others.

“Counterfeit joy is a passing, titillating, unpredictable sensation that temporarily transcends the despondency of the moment. To seek it is to drink from a sensual source that ever leaves the thirsting questing spirit unsatisfied, often disillusioned and in subsequent despair. To know the true joy of the Lord, present always in profound, quiet, still, inner power, because of His presence within, is to have the capacity to triumphantly transcend all the turmoil of our times in strength.”

Let us avoid the temptation to take a short cut to joy. There isn't one. It comes through the dedicated work of serving God. Yet the reward is well

worth the effort. It pays back those who are willing to make the commitment to serve God faithfully. Just as Nehemiah told the people: "The joy of the Lord is your strength" (Neh 8:10)

CONCLUSION: We too can have the abiding joy of the gospel in your life. In fact, we must have it if we are to be the holy people of God.

Hasn't the world seen enough discontented, moody, critical people? Rejoice in the Lord and you will stand out as a ray of light and hope to the people around you. This joy comes to those who truly give themselves to the Lord! Do you have this joy?