

“JOY”

The Second Characteristic of “the Fruit of the Spirit”

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The singular "fruit of the Spirit" is characterized by love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance (Galatians 5:22-23). These are not different fruits but various characteristics of the same fruit. As one would describe an apple or an orange, he would begin with the most prevalent characteristics, those that stand out above the others. So it is with "the fruit of the Spirit." The characteristic that stands out the most is love and then joy.

Joy is delight or to experience great pleasure. It is the opposite of weeping, lamenting, and sorrow (John 16:20-22). Some synonyms of joy are gladness and rejoicing.

From the accusation made against Jesus (Matthew 11:19), we know that he was a man of joy. He was, in many ways, a man of sorrow, yet, "for the joy that was set before him," He "endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2). The anticipated joy of being exalted to the right hand of God helped the Lord to overcome the sorrows He endured.

Because Christians are followers of Christ, we need His joy – a joy that will help us endure the trials of this life. When Paul wrote to the church in Philippi, they were undergoing persecution and were suffering for Christ's sake (Philippians 1:28-30). Thus, Paul exhorts, "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord" (Philippians 3:1), and "Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice" (Philippians 4:4). How could they rejoice when they were suffering? In the same way Jesus rejoiced. By pressing "toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" and by looking to their reward in heaven (Philippians 3:14, 20), they could rejoice. The anticipated joy of being with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit throughout all eternity will help us to overcome the sorrows inflicted upon us by the trials of this life.

Yes, joy can lift us above trials and tribulation. James exhorts, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations" (James 1:2). How can this be? How can we have joy while enduring various kinds of trials? Because true joy is independent of external forces. Externals can bring joy and sorrow, but they are

usually short lived. Many of the Hebrew Christians had lost property, and, yet, they joyfully accepted it because they knew that they had "in heaven a better and an enduring substance" (Hebrews 10:34). Paul and Silas could rejoice through prayer and song with their feet in stocks in the inner prison of Philippi because they had true joy. It is for this reason, Peter could exhort, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy" (1 Peter 4:12-13).

Notice how this idea is further expounded upon in the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount. In the last Beatitude, Jesus said, "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake" (Matthew 5:11). Blessings or happiness – joy – promised to the persecuted? Yes! Jesus explains in the next verse, "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." The anticipated joy of heaven brings great joy to those who are persecuted for Christ's sake. So, when the trials of life seem to get us down, let us remember the heavenly reward which will bring us great joy.

After exhorting the disciples to keep His word, Jesus said, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (John 15:11). Jesus knew that true joy comes by keeping the commandments of God. Thus, He exhorted His disciples to obey the commandments of God in order to have joy. Joy, therefore, is a natural outgrowth of keeping God's commandments. David wrote, "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night" (Psalm 1:1-2). Again, in Psalm 112:1, he wrote, "Praise ye the LORD. Blessed is the man that feareth the LORD, that delighteth greatly in his commandments." Surely, we would agree with David when he said, "The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart" (Psalm 19:8).

Keep in mind, in order to properly obey God, one must know His will. In John 15, Jesus first instructed His disciples, then He told them the benefits of obedience – "that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." In the first of seven beatitudes of Revelation, John pronounced a three-fold blessing upon the reader, the hearer, and those who keep those things which are written (Revelation 1:3). Instruction comes before obedience. In John's introduction of his first epistle, he said he wrote those things "that your joy may be full" (1 John 1:4). Again, instruction comes first, obedience follows, and joy results.

The book of Acts is sometimes called "the book of joy" because within its pages we find the joy of obedience. After the church was established on the marvelous day of Pentecost, the disciples "did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart" (Acts 2:46). After the Ethiopian eunuch confessed and was baptized, "he went on his way rejoicing" (Acts 8:39). After the Philippian Jailor repented and was baptized, "he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house" (Acts 16:34). Also, within the pages of Acts, we find the joy of being persecuted. After the apostles were beaten and brought before the Sanhedrin, they were told not to "speak in the name of Jesus." However, the apostles rejoiced because "they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name" and "ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ" (Acts 5:40-42).

Joy also comes when priorities are properly set. Many have probably seen the acrostic for JOY: Jesus first, Others second, and Yourself last. This simple acrostic illustrates the importance of properly set priorities. When priorities are mixed or confused, the result is tragedy and sorrow, but when kept, they bring a harvest of joy. Properly set priorities begin with putting Jesus first. Jesus said the first and great commandment is "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Matthew 22:36-38). Next on God's chain of priority is others second. Again, Jesus said, "And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matthew 22:39). In application Paul exhorted the Christians in Philippi to have the mind of Christ by esteeming others "better than themselves" and looking "on the things of others" (Philippians 2:3-5). By putting others before ourselves, we place ourselves last. This is the golden rule of Luke 6:31, "And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise."

With these thoughts, let us heed the admonition to rejoice by following Christ's example of overcoming suffering, by obeying God's commandments, and by setting our priorities in order. "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Romans 14:17). "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost" (Romans 15:13).