



# The Christian's Joy

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## THE CHRISTIAN'S JOY

(Contributed Article)

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AS we come to God's Word to examine this matter of Joy and Rejoicing we find there are many quotations made in regard to it. Moses was directed by the Lord to instruct the children of Israel to render their services to the Lord with joy and rejoicing of heart. See Deut. 12:7; 16:14, 15. In fact certain punishments came upon the children of Israel if they failed to serve the Lord with joy. See Deut. 28:45-47. This shows how important was this matter in the Lord's sight. In the psalms we find great prominence given to the matter of joy and rejoicing. Turning to Psa. 5:11; 35:9; 63:5-7; 16:11; etc., we find some further exhortations to serve the Lord with joyful hearts. Many more references in regard to the value of cultivating the joyful spirit could be found in the Old Testament, but we will content ourselves at this time by referring to Isa. 29:19; and Neh. 8:10.

In Dr. Strong's Concordance we find that the meaning of "rejoicing" is, "to be cheerful", "to be calmly happy." Coming to the New Testament we find our Lord

and His Apostles had a great deal to say on the matter of Christian rejoicing. Turning to Paul's words we read in Phil. 4:4—"Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say rejoice." Surely this represents the very essence of Christian living. Under present conditions it is not supposable that outward circumstances will always be favorable to rejoicing, from the natural standpoint. He, therefore, who would rejoice always in the Lord must have faith in the Lord—trust, hope, love. Without these we could not so appropriate to ourselves the gracious promises of the Word as to be able to rejoice in tribulation and suffering and under trials and difficulties, and when falsely accused and misrepresented, and when slandered and evilly entreated for the truth's sake. The only ones who can rejoice always are those who are living very near to the Lord, and who can feel always their oneness with Him, and that His protection and care are over them, and that His promise is sure, that all things shall work together for their highest welfare, as new creatures.

Others may rejoice today and be cast down tomorrow; only the faithful in Christ Jesus are privileged to rejoice always. The

thought of the Lord's favours, past, present and to come, make all the trials and difficulties of such to appear very light afflictions, as but for a moment, not worthy to be compared with the glory, honour, and immortality promised, and the blessed privileges of divine service, both here and hereafter. The Apostle emphasizes the matter by saying—"Again I say, Rejoice." Someone has said that we cannot have too many rejoicing Christians, nor can they rejoice too much, if they rejoice in the Lord. This rejoicing is not necessarily boisterous, nor of necessity the reverse. It implies serenity, happiness, peace, pleasure of soul, however, and does not mean that noisy demonstration is essential, as some seem mistakenly to think.

The Apostle further exhorts that the faithful should let their moderation, their forbearance, be manifested, not only toward the brethren, but toward all with whom they have to do. The Greek word here rendered "moderation" seems to carry with it the thought of reasonableness, and of not exacting our rights too rigorously.

Mercy and leniency are certainly qualities required of all who would be members of the Body of the Anointed. We should

strive to be faithful in the performance, as far as possible, of all that justice would require of us, and merciful in respect of all our requirements of justice from others should be our rule, so shall we be the children of our Father which is in heaven, for He is kind to the merciful and to the unthankful.

“The Lord is at hand.” The thought seems to be that we who are the Lord’s are not living for the present time. We are expecting great changes to be ushered in when our King shall take to Himself His great power and begins His great reign. We are not to be struggling for the last inch, or for the last cent, nor for the extreme of our own rights; but rather, to be so full of rejoicing in the good things coming and already ours by faith, that it will make us generous as respects the things of the present time in our dealings with the brethren and others. We are not expecting justice from the Lord, for nothing that we have done or could do would justly call for such exceeding great and precious things as He has promised us. And as we are expecting grace or bounty in so large measure we can well afford to be generous and liberal in our sentiments

toward others — especially toward the household of faith, because they are our brethren and fellow-representatives of the Lord Himself, from whom our bounty is to come. Also we can be the same toward the world without, because they have not the future prospects which we possess, and hence set their own hearts upon the things of the present time; and we can well afford to accord them their full share of these or more, since we are so rich through our Heavenly Father and our Heavenly Bridegroom.

That the Apostle did not mean to be understood that the Lord's second advent might be expected immediately, nor before his death, is evident; for elsewhere in his epistles he clearly sets forth his expectation to die, and to wait for the reward, the crown of righteousness laid up for him. Evidently, therefore, his only thought in this exhortation—"The Lord is at hand"—was, that we are living in the close of the reign of evil, that the dawning of the day of the Lord is not far distant, and that to the eye of faith it is so near that its influence should affect even the smallest affairs of the present life.

“Be careful for nothing” is the next exhortation, but since our English word “careful” has lost its original meaning, there is danger of getting the wrong thought here. The word originally had the thought of being full of care—*anxiety, trouble*. The Apostle’s words correspond exactly to our Lord’s injunction—“Take no thought”—and signify—*Be not anxious, burdened, full of care*. It is proper that the Lord’s people should be careful, in the meaning of the word careful as used today. We should not be careless, indifferent, loose in our conduct or words, but be circumspect.

Anxiety and burdens are unavoidable to those who are depending on themselves, their own wisdom, their own strength, their own skill; but the members of the Body of Christ accepted in the Beloved, members in the Divine family, sons of God, are assured over and over again in the Word that if they abide faithful, all things shall work together for their highest welfare. Why should they be burdened? Why should they feel anxious? He who guards their interests slumbers not.

When Christians find themselves anxious, fearful, burdened, the evidence is that they are lacking in faith, and the

probability is that they have either never grown to the point of having proper faith in the Lord, or that they have allowed "earth-born clouds" and cares of this life to come between them and the Lord, so that they no longer have confidence that they are abiding in His love and in His care. All in such condition should go at once to the throne of heavenly grace, and to the divine promises, and obtaining mercy and help they should grow in the Lord and in confidence in Him, and their corroding cares will give place to faith, confidence, peace of heart, whatever the outward conditions.

Such is the counsel of the Apostle—that instead of continuing in the anxious condition, we should lay all of our affairs before the Lord, supplicating His promised providential care, acknowledging our own lack of wisdom, and gladly accepting His wisdom, and the provisions of His love we should make every request in a spirit of thanksgiving. This spirit of thanksgiving implies a recognition that the circumstances and conditions in which we are, have been supervised of the Lord, and that we are appreciative of His care, and trust it for the future. Thanksgiving for

what we have, and a full appreciation of the Lord's leadings hitherto and now, will preclude any anxiety for the future, for the thankful heart will conclude that He who favoured us and redeemed us while we were yet sinners, will much more favor and do for us now that we are His, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

The question may arise, Why will not God give us the things which He sees us to need without our making petition to Him and claiming the promises of His Word? Undoubtedly because we need previously to come into the proper attitude of heart to receive His favors and be advantaged by them. Even as it is, we may be sure that we do not sufficiently appreciate the divine care bestowed upon us hitherto and now. Even in the attitude of prayer and thanksgiving we probably do not discern one-half of our causes for gratitude, as we shall see them by and by, when we shall know even as we are known. It is the same with natural hunger. Unless we were so constituted that the gnawings of hunger would show us our need of food we would probably appreciate it less, even if we ate as much and with the same regularity.

If we have the spirit of rejoicing and trust in the Lord, and make all of our requests, so far as we are able to discern, in harmony with His promise, and accept with gratitude and thanksgiving whatever His providence may send us—"The peace of God which passeth all understanding shall guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." The thought here is distinct. It is not our own peace that is referred to. We may by nature be more or less indisposed to peace, we may be restless, dissatisfied, discontented, fearful, foreboding or quarrelsome, but, following the counsel outlined in the Apostle's words, we learn to trust God in all of our affairs, and it is the peace of God—the peace which comes to us from a realization of God's power and goodness, and willingness to hold us by His right hand as His children—that comes in, to keep us from worry, from anxiety, etc. The thought is that this peace stands guard continually, as a sentinel, to challenge every hostile or worrying thought or fear. It keeps the Christian's mind, so that he at heart has peace with the Lord, fellowship, communion; and it guards his mind also, his reasoning faculties, instructing him and assuring him respecting the divine power

and wisdom and love. But it does not assure him of anything respecting his own perfection or worthiness or acceptance before God. This proper peace merely assures our standing in divine favor through Christ Jesus—His worthiness, His sacrifice, His aid and strength.

Turning to the 5th chapter of Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, verses 16 to 18, we read—"Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." One of the striking peculiarities of the Apostolic Epistles is that a large portion of them is devoted to an unfolding of the future high, exalted station that God sets before the consecrated ones of this Gospel Age; and the remainder of the epistles are given to a description of the effects that an acceptance of the call to run in the race for the great prize should produce in the lives of such. This we find to be true in the Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonian Christians. It is a fact well known that great truths may be taken into the head, may be intellectually discerned, and yet produce little or no effect in the life. In such cases it is not the truths that are at

fault, but it is those who imperfectly receive them. It is therefore proper and reasonable to conclude that if these wonderful truths did not produce the effects that the inspired Apostles describe; if they do not effect a change in the everyday life of those professing to be the recipients of the same, then such have not yielded, or are not yielding up their wills, all their ransomed power to the One who purchased them with the pouring out of His life. "Ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body" are the solemn words of Christ's chosen Apostle Paul.

In order to know whether we are truly consecrated or not, it is absolutely necessary to have instruction not only concerning the high and heavenly calling itself, but also concerning the effects that a Scriptural reception of these blessed truths have, when received into the heart and life. This Thessalonian epistle, like all the others, has much to say about the "high calling of God in Christ Jesus", and the heavenly hope of the Christian. The words—"Rejoice evermore"—are the first of seven exhortations which close the epistle, and how helpful it is to the Christian to be in this con-

dition of "rejoicing always." In days of sunshine and in days of gloom, in life's bright scenes, or in life's dark scenes, in times of peace and quiet, and in times of tribulation and distress, when the heart is bounding and when it is mourning, in times of prosperity, or in times of adversity, it is always possible for the mature Christian to rejoice, to be increasing in prayer, and in everything to give thanks. These characteristics describe one whose affections are centred upon the things above; one who is closely united to God, and is thoroughly in earnest in his efforts to please Him. They describe one who has a deep sense of his own unworthiness and deficiencies; but more than this, they describe a whole-hearted appreciation of the Divine arrangement in Christ to make him acceptable, and to cause him to have fellowship and communion with the infinite God as a loving and kind Father.

In the words—"Rejoice evermore"—we are reminded that true Christianity is not a gloomy thing, not a depressed state of existence. It is true that pure Christianity does have the effect not only to separate one from the evils of the world, but to a certain extent also to separate from what

may be termed legitimate, worldly pleasures, pursuits, and amusements. The thought of this, however, is not that the giving up of these things is depressing to the Christian, or that it is depriving him of pleasure; rather, that he has come into possession of higher enjoyments—pleasures that are eternal—enjoyments that have only their beginning in the present life, and continue in a fuller and richer measure.

In whatever the Christian gives up, he suffers no loss of real pleasure that he is not more than compensated for even in this life, in the enjoyment and pleasures of a spiritual kind. The Christian is not exempt from the trials and tribulations, the adversities and perplexities which flesh is heir to, but he has One who is with him in all these circumstances and conditions, and the great ambition and purpose of his heart ever is that he may evidence by his life that this One who is with him lifts him above these trials and adversities, and enables him to bear all with patience and fortitude. He knows that these earthly experiences that seem from the natural standpoint to work against him are being overruled for his development into the

likeness of the Master; he is enabled to see that these light afflictions which are but for a moment, work out for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while he looks not at the things which are seen but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. He is enabled to see that these seemingly adverse things are providential occasions for him to show what faith in his Lord can do for him, and thus give a witness, a testimony to God's favor and power in Christ. One has truly said that even "the saddest aspects of a Christian's daily life are but the showers of spring that usher in the bright and beautiful summer—the everlasting and the heavenly sunshine."

To many, perhaps to the great majority of those who take the name of Christian, the Christian life seems more like a penance than a life of fellowship with God. The Word of God does not so describe it; but rather does it describe it as a blessed privilege. It is true, that if it were not for the "blessed hope" that looks beyond this vale of tears, the Christian would not be able to fulfil the exhortation of the

text and "rejoice evermore." The Christian life, therefore, cannot be separated from the hope of the life beyond. The more firmly this hope is laid hold of, the more it becomes a living reality, and the more the Christian is enabled to rejoice in all conditions.

How beautifully the Apostle John describes this "hope" and the effect which a proper appreciation of it has on the consecrated Christian. See 1 John 3:1-3. The hope that expresses not only desire, but confident expectation that it will be realised in "due time", has the effect of causing the Christian to rejoice in tribulation, and even when experiencing bitter sorrow, to "joy in God", knowing that "all things are working together for his eternal good."

Hope is an element that to a greater or less extent exists in all, although to the children of the world, because of not understanding God's love as revealed in His purposes for them, it does not reach beyond this vale of tears. It does serve, however, to tide them over many of earth's sorrows and trials. The poet has expressed this in words—

“Soft as the voice of an angel,  
Breathing a message unheard;  
Hope with a gentle persuasion,  
Whispers the comforting word—  
Wait till the darkness is over,  
Wait till the tempest is done;  
Hope for the sunshine tomorrow,  
After the showers are gone.  
Whispering hope,  
O, how welcome Thy voice,  
Making my heart in its sorrow, rejoice.”

The Christian life is not a reluctant sacrifice wrung from us, but a joyous, freewill offering, gladly and gratefully rendered by us. The Christian's joy is not in the trials, difficulties, tribulations, and sorrows that he encounters, but in spite of them all, and in the midst of them all, he has a deep and abiding joy. His joy is in God—in thought that he is in union with God, through Christ, that he has been accepted by Him. His joy is enhanced as he remembers that he is a branch in that heavenly vine that the Heavenly Father is pruning that it might be fruitful. “These things (that is, that you are a branch of the vine) have I spoken unto you”, said the Saviour—“that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy may be full.” The Christian's secret of a happy life is in knowing and ever keeping in mind that

he is a child of God, that Christ is his Elder Brother; that his standing and acceptance are in Him; that the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ is his Father; and that it is not by works of righteousness that he has done, but by His own mercy He saves him "by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the holy spirit."

Why is it the privilege of the Christian to "rejoice evermore?" What is the foundation for his rejoicing? What has he in which to "rejoice evermore?" We answer—So far as he personally is concerned, the Christian as such has much in which to rejoice; he has nothing that need make him sad and dejected. God has forgiven all his past sins; in Christ he has redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace. We have a throne of grace to which we may approach that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. We are frail and weak, and cumbered with infirmities; but we have a great High Priest who is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities." We have received of God's own spirit, which bears witness with ours that we are His children, His sons.

We have the blessed privilege of knowing that the great God of all is dealing with us as His sons; and while He sees best at times to chasten us, we know that these chastenings are necessary and for our good, in order that we might become a partaker of His holiness. We are made aware of the fact that there is a special providence over us—that all things work together for our good because we love God, and are the called according to His purpose. Jesus tells us that the Father loves us, and that He Himself will love us to the end. The inspired Apostle tells us that He that hath begun a good work in us will complete it unto the day of Jesus Christ. Another Apostle tells us that “all things that pertain unto life and godliness” are freely given to us by God.

If persecution comes to us because of our identification with Christ, or for His sake, He tells us to rejoice and be exceeding glad for great is our reward in heaven. We not only have the spirit witnessing with ours that we are the children of God, but witnessing also that we are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with Him. We know that we are no longer under condemnation, no

longer subject to bondage, for "we have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but we have received the spirit of adoption (sonship) whereby we cry, Abba, Father." We have the witness that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren. We are enabled as our faith lays hold of these exceeding great and precious promises, to rejoice in tribulation, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the holy spirit that is given unto us.

As for spiritual blessings, which are the greatest of all blessings, we are told that even now by faith we are raised up and privileged to sit with Christ in heavenly places. We have the blessed privilege of having made known to us by God the mystery of His will, according to the good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself; that it is His purpose in the dispensation of the fulness of times to gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth.

We have the promise of Christ that He will come again and receive us unto Himself that where He is there we may be also; that when He who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory. Furthermore, we have had made known to us God's wonderful Plan of the Ages—that all mankind are objects of His love; and that He gave His son to be a ransom for all to be testified in due time; that our loved ones, who in the present life are not able to see His love, will in a due time appointed be privileged to learn of it, and profit by it to the extent of being offered the privilege of attaining everlasting life; in other words, that there is a hope to be set before the world, that of obtaining restitution, or earthly glory. Also we are told that nothing shall separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. "What more can He do for me? says one, "He has given me His word to guide me, His holy spirit to teach and comfort me, and the bright promise of an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." And as if to make me sure of all, He has said—"All things are yours, Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas; the world, things present, things to come; life or

death—all are yours, because ye are Christ's."

There is nothing in the Bible to depress the Christian; but there is much in every page, much in every providential arrangement of heaven to cheer him and make him respond with joyous utterance to the prescription of the Apostle—"Rejoice evermore."

While the Bible does not teach that the full assurance of faith is an absolute duty, it does teach that it is a blessed possibility. There are unquestionably Christians who can say with unfeigned lips—"I know in whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day"—and there are doubtless others who can say—"Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee; and when heart and flesh fail, Thou wilt be the strength of my heart, and my portion forever." As one has said—"Faith believes in Christ for salvation; assurance, which is a step higher, believes that in Christ we already have salvation. Both are saving. The first is saving only, the second is saving and comforting, too", and the Apostle John

writing, says—"These things I write unto you (wishing them to have full assurance) that your joy may be full"—1 John 1:4.

The Christian's joy may be increased even beyond that of full assurance of joy, on account of his own acceptance and hope of the eternal inheritance in the future. A Christian has something to give to others. If we wish to retain and keep this full assurance of joy, we must give out liberally of that good we have received of God; we must remember and practise the words of the Lord Jesus—"It is more blessed to give than to receive." We do well to ponder the lesson to be drawn from the incident of the four starving lepers recorded in 2 Kings 7:3-11. At the time of this incident there was a great famine in the land of Samaria. Being leprous they were compelled to live outside the walls of the city. Read the account in verses 3-11 noting particularly the lesson in verses 8 and 9. What is the lesson here for us as Christians? Are we not in a condition similar to that of the four lepers? As children of Adam we have all been tainted with the leprosy of sin. Yes, and in our needy and undone state we have been guided by the Lord's good

providence, to a wonderful supply of food. Now what are we doing about all this? Let us examine ourselves, dear friends. Are we selfishly hoarding the precious truth? Are we inclined to keep it to ourselves? If so, let us correct this tendency. Let us ponder the words of the lepers in verse 9—"They said to one another, We do not well; this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace; if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief (margin, punishment) will come upon us; now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household."

We mentioned that a Christian has something to give to others; and if we wish to retain and keep our full assurance of joy, we must give out liberally of the good we have received of God. The Apostle Peter has said—"Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." Commenting on these words a recent writer has said—"The very object of our being called into this light is that we may let it shine. If we do not let it shine we are unworthy of it, and the

treasure will be taken away and we will be left in the darkness. If indeed we have received the light and have consecrated ourselves fully to God, let us ask ourselves, What am I doing to show forth the praises of Him who has called me out of darkness? Am I going forth with these tidings to my neighbours near and far? Can I truly affirm that I am—'All for Jesus, all for Jesus; All my being's ransomed powers; All my thoughts, and words, and doings, All my days and all my hours?' "

In these days when the kingdom message may be had in such handy printed form, it is the privilege of all the Lord's people to be on the alert to grasp opportunities of telling the good tidings to all who have the hearing ear. In all you give to the needy, in all you give to those in distress, whether the giving is of the spiritual food and raiment, or of the temporal necessities, in all you lay on the altar of sacrifice, there is not the slightest ground for boasting, but there is much in it that will increase your joy evermore. The one who gives most, enjoys the most. It is a grand and blessed law in God's holy providence, that if you try to increase your own joy by gratifying your desires

and appetites, you find that you stimulate them by indulgence, and the more you give them, the more they necessarily crave. But, on the other hand, if you wish to increase your own joy by denying your own desires and appetites, and giving as a ministry to the wants and necessities of others, you will find that though your desires are thus unstimulated, yet will your gratification increase, and the more you can give, the more you will swell the current of your happiness, and multiply the joys of your heart. To rejoice always, therefore, give always—"There is that scattereth and yet increaseth.'

One of the old saints of God when brought under circumstances in which everything of earthly comfort was slipping from his grasp gives utterance to the beautiful words—"Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation"—Habakkuk 3:17, 18.

Let the followers of Jesus therefore hear the Apostle's exhortation and "Rejoice in the Lord always." It gives honor to the one who bought you, to rejoice. Indeed, you owe it to God, to show to the world that your Saviour enables you to rejoice. It is in this way that perchance you may draw others to that spring from which you have received the life-giving medicine that makes even the present life one of joy and rejoicing.

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