

Joy

Two weeks ago, I wrote in the *NEWSLETTER* what Paul had told the Galatians about how they could change their lives so that they would be pleasing to God. He told them to get rid of the “acts of the sinful nature” and to bear the Spirit’s fruit. In short, we should possess the characteristics of:

“...love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control...” (Galatians 5:22-23)

Last week, the fruit of the Spirit was love, the kind of love God showed to us and that we should give back to Him and to our fellow man. Today, we look at **JOY**, but in order to do so, we can’t assume that it is the joy defined in the dictionary. Webster says that joy is “the emotion evoked by well-being, success, or good fortune or by the prospect of possessing what one desires.” That type of joy is based on human emotion brought on by selfish desires. We want something badly enough that we’ll do anything to get it. When we receive it, we are overjoyed—no matter who we may have hurt in the process.

All you have to do is look at the scripture to see that the Spirit’s joy is somewhat skewed. Many of the things that should bring us joy are unpleasant. The rewards reaped because of the “unpleasantness” far outweigh the difficulty or discomfort, and that should bring us real joy.

When Jesus was to be born, it was announced by the heavenly messengers in **Luke 2:10** as “**news of great joy.**” The one upon whom they had waited had come, and His message was intended to cause those who followed Him to be happy and joyful. However, the words of Jesus in **Matthew 5** in what we call the beatitudes don’t sound very joyful. They call for sacrifice, compassion, and caring for the other guy. Some even call for persecution and difficulty. But, as I’ve said on occasion, Jesus doesn’t leave us hanging—He and His inspired writers tell us why we should be happy and joyful and consider ourselves blessed in spite of the unpleasantness of the situation. Jesus said in Matthew 5:11-12:

“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven.”

The assuredness of our eternal reward should be enough to cause us to be joyful, even when facing affliction. James, in **James 1:2-4 and in verse 12**, says that it should be considered “**pure joy**” when we face various trials. Why? Because when we face them, we grow stronger in the faith. The stronger we are, the more likely we will be able to persevere and live a life well pleasing to God. That life will bring about for us “**a crown of life**” because by our life we have shown our love for God. That life will put us in stark contrast with the lost who are “**without hope and without God in the world.**” (**Ephesians 2:12**) To us, however, Paul tells us in **Romans 15:13** that “**the God of**

hope has filled us with joy.” That joy, Jesus said in **John, chapters 15-17**, is complete, having been given to us in full measure, and cannot be taken away.

Paul, in spite of his trials, used the word joy or rejoice over and over again in describing his relationship to God. He knew the sufferings would eventually turn to joy when he passed from death to life. Peter knew it, too, and wrote to his readers that they should **“rejoice that you should participate in sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed.” (1 Peter 4:13)**

When you feel hard-pressed, be joyful. Know that the eventual reward of living a life of sacrifice and trial is life eternal. –Johnny Stephens