

Godly Joy

By Gary Henry

“Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation” (Hab. 3:18). We often emphasize the need for our sorrow to be godly sorrow, but is it any less important for our joy to be godly joy? If it is dangerous for worldly thinking to infect our sorrow, is it any less of a problem when it jeopardizes our joy?

To begin with, what is it about godly joy that makes it “godly”? The answer is not hard to find. Just as godly sorrow is focused on God rather than self (it grieves what our sins have cost Him and not us), godly joy is also focused on God. It rejoices in whatever God rejoices about: the accomplishment of His purposes, the triumph of His cause, the redemption of those who have accepted His salvation, and, yes, even the carrying out of His justice.

I believe one prominent feature of godly joy is that it rejoices in the life-path that God lays out before us. That is, it finds joy in following the path that God indicates rather than the one we might have chosen. It genuinely rejoices in the accomplishment of God’s will, whatever that might mean for us personally. As Evelyn Underhill put it, “This is the secret of joy. We shall no longer strive for our own way, but commit ourselves, easily and simply, to God’s way, acquiesce in his will, and in so doing find our peace.”

Jesus is obviously the great example here. He experienced no greater joy than being a part of the fulfillment of His Father’s purposes, even when the role required of Him was painful and difficult. On one occasion, He said, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work” (John 4:34). He derived more joy from obedience than most people get from a great meal.

Without the focus that Jesus had on the Father’s glory, joy tends to degenerate. It becomes the product of nothing more than the selfish indulgence of our desires, with little or no regard for whether that indulgence helps or hinders the outworking of God’s purposes in the world. And in the end, that kind of “joy” (if it even can be called that) is a distinctly unsatisfying thing. It leaves a dry, dusty taste in our mouths. But GODLY joy, that is a different thing altogether! When our joy is the overflowing of GOD’S joy, well, that is what Eden was about. And our Father has not given up on it.

Lift Up Your Heads

A young man once found a five-dollar bill in the road. After that he never raised his eyes from the ground when he walked. In the next thirty years he got \$1.64 in silver, 143 pennies, 89 buttons, 213 old pens, a hunch back, a miserly character, and a rotten disposition. He lost the glory of the sunshine, smiles from friends, and the beauty of the flowers, trees, and blue skies ... all that really makes life worth the living.

Sadly, many are missing the real joy and happiness available to those that love the Lord and do His bidding. We must get our heads up and look to Him who said, “Then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draws nigh” (Luke 21:28).

Modern Day Romans

In the days of Roman greatness so many people wanted their likeness in sculpture that Greek artists, working in Rome, had apprentices turning out stock bodies of gods and goddesses, while the artists made the heads to fit into sockets. In our day, the situation is reversed. Thousands of people are wearing the heads of others. They will not think for themselves, carried away by fads in science and religion. Many carry around the “Hollywood” version of life. It takes individual courage and faith to come out from the world.

Paul wrote, "And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be my people." Therefore "come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you" (2Cor. 6:16-17).

Food for Thought

"Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him" (John 6:27).

Several years ago the British Weekly printed a letter to the editor: "Dear Sir: I notice that ministers seem to set a great deal of importance on their sermons and spend a great deal of time in preparing them. I have been attending services quite regularly for the past thirty years and during that time, if I estimate correctly, I have listened to no less than 3,000 sermons; but, to my consternation, I discover I cannot remember a single one of them. I wonder if a minister's time might be more profitably spent on something else? Sincerely..."

That letter triggered an avalanche of angry responses for weeks. The value of preaching was belittled and defended by many, but eventually this single letter closed the debate: "My dear Sir: I have been married for thirty years. During that time I have eaten 32,850 meals -- mostly of my wife's cooking. Suddenly, I have discovered that I cannot remember the menu of a single meal. And yet, I received nourishment from every one of them. I have the distinct impression that without them, I would have starved to death long ago. Sincerely..."

"Just Because I'm a Woman"

"Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing." (1Peter 3:8-9)

A middle-aged business executive approached the front entrance of the office building in which he worked. A young feminist came up at the same moment, so he stepped back and held the door open for her to pass on through. She looked at him and said with annoyance, "Don't hold the door for me just because I'm a woman."

To her surprise, he looked right back and replied, "I'm not. I'm holding it open because I'm a gentleman." Likewise, we as Christians must always act toward others on the basis of what we are in Christ Jesus, and not on the basis of what they may or may not be. (From 1500 Illustrations for Biblical Preaching, p. 38)

How to Become Normal

How to become normal, when you are not, and how to stay normal when you are. Use effective thinking: it will reduce stress.

- 1) Life is difficult. Get used to it.
- 2) Perception is reality. Imagination and suspicion are not.
- 3) Change is the toughest thing a human being can do.
- 4) You can never change another human being; you can only change yourself. Once you change, they may change, but you cannot change them.
- 5) I am responsible for everything I do and say. I am not responsible for your response to me.
- 6) The future and the past are seldom as good or as bad as we anticipate or remember.
- 7) No one has a squeaky clean psyche.
- 8) The only time you can control is this moment.