

17

---

---

*The Joy  
of Holiness*

---

---

FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS  
NOT A MATTER OF EATING  
AND DRINKING, BUT OF  
RIGHTEOUSNESS, PEACE, AND  
JOY IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

*Romans 14:17*

God intends the Christian life to be a life of joy — not drudgery. The idea that holiness is associated with a dour disposition is a caricature of the worst sort. In fact, just the opposite is true. Only those who walk in holiness experience true joy.

Jesus said, "If you obey My commands, you will remain in My love, just as I have obeyed My Father's commands and remain in His love. I have told you this so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete" (John 15:10-11). In this statement Jesus links obedience and joy in a cause and effect manner; that is, joy results from obedience. Only those who are obedient — who are pursuing holiness as a way of life — will know the joy that comes from God.

In what way does holiness produce joy? For one thing, there is the joy of *fellowship with God*. David said, "In Thy presence is fulness of joy; in Thy right hand there are pleasures forever" (Psalm 16:11). True joy comes only from God and He shares this joy with those who walk in fellowship with Him. When David committed the awful sins of adultery and murder, he lost his sense of God's joy because he lost fellowship with God. After this, in his penitential prayer he asked God to "restore to me the joy of Thy salvation" (Psalm 51:12). A life of disobedience cannot be a life of joy.

The daily experience of Christ's love is linked to our obedience to Him. It is not that His love is *conditioned* on our obedience. That would be legalism. But our *experience* of His love is dependent upon our obedience.

Dr. William Hendriksen observes that God's love both precedes and follows our obedience. God's love, he says, "by *preceding* our love . . . creates in us the eager desire to keep Christ's precepts; then, by *following* our love, it rewards us for keeping them."<sup>1</sup>

Another cause of joy is knowing that I am obeying God — that I am no longer resisting Him in some particular area of my life. This joy is especially apparent when, after a long struggle between the Spirit and our sinful natures, we have by His grace finally and radically dealt with some besetting sin that had previously mastered us. We might call this the joy of victory; I prefer to call it the joy of obedience.

In addition to the joy of fellowship with the

Holy God, a holy life also produces the joy of *anticipated reward*. The writer of Hebrews said, "Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the Pioneer and Perfecter of our faith, who *for the joy set before Him* endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:1-2). Jesus was motivated to endure by anticipating the joy of His reward. No amount of hardship and struggle could deprive Him of that anticipation.

In the parable of the talents, the Lord said to the two servants who used their talents, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. . . Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matthew 25:21, 23, KJV). One of the "talents" God has given to every Christian is the possibility of walking in holiness, being free from the dominion of sin. We, too, can look forward to entering into the joy of the Lord as we walk in holiness to the end of our days.

Joy not only *results* from a holy life, but there is also a sense in which joy helps *produce* a holy life. Nehemiah said to the dispirited exiles who returned to Jerusalem, "The joy of the Lord is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10). The Christian living in disobedience also lives devoid of joy and hope. But when he begins to understand that Christ has delivered him from the reign of sin, when he begins to see that he is united to Him Who has all power and authority, and that it is possible to walk in obedience, he begins to have hope. And as he hopes in Christ, he begins to have joy. In the strength of

this joy he begins to overcome the sins that so easily entangle him. He then finds that the joy of a holy walk is infinitely more satisfying than the fleeting pleasures of sin.

But to experience this joy, we must make some choices. We must choose to forsake sin, not only because it is defeating to us, but because it grieves the heart of God. We must choose to count on the fact that we are dead to sin, freed from its reign and dominion, and we can now actually say no to sin. We must choose to accept our responsibility to discipline our lives for obedience.

God has provided all we need for our pursuit of holiness. He has delivered us from the reign of sin and given us His indwelling Holy Spirit. He has revealed His will for holy living in His Word, and He works in us to will and to act according to His good purpose. He has sent pastors and teachers to exhort and encourage us in the path of holiness; and He answers our prayers when we cry to Him for strength against temptation.

Truly the choice is ours. What will we choose? Will we accept our responsibility and discipline ourselves to live in habitual obedience to the will of God? Will we persevere in the face of frequent failure, resolving never to give up? Will we decide that personal holiness is worth the price of saying no to our body's demands to indulge its appetites?

In the Preface we considered the farmer who, in dependence on God, fulfills his responsibility to produce a harvest. He does not sit back and wait for God to act; rather he acts himself, trusting God to do His part. If we are to attain any measure of

holiness we must have a similar attitude. God has clearly said, "Be holy, because I am holy."

Surely He has not commanded us to be holy without providing the means to be holy. The privilege of being holy is yours, and the decision and responsibility to be holy is yours. If you make that decision, you will experience the fullness of joy which Christ has promised to those who walk in obedience to Him.

---

NOTE: 1. From *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to John* by William Hendriksen (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1953), page 281. Used by permission.