

The Christian's Joy

By Doug Hamilton

Jesus said in John 15:11, "*These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.*" He said again in John 16:24, "*Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.*" John said in 2 John 12, "*...I hope to come to you and speak face to face, so that your joy may be made full.*" It is obvious that the life of the Christian is to be filled with joy. What is joy and why should the Christian be filled with it?

Definition of Joy

According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, *joy* is defined as *a feeling of great happiness*. The Layman's Bible Encyclopedia defines joy as: *the emotion excited by the acquisition or the expectation of good; pleasure caused by good fortune, or the like; gladness, delight*. It is a word which appears in one form or another, such as rejoice, rejoicing and joyous hundreds of times, depending the version. Joy is definitely a popular concept in the Christianity. It is necessary to look deeper at this word through scripture before we can make the best application.

1) There is the EMOTION of Joy.

Joy is the feeling called forth by well-being, success, or good fortune. A person automatically experiences it because of certain favorable circumstances (*Baker encyclopedia of the Bible*). We find many examples of the emotion of joy. Luke chapter fifteen provides many instances of this type of joy.

- In the parable of the lost sheep, the shepherd who found his lost lamb experienced the emotion of joy (Luke 15:5-6).
- In the next parable the woman rejoiced when she found the lost coin of her bridal headdress (Luke 15:9).
- In the third parable of the Prodigal Son, the father rejoiced upon his son's return. By the end the father explains to the eldest son, "*But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found*" (Luke 15:32).

In all three cases, there was not a command to carry out the emotion of joy, but instead a result of the present environment. All people, both Christian and non-Christian, can have joy. The birth of a new child, a bonus in the paycheck, the good report from the doctor and the encouraging letter from a friend can be experienced by all people. Just like we have joy today, they had it during the days of the New Testament.

- When the woman was healed by Jesus in Luke 13:16-17, "*the entire crowd was rejoicing over all the glorious things being done by Him.*"
- When the apostles saw Jesus ascend into heaven in Luke 24:51-52, "*they, after worshiping Him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy.*"
- When the gentile Christians found out that they would not have to be circumcised in Acts 15:30-31, "*they rejoiced because of its encouragement.*"

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- When the woman heard the news that Jesus was risen from the dead in Matthew 28:8, *“And they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples.”*

It is easy to feel joy when the circumstances surrounding our lives are good. It is in the adversities of life that we naturally do not experience the emotion of joy. That leads to the other half of the equation.

2) There is the COMMAND of Joy.

Often times the worldly conditions around us do not naturally generate the emotion of joy. Conditions in our life might hinder the happiness which God wants in our hearts. In these cases there is not an emotion of joy, but the command of joy.

- 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, “Rejoice always...”
- 1 Peter 4:13, “keep on rejoicing...”
- 2 Corinthians 13:11, “Finally, brethren, rejoice...”
- Romans 12:15, “Rejoice with those who rejoice”

God expects his people to rejoice in every circumstance, whether we feel like it or not. There is a definite command of joy for all Christians. Listen to the attitude of Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:4-10. He went through some terrible struggles while he was working as a missionary for the Lord Jesus Christ. He said, *“...in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, ⁵ in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger, ⁶ in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love, ⁷ in the word of truth, in the power of God; by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left, ⁸ by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report; regarded as deceivers and yet true; ⁹ as unknown yet well-known, as dying yet behold, we live; as punished yet not put to death, ¹⁰ as sorrowful yet always rejoicing...”* It did not matter what situation he was in, he always found the need to obey the command of joy. We are also under the same position of the apostle when it comes to the same.

There are some things we should never rejoice about.

- In 1 Kings 21 King Ahab rejoicing over the stolen vineyard of Naboth.
- The idolatrous Israelites rejoiced at the building of the golden calf (Acts 7:41).
- 1 Corinthians 13:6 states we should “not rejoice in unrighteousness”.
- Proverbs 17:5 warns against rejoicing over the calamity of others.
- Proverbs 24:17 states, *“Do not rejoice when your enemy falls...”*

The Command of Joy is a Mindset.

Since we typically have no difficulty with the emotion of joy, we shall focus on the command of joy. It is easy to feel joy when things are going great, but most moments of life it does not. How do you obey the command of joy when facing the trials of life? We must understand that the command of joy is a mindset.

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It says in James 1:2, “*Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.*” It does not make sense when first reading, for we naturally do not feel joy when in a trial. The apostle Peter said something similar in 1 Peter 1:6, “*In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials*”. We must remember that this is a command of joy and not an emotion of joy. When experiencing unfavorable conditions enter our life, we must choose to exhibit joy.

The Greek philosopher Epicurus taught centuries before for when the times get tough that we were to think on the more pleasant moments from before. In his final illness, in terrible pain, he encouraged his followers about all the wonderful discussions from the classroom which they shared. This was the same strategy which Paul taught the Christians of the first century.

- Philippians 4:8, Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.”
- Colossians 3:1-2, “Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.”

The command of joy is to take our minds to joyous thoughts when facing difficult times, even if we are not feeling it. We are “*not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind*” (Romans 12:2). We must have an attitude of joy in all circumstances. The command of joy is so much tougher to maintain than the emotion, but if we will keep the command, then the emotion will always follow.

Ways to Obey the Command of Joy

How do we go through the motions of joy? It is through our interactions with each other. Many times when things are not going well for us there is a tendency to carry the burden alone. Fellowship with other Christians is one of the greatest ways to gain joy, for it is shared. *Philippians 2:17-18*, “*But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.*” He told the Corinthians, “*having confidence in you all that my joy would be the joy of you all*” (2 Corinthians 2:3). Joy is meant to be shared with others.

- 2 Timothy 1:4, “longing to see you, even as I recall your tears, so that I may be filled with joy.”
- Philippians 4:1, “Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long *to see*, my joy and crown”
- 1 Thessalonians 2:20, “For you are our glory and joy.”
- Philemon 7, For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.

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What are the ways we interact and share our joy with another? How do we carry out the command of joy?

a) Prayer to God

- Philippians 1:4, “always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all”
- Philippians 4:4-6, Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentle *spirit* be known to all men. The Lord is near. ⁶ Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

b) Holy Scriptures

- 1 John 1:4, “These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.”
- 1 Thessalonians 1:6, “having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit”

c) Sharing Good News

- Luke 10:17, “The seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.”
- Acts 13:48, “When the Gentiles heard this, they *began* rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.”
- Acts 15:3, “Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren.”
- Philippians 1:18, “What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice”

d) Singing Hymns

- Colossians 3:16, “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”
- Ephesians 5:19, “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord”

Sing and Be Happy

If the skies above you are gray, You are feeling so blue,
If your cares and burdens seem great all the whole day through,
There's a silver lining that shines in the heavenly land,
Look by faith and see it my friend, Trust in His promises grand.

Chorus

Sing and you'll be happy today, Press along to the goal,
Trust in Him who leadeth the way, He is keeping your soul,
Let the world know where you belong, Look to Jesus and pray,
Lift your voice and praise Him in song, Sing and Be Happy Today!