

The Fruit of Joy

“These thing have I spoken unto you that My joy might remain in you and that your joy might be full” (John 15:11).

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace...” (Galatians 5:22)

As in the matter of love, Paul says that joy is, not shall be the fruit of the Spirit. But where is the joy? Most Christians would feel that it is, if not absent from lives, at least a “sometime thing.” It is assumed, then, that they must be lacking in the filling of the Holy Spirit, and the religious leaders would give that indication. It would be assumed that if one had a special touch of the Holy Spirit, the joy would flow in them. Unfortunately, the effort to attain such an experience has brought a great deal of discouragement and distress to the believers. The problem is a failure to understand the meaning of the word joy in the Greek text, and the failure to distinguish between joy that is of the flesh and that which is of the spirit. Whether or not one may have “special” experiences with the Holy Spirit is not the issue here.

In the first place, we must understand the meaning of the word. The Greek word is “*chara*.” It is from the same root as the words for “grace,” “gifts,” “thankfulness,” and “forgiveness.” All of these words indicate same kind of flow of benevolence (good will). The English word “joy” has more the flavor of “ebullience” or “bliss.” It is often seen as some deeper expression of “happiness,” which is more of a surface and transient thing. As in the word for “love” the English usage has almost destroyed any deep significance to the word. As we may think of the joy of our salvation, we also see it used in such light expressions as “jumping for joy.” The English word, of course, is mostly applied to emotions, which are a part of the mind or psyche. Where human feelings are involved, joy can be a very unreliable and transient emotion. There is nothing wrong with the emotion of joy, even as the English usage of it implies. But that kind of joy is always very closely tied to the human brain patterns, and is therefore never reliable.

The Holy Spirit comes not with emotional patterns, but with truth. The reaction to that truth is based upon the nature of a given individual’s natural mental sense. Some people are by nature quite expressive as far as emotions are concerned, and some by nature are not. It is not sound to compare personalities in terms of spirituality. But neither Paul nor Jesus were referring to human personality traits. In the passage quoted from John, Jesus has uttered these words on His way to the most tragic and trying event in His life—the crucifixion. He was not taking it lightly, and certainly He was not drowning the realities in a sort of “celestial euphoria.” Nor was He trying to prove that Christians can be “happy” even in the midst of catastrophe. Obviously there was something else that He was expressing—something that had to do with the deepest recesses of the Spirit. We must try to replace in our minds this sense of the word, for the lighter and surface concept of the English word which comes originally from the same roots as the French word *joie* as in *joie de vivre*. This means of course, the “gaiety of zestful living.” Jesus was certainly not, on the way to His death, offering to His followers “zestful living.” What He was offering was a river of divine benevolence flowing within them, which would

make life a vital meaningful thing. The word “satisfaction” is certainly more appropriate than “happy” or “blissful,” as an ongoing condition of life. In fact, bliss does not really fare well. We can only stand so much of it before it becomes boring and wearisome. A piece of candy is a delight. A box full may make us not want to see another piece. It is the same with idleness. Two weeks of vacation can be most refreshing; a month may be too much, and we want to get back to reality.

In the spirit of what Jesus was saying James said, “*Count it all joy when you fall into divers [various] temptations [testings], knowing that the trying of your faith worketh patience*” (1:2,3). The joy comes with hard experiences, not pleasant in themselves, but vital in the achieving of spiritual sensitivity. It is the same with proper physical exercise, which can be quite painful (“no pain, no gain”) but yields the satisfaction of fitness. Paul, in fact, uses this word in connection with the Greek games. “*That I may finish my course (dromos) in joy*” (Acts 20:24). The Greek word for “course” is directly identified with the arena—[racetrack]. We get from it words like “hippodrome” which is an arena for horses. Applied to the Greek athletic contests the word *chara* means joy in the sense of exhilaration of the contest. The serious contender knows the intense physical pain and exhaustion that goes with the contest. In fact, our word “athlete” is from the Greek *athlesis*—struggle or conflict. In this context, joy and pain are blended in a sense of exhilaration in the challenge, rather than a blissful experience. A soldier may feel such exhilaration in battle in spite of the honor of it. None of the meanings above are associated with superficial bliss or happiness, but rather with a deeper sense of satisfaction in the value of the action.

Of course, the word does, as used in the classics, involve human feelings. The most important consideration is that the reality of our joy as Christians is in the spirit where Christ dwells, and not in the mind where it is subject to the vacillations of human emotions. It certainly can give rise to emotion, as the individual reacts to the experiences in the spirit, but such emotions are not an essential part of the joy that is in the spirit.

Joy in the spirit is there because Christ is there and we have His joy. It is there as a river of divine benevolence flowing through us like an artesian spring. It has God as its source and is maintained constantly by His energy. The surface feelings of sadness or gladness are not a dependable gauge of that flow. They are not wrong—just not reliable. The river flows eternally in the deeps of the spirit, in spite of the surface emotions. Jesus, referring to the future coming of the Holy Spirit, spoke of this river. “*In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, if any man thirst let him come unto Me and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly [innermost being] shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should [are about to] receive; for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified*” (John 7:37-39). Obviously this promise was made, not to a select few who have special religious experiences, but to all who would believe. It was a promise of the effects of the Holy Spirit upon all believers when He did, in fact, come to dwell in humans upon the earth. It can never be applied to special groups of believers who have received some second kind of experience subsequent to salvation. When the

Spirit would come upon the believers this flow of energy would be there. If one did not have this Spirit within, one would not be saved. So the river of energy flows in the spirit of all who belong to Christ. If you have asked Him to come in He is there. The evidence is that you want Him to be there. And His joy will be there in the spirit no matter what the surface feelings in the flesh may be.

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