

## **The Believer and the Holy Spirit**

### **XI. - The Fruit of the Spirit—Joy**

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

***“The God of hope [expectation] fill you with all joy and peace in [the process of] believing, that you may abound in hope [expectation] in the power of the Holy Spirit”*** (Romans 15:13).

***“And you became followers of the Lord having received the word in much affliction with the joy of the Holy Spirit . . .”*** (I Thessalonians 1:6).

The promise of Galatians 5:22 is that joy would be a fruit of the Spirit. But what is joy? How many believers can really say that they have joy in their lives? If we were to ask a hundred people to define joy, we would get a hundred different answers. As with the word “happy,” the human experience of it is elusive and unreliable. We must then distinguish between the joy of the Holy Spirit and the joy that is part of the human emotions. The texts quoted above indicate unarguably that there is a joy prevailing in the Spirit and going beyond the reach of the human psyche. Thus Jesus, facing the agonies of Calvary, spoke of the joy that He Himself had, and offered it to the disciples in full measure. So we must ask—what was the nature of this joy so freely offered in the context of His imminent suffering.

The Greek word used here is *χαρά* (*chara*). It is the root in a number of Greek words, all of which refer to the flow of Divine benevolence. Thus, we have *χαρις* (*charis*), “a flow of grace;” *χαρισμα* (*charisma*), “a freely given gift;” and *χαριζομαι* (*charidzomai*), “to forgive.” So the force of these words is something of God’s river of love and grace engulfing the spirit which He now occupies. Thus, the kind of joy Jesus speaks of here is something of the Spirit and not of the flesh. It is not subject to the vacillations of human emotion. Nor does it denote the surface sense of bliss that accompanies pleasurable human experience. Basically it is an inner sense of the reality of God in spite of all human experience, negative or positive. We do not always feel good about things, but in a very deep sense we know God is there. Even Jesus, on the cross, had a human reaction at one point—that God had forsaken Him—but shortly thereafter committed His Spirit to Him. It would seem that Jesus had to come to the ultimate implications of the human flesh and the negative feelings that had come to the surface from time to time during His earthly odyssey. Perhaps the insufferable burden of the human scene for over thirty years, was more suffering than the acute episodes of the cross. Although the greatest agony of all, which brought about bloody perspiration was the weight of the sins of the world, upon One whose life had been sinless. It was the guilt of the innocent charged with heinous crimes. Nevertheless, in the full consciousness of all that He faced in the crucifixion, Jesus spoke of the fullness of the joy within Him and offered it to His Disciples.

In the human misunderstanding of this great truth, it is often assumed that the joy that is the gift of the Holy Spirit must be externalized in fleshly exhibitions. Thus it is assumed that those who are filled with the Spirit will manifest it in human emotional expressions. Unfortunately this fails to take into account the

variables of the human personality, which are not necessarily affected by the presence of the Holy Spirit within. The Holy Spirit does not come with an emotional accompaniment. Rather the emotional expressions are reactions to the coming of the Holy Spirit, based upon the individual personality. You find great emotional outbursts in many situations where the Holy Spirit is not involved at all, as in sports events or political conventions. By the same token, there are many whose reactions to all experiences are conservative. They simply do not get “excited” about anything very much. But that is a matter of personality and not of spirituality. Of course, there is nothing wrong with giving vent to emotional expressions as a result of one’s involvement with the Holy Spirit. The problem comes when those who are so expressive, assume that everyone who is filled with the Spirit will have the same experience. Actually, religious groups tend to draw into their number those who have a rather similar kind of personality. Many do not feel comfortable in the midst of demonstrations and displays of any kind. They may be equally touched by the Spirit as those who do give outward expression to it, but have a different reaction.

The joy that is the gift of the Holy Spirit accompanies the process of believing and brings with it a certain expectation of God’s grace. That is, we expect God to be with us in a deep sense, that prevails in spite of the circumstances of our lives which may cause many negative feelings in the flesh. That is why we continually “bounce back.” We are like the eagle, whose wings catch the currents and carry it over the obstacles. The flesh may falter, but the spirit retains the connection with Christ in spite of the obstacles. The Greek prepositional phrase is more than just “in believing;” it encompasses the idea of the process—“while in the circumstance of believing.” The river of God’s benevolence carries us along in the spirit, while we encounter the rocks and turbulence of life in the flesh. The word “hope” is not an adequate translation of the Greek *ελπις* (*elpis*). The English word “hope” has too much uncertainty in it. Nor does the expectation engendered in the spirit depend upon human emotions. In the flesh we may feel that the situation is quite hopeless, and yet the spirit somehow clings to Christ. It is very much akin to Jesus’ experience on the cross, where, in the flesh, He felt forsaken by God, and yet later committed His Spirit to Him. It is well to remember that the joy and peace, as well as the expectation, are all based upon the power of the Holy Spirit.

The joy of the Holy Spirit, which we have been talking about, was accompanied in the early Church “with much affliction.” The Greek *θλιψις* (*thlipsis*) literally means “pressure.” It comes from a verb form that means “to squeeze.” Jesus said, in the same vein, “*These things have I spoken unto you that in Me you might have peace; in the world you have affliction [pressure]; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world*” (John 16:33). It is not just a matter of suffering as we think of it, but of the pressures of life in general that “squeeze” us. Life seems to get more and more complex as life progresses. It is not always possible to keep our focus on Christ in the human sense. It does not mean that one is any the less tied to Christ—an eternal unity—but only that the human mind is distracted by the realities of life. The presence of Christ within counteracts the pressures of life without. It is like the submarine, which is so constructed that the pressure within equalizes the pressure without, else it would be crushed like an eggshell.

In summary, joy is indeed a fruit of the presence of the Holy Spirit within, but we must distinguish between that which is a prevailing reality in the spirit

versus that which is simply an expression of human personality. The evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit within us is not in how we feel about things—a human emotion—but in the fact that we want Him to be in us. Even though one may go through many negative experiences in the face of the struggle for a vital relationship with Christ, the fact that we struggle at all and that we prevail in remaining with Christ, is a far more reliable test than vacillating human emotions.

David Morsey

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