

Fullness of Joy

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Amongst true believers there is nothing more lacking in the present day than sniitual joy, and where this is so, there is sound reason for the lack on our side. Thank God, all is bright on His side. We are introduced into unclouded blessedness. Our place is before God in all the acceptance of the Beloved. "To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved." And our privilege is to share the fellowship of the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord – the circle of divine love.

What wondrous grace that God should be pleased to take us up, and not only save us from all the ruin of the first man, but bring us into all the joy and blessedness of the second! "As He is, so are we in this world."

Many and various are the causes which operate to hinder our enjoyment of what has been thus given to us in Christ. There are weights which hinder, and sin which so easily besets, and Satan behind all, seeking to entrap our feet and impede us in every possible way. But there is no necessity for us to be overcome, or turned aside.

God is for us, and the Holy Spirit is given to be our strength. If, however, we grieve Him, He will not be free to minister Christ to us, and how then can we rejoice?

In John's gospel the Lord speaks of joy –

- In relation to obedience (chapter 15).
- In relation to dependence (chapter 16).
- In relation to separation (chapter 17).

Obedience

In John 15:9, the Lord assures the disciples of His love to them: "As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you: continue ye in My love." His love to us is only measured by the Father's love to Him. Wondrous to think of! Have our hearts taken in this wondrous truth? Are our souls basking in the enjoyment of this? Do we really believe that at this moment, notwithstanding all our fickleness and feebleness, our waywardness too, the Lord's love is just the same towards us as ever? It cannot change, because it is divine and eternal. He will never love us less, and He can never love us more!

"Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them to the end." Though His love never changes toward us, vet the enjoyment of it may be lost to us, because of our not seeking to please Him by walking in the path of His will. This is what is involved in obedience. It has been said, and said truly, that "happiness lies in obedience," but this demands the setting aside of self, the renunciation of our own wills in everything. This we may not always be prepared for. But observe how the Lord sets Himself before us as our example! In John 15:10-11 He says, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."

Dependence

In John 16:23-24 He says, "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My Name, He will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My Name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." This is our resource in His absence, and what more could we desire? We are to ask the Father in His Name, that is as representing Him here, which would exclude all that would merely gratify ourselves.

Now prayer is the expression of dependence; for why pray if we have no need, or if we have any resource in ourselves? How blessed for us to be so consciously weak in ourselves, that we are absolutely cast on the Lord as our only resource. Conscious weakness is the path of divine power. Even Paul had to learn, "when I am weak, then am I strong." Blessed lesson! He gloried in what made little of himself before men, and took pleasure in difficulties of the most trying kind, that the power of Christ might rest upon Him.

Obedience and dependence are inseparable. If there be not subjection of heart to the Lord's will, which is expressed in keeping His commandments, we shall not realize His sustaining power. He will not support us in any path of our own devising, nor could we in this, look to Him in confidence to be kept, and this, I have no doubt, is the cause of such a manifest want of joy among the people of God today.

In Psalm 81 we have a striking instance of what Israel lost through their disobedience and lack of confidence in God. Jehovah reminds them of what He had done for them, and in verse 10 He says, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." Could they have desired more? They were promised blessing without measure, without stint, but alas! they would not hearken to Jehovah's voice, and the latter part of the Psalm is His lament over what they had lost through their willfulness and disobedience. He as much as says if you had only obeyed My voice, and been content with My ordering for you, trusting Me simply, I would have done far better for you than you could possibly have done for yourselves. What a pity we are so often like them, and in our unbelief try to do better for ourselves than He is doing for us, and so we are robbed of the blessedness and satisfaction found in simple dependence on the Lord alone. If we had more confidence in the Lord's love, and in His unerring wisdom, we should be saved from many a sorrow and heart-break. Whether we realize it or not, He is doing His very best for us. True love could not do anything else. And though He may permit us to be tried for some wise reason – unknown to us it may be, yet He will never fail us. "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say the Lord is my helper, and I will not fear... ." (Hebrews 13:5-6.)

Separation

In John 17, the Lord takes His stand on the ground of redemption accomplished. He sets His disciples in His own position before the Father, and they are sent into the world to represent Him.

We are allowed to hear the breathings of His soul into the Father's ear about them. He entrusts them to the Holy Father's care, to be kept in His Name, as He had kept them in the Father's Name, and in John 17:13 He says, "And now come I to Thee; and these things I speak in the world that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves." In John 17:18-19 He also says, "As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth."

His separation from all here is the measure of our separation. We are sanctified according to the place He has taken for us, and are sent into the world to be here for Him, as He was here for the Father. What marvelous grace! What an honor He has conferred upon us! Oh! for grace to rise up to the moral dignity of such a position, and even seek to be more separate in heart and ways from everything that is unsuited to the place He has taken for us. May the one desire of our hearts be to live Christ, to occupy for Him in whatever sphere He has placed us, and thus to have – what nothing else can compensate for – His joy filling our hearts. Never was it more important than now to insist upon, and maintain, a holy separateness from this defiling world. If there is any compromise with it, in any way, be assured we cannot be in the realization of His joy; nor can we know what fullness of joy is. “Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.” (James 4:4.) Nothing is more insidious and subtle than worldliness. It meets us everywhere and is sure to creep in upon us if we are not watchful. It presents itself in a thousand forms, and no one is beyond being influenced by it. But in whatever guise it may present itself, we ought to seek grace to refuse it absolutely. May we never forget that we are called to follow in the footsteps of a rejected Christ – One for whom the world has neither heart nor eye – One for whom there was no room in the world’s inn. May we be able to say with Paul, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, whereby the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world”; and, may we, in this day of increasing worldliness, lay to heart the exhortation, “Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, acceptable and perfect will of God.”

Handfuls of Purpose, Vol 1., P. 3