

Joy: What Is It?

A Virtue Beyond Explanation

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The Bible contains many ideas and concepts that are difficult to understand. This is only to be expected since what we have in our Bibles is a translation from Hebrew or Greek into a third language (in our case, English), and that is difficult because our English words do not translate the Hebrew and the Greek words exactly. We can get some kind of an idea, but it is not like we are a native Hebrew speaker or a native Greek speaker who would understand the nuances of the language.

But it is more than that. It is also a conversion of heavenly things to forms that earthly people can understand. We have a hard time with that because we are very earthly and the things that God is teaching us are very heavenly, and there is a great gulf between them. And you know, even then, it is only by the gift of God's Holy Spirit that we can understand them at all.

This idea—that it takes the gift of God's Spirit—is what Paul discusses in I Corinthians 2, that God has provided these things to us or revealed them to us by His Spirit. Everyone who does not have God's Spirit is out of luck. They cannot understand the deep things of God. Many of the things that we consider to be easy to understand, they cannot understand at all; or if they do, they twist it somehow, so it does not give the full strength of what God is trying to get across. Now, clearly, this tremendous gift of God's Holy Spirit is something that we should be continuously thankful for.

Yet really, even with God's Spirit, we do not understand everything fully. As a matter of fact, I wonder sometimes how much we understand at all. We give ourselves pats on the back now and then for "Wow! We really understand a lot about this subject or that subject." or "We have gone into this deeply and we know the depths of God on this matter." But I think we are fooling ourselves in many cases.

Our minds are just too finite, too limited, too earth-bound, too dumb to really understand what God is trying to get across to us. And we have had an influence on our minds for years and years that has totally corrupted the way we think. Even with God's Spirit trying to clean things up in there and make the glass that we are looking through less foggy (actually it is pretty okay, He is trying to scrape off some of that opacity so that we can get something through there—maybe I am selling it short a little bit), the fact that God needs to whack us over the head with a 2x4 every once in a while to get us to understand certain things is proof that we do not understand things as fully as we think

we might.

We are really just not equipped at times, it seems, to grasp what Paul, in Ephesians 3:18, calls “the width and the length and the height of the knowledge of God”—that we are called to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Some matters, even after many years of study, after many years of conversion, just seem to elude us. There is something that has not been quite unlocked, or there is some stumbling block in us that just does not get the full understanding of a certain subject even though we may pore through our Bibles every day to try to understand this.

These matters are different for different people. We are not all stuck on the same problem. We are not all stuck on the same inability to grasp. But we are the weak of the world. We are the base; we are not the wise. God called the foolish. It is very clear there, in I Corinthians 1 starting in verse 26, that God revealed the things that He has revealed to people who do not have a lot going for them.

A few of us are theologians. A few of us have truly scholarly minds that can really go into the depth of a matter and come up with nuggets of real truth and insight. And, like I said, a few of us are truly wise.

But we are not so simple that we know nothing about theological concepts, and that is a good thing. Most of us probably know the rudiments of most things that are found in the Bible. We can get by on this knowledge and it is something that we can grow on. We could, if we are forced against a wall and a gun was put on our foreheads (probably with a little bit of sweat and perhaps a little bit of agony), explain the basic principles behind, let us say, the love of God, or justification, or sanctification, or the atonement, what actually is grace, eternal judgment, what is true repentance, what is overcoming—those sorts of things.

Now our explanation would never reach the point where it would astound the scribes and the priests in the Temple, like Jesus did at the age of 12. I am sure we would fall quite behind all that.

But our explanation would probably show we know something about those subjects. We have dabbled in them. We have learned a little bit. We have grown from knowing absolutely nothing to knowing something. We could at least give a thumbnail sketch of the doctrine. Perhaps we can throw out a verse or two from memory and say this verse tells us what the love of God is. And so we will be okay there. We will get a passing grade, it might be a ‘D’ but at least we would know enough to get by.

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Well, I want to confess today before all of you that there is a theological subject that, for me, has been a bit of a trial to try to grasp all my life, and it is one that should not really be all that difficult. But, for me, this has just been one of those things that I have a hard time understanding.

Maybe it is because of my personality, I do not know. I do not think it was my upbringing or anything like that. But I have just had difficulty with this concept.

Many people would think that it is a truly simple concept and they would not have problems with it at all, and they would say “You were stopped by that? You couldn’t figure that out?”

And what makes it all the worse is that this concept that I have such a hard time with is a word that is only three letters long. I will not keep you in suspense any longer. The thing that has tripped me up for so long is: joy: What is joy?

Now I know the definition of ‘joy.’ That is not really very hard. Webster's would put it something like “it is pleasurable feelings, a kind of emotion, of being upbeat” because you have been successful or you have had good fortune or that something you like has happened.

But when you look at it from the Bible’s perspective that is a very incomplete definition of joy. Now obviously it was short; Webster's did not go into any great detail. But just “pleasurable feelings” is woefully inadequate to the idea of joy that comes out of the Bible.

I have experienced joy; so maybe I should not have a big problem with it. But I do. I have experienced joy in my marriage, in my children. Obviously I have experienced joy in the church and in fellowship with you. I have experienced joy in a lot of things—in sports. I have experienced joy on the asphalt of Charlotte Motor Speedway going more than 150 miles an hour in a race car. That was thrilling. Talk about a pleasurable emotion, a satisfaction of doing something you never thought you would do. I have seen others express joy in many of these same situations.

But consider the range of those situations: It went from joy in God to joy in a NASCAR vehicle. What kind of a range is that? That is from the highest high to, well, southern expressions of victory and stuff like that. But that is extremes. Can they really *all* be joy?

Is the joy in God the same thing as the joy in marriage, in the joy of children, in the joy of fellowship, in the joy of playing sports? Are they all joy? Do they all rise to the level of

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the joy that is set before us? I do not think so. Can you see my difficulty?

What makes it worse is that if you go into the Bible and study 'joy' you find out that the Bible has the same range of feelings, or whatever you want to call it, that it calls 'joy' or 'rejoicing.' So let us look at some of these. Actually the Bible provides an even larger range than what I just showed you.

We are going to go to the book of Job chapter 20. This is Zophar speaking. He is giving Job a sermon here.

Job 20:4-5 Do you not know this of old, since man was placed on earth, that the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment?

Now we are starting at a very low level of joy, are we not? Zophar here uses the word 'joy' for the feeling of triumph and pleasure that a wicked person gets when he robs a bank, cheats somebody, or does something sinful. It is a human joy, if you want to call it that, a feeling of pleasure that they got the upper hand over somebody, that they got something that they should not have gotten. Can this in any way be compared to the joy of a true Christian? It seems awfully crude by comparison. How can a carnal, sinful pleasure even be called 'joy'? But here we have it in the Word of God as a 'joy.'

A few pages over to the Proverbs. Here is another one that makes you scratch your head.

Proverbs 15:21 Folly is joy to him who is destitute of discernment, but a man of understanding walks uprightly.

So now we have, not just sin, but foolishness is joy to someone who does not understand. This cannot at all compare to Christian joy.

What he is talking about here is a kind of hedonism—carelessness—having fun just for the sake of fun, playing tricks on other people, getting one's kicks however. We even have the term and we still use it: about kids going 'joyriding.' Now what are they doing? They are being foolish. Usually they are stealing a car, which brings sin into the matter. So is that a *good* joy? Is that the joy of a Christian? Obviously not. It cannot be real joy.

Let us go back into the historical books, into I Samuel. We are starting to get into little bit

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better kinds of joy. This is I Samuel 18. This is right after David takes Goliath down and so David is at the height of his fame. He has just done something that no one else in the entire country would do.

I Samuel 18:5-8 So David went out wherever Saul sent him, and behaved wisely. And Saul set him over the men of war, and he was accepted in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul's servants. Now it had happened as they were coming home [and they were probably coming to Gibeah because I believe that is where Saul was ruling from], when David was returning from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women had come out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with joy, and with musical instruments. So the women sang as they danced, and said: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." Then Saul was very angry. . .

So they came out with joy, singing and dancing, and playing all these musical instruments and making a big hubbub, completely giddy and happy, over the triumphs of David and Saul. So what you have here is an exuberance over the winning of battles, of throwing off the yoke of the oppressor. There was probably some hero worship thrown in. But it was the thrill of victory, the joy that one gets from being a winner, the giddy happiness that things have gone well. That is not so bad.

We throw victory parades for our heroes—ticker-tape parades down one of the streets of New York City—and we get all thrilled at things like that, that things are going well, the nation is rising, we have shown that we are the best, and all that stuff. And this is called joy—a little bit more understandable, I think.

Let us go back to the book of Job. Now this is Job defending himself before his friends and such, and so he is giving a little bit of his résumé—"This is the man I was before all the bad things started happening to me."

Job 29:7-13 "When I went out to the gate by the city, when I took my seat in the open square [Job is saying "Hey, I was a pretty big man"], the young men saw me and hid, and the aged arose and stood; the princes refrained from talking, and put their hand on their mouth; the voice of nobles was hushed, and their tongue stuck to the roof of their mouth. When the ear heard, then it blessed me, and when the eye saw, then it approved me; because I delivered the poor who cried out, the fatherless and the one who had no helper. The blessing of a perishing man came upon me, and I caused

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the widow's heart to sing for joy."

So Job says, "Look what a well-respected, really good guy I was. I saved poor people from their oppressors and I helped orphans; and those who were about to die blessed me because I had helped them throughout their sickness. And the widow just sang for joy because of all my wonderful charity." Job probably did these things. I will give him the benefit of the doubt and say that this is exactly what had happened because God had certainly blessed him before.

He ends it here (at least in the part that I quoted here) with the widow's joy. What the widow's joy is, is the upwelling of happiness that a person feels upon receiving an unexpected helping hand; that out of the blue someone thought of you and gave you something that helped you through a trial or some terrible situation. That the widow could not afford her monthly rent and suddenly there was a check from Job and she could pay it, and so she rejoiced in Job. She cried tears of joy because now that problem had been taken away out of the charity, the kindness, of Job's heart.

So this joy is the kind of joy where you are tickled pink with relief and gratitude at being saved from some terrible doom that was over your head. It is that feeling of "Aah, this is great! Now I can (fill in the blank)"—"Now I can pay my bills"; "Now we can eat this week"; "Now I can buy that new Wii that I was always looking for"—or whatever it happens to be. And so it is a joy at feeling now you do not have that burden anymore. We can probably say that we have felt that kind of joy every once in a while.

Let us go to the book of Proverbs and see another kind of joy. And here we are beginning to get a little closer to the kind of joy that we would look to find in the New Testament. Solomon writes here:

Proverbs 21:15 It is a joy for the just to do justice, but destruction will come to the workers of iniquity.

Here is a joy that you feel when you do something good and right, that you do something that God had said to do, and you follow through and you do it right, and there is a kind of wonderful satisfaction that you feel from having followed God's law, followed God's Word, and done it right.

This is the kind of joy in a job well done; the kind of joy you feel when you have done something and you know that for an instant, in this one little thing that has happened,

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you have made the world a better place; that something good has happened; that you pleased God by this.

This is a moral joy, a joy in doing good works in obedience to God. It is a good joy. It is nothing like some of those other joys that we have seen.

But now we are edging into godly joy territory because we have this good feeling of satisfaction and well being in our hearts.

Finally, let us go to I Samuel 2. If you know your chapters, you will know that this is the prayer of Hannah after giving Samuel to the priest (actually to God for His use). She had given him to Eli because he was an answer to her prayer for a son. And so this is her response to God. I think we could call this a truly spiritual joy that we could all understand.

I Samuel 2:1-2 And Hannah prayed and said: “My heart rejoices in the Lord; my horn is exalted in the Lord. I smile at my enemies, because I rejoice in Your salvation. No one is holy like the Lord, for there is none besides You, nor is there any rock like our God.”

This is the joy of someone who has seen God work—work in them and work for them. This is the kind of joy that just simply wells up from a person who is full of worship and adoration and thanks for God and what He has done for us.

It is something that comes unbidden because we know that God has worked a great thing in us and for us, and we see that He is working things all over and we just seem to get a glimpse of His glory in one form or another. And so it comes out in singing and praise and heartfelt prayers of gratitude, and it just lights up the face. It makes everything seem A-OK—“All is well with me; all is well with God. Things are going to work out. It can’t get any better.”

We have visited six passages, all of them in the Old Testament. I thought I would do that just to show that these types of joys are all there in the Old Testament as well. I could have gone to all New Testament places and gotten something similar to this because there is a range of joys like this in the New Testament also.

But we did visit six passages here in the Old Testament and all of them contain something called ‘joy’ and they were all different. They expressed a range of meaning that is so broad that it is hard to believe that they can be covered by the same three-

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letter word. But, unfortunately, they are. And to understand what true godly joy is, you have to see all of them.

So that is our problem for today. How do we define joy? What is joy?

Now we understand being happy. We understand feeling pleasure. We understand triumph in victory and rejoicing when good things happen. I think we have a good grasp on that. I do. Even though I struggled with joy, I understood these things.

So we are going to concentrate on the kind of joy that Jesus and the apostles pointed to, because that is the joy that I did not understand. It is the kind of joy that we must have in us, the kind of joy that must be built (and I want you to catch the word 'built') into our characters. It is a joy we did not have until God came into our lives. So that is what we are going to concentrate on: the New Testament joy, you might want to call it; godly joy, spiritual joy, true joy. I may be calling it something like that or one of those phrases throughout the rest of the sermon.

I want to give you three or four quotes about joy because I want you to see that my dilemma was not unusual. Because commentators who look at God's Word can see that there is a huge range of ideas that come under the idea of joy.

Here is the first one. The commentator here writes:

There is something mysterious about the concept [joy] that is not always easy to grasp or express. For the vast majority of these early Christian writers, true joy was not something that could be measured by external features such as hilarity, an exultant celebration. Further, these writers do not appear to equate joy with happiness, as happiness is commonly understood today.

If you think of joy as simply being happy, or having a thrill, or being exultant, that is not it—that is not the fullness of it. So this commentator plainly realizes that Christian joy is a superior form of joy than the run-of-the-mill joy of this world. There is something different about it. The writers in the New Testament, especially, elevated joy, not necessarily in the words that they used—because they used the same words that others had used before—but ratcheted up the meaning of it somehow. It is not mere happiness; it is not mere pleasure; it is not just satisfaction; it is not merriment. It may contain elements of those things, but you cannot say that one of those things is joy.

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Another writer (this one comes to a conclusion very similar to mine):

From the text under study, its meaning seems to range from an exuberant gaiety that expresses itself in frolic or exultant dance, to a happiness coming from a good mental outlook on life, to a feeling of well being that is generated by confidence in the blessing of God, to a deep quiet settled joy that is more akin to peace than it is to happiness.

You see what he did in his definition there was just lump them all together. Like he said, it is more than gaiety, it is more than happiness, it is more a feeling of well being, it is more than a deep quiet settled joy. He could not think of another word to use for it. So he just kind of gave it all and went "You figure it out." It is something like all of these things put together.

C. S. Lewis had an interesting take on joy. He wrote an autobiography and, believe it not, the title he gave it is, *Surprised by Joy*. That was a double entendre because he was surprised by joy and he was surprised by his wife Joy, and that was why he finally had joy in his life. There is more to it, you ought to read it.

But even with all his education (C. S. Lewis was an Oxford don. He was a master of the classics. He obviously wrote the Narnia books and a lot of Christian apologetics throughout his life. He was a very learned man), he seems to have had a similar problem with understanding joy.

Now he thought himself to be incapable of experiencing and expressing true joy, and the reason he thought this is because he had never known it all his life. He had never really expressed, or even seen maybe, any true joy in his life. So he thought, as he got older, that it would never happen to him. And then Joy came. So he concluded in his book that joy "must be sharply distinguished both from happiness and from pleasure." Because he had experienced happiness in some ways; he had experienced pleasure in some ways. He thought it was great fun.

He got great pleasure out of going down to the local pub and having long talks with J. R. R. Tolkien about writing, about classics, about whatever. They were good buddies. And others came. They formed 'The Inklings' and they had a good old time.

But he came to understand that that was not joy.

There was pleasure. There was happiness in it. There was a lot of feeling of

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contentment that he had friends. There was satisfaction that his ideas were respected and they were talked about among his friends, and that he got acclaim for various things that he did in his work as an Oxford don. But those were not joy. It was something else.

It was beyond, as he says here, “something to be sharply distinguished, both from happiness and from pleasure” because those are simply common mundane emotions. Everybody has those at some point. You had to be terribly depressed for all your life never to feel some sort of happiness or have some sort of pleasure. So joy is obviously not that.

So, he says, we have got to draw a sharp line between happiness and pleasure on one side, and joy. Joy is something else.

Now, in the end, he defined it. C. S. Lewis was a man of letters and so, in his definition, he comes across in a way that he is an Oxford don. There is a bit of a literary quality to this that makes it interesting and memorable, but maybe not truly understandable. So I am just going to give it to you as it is. He defined joy as “unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction.”

You have to remember that C. S. Lewis, fairly late in his life, converted to Christianity. He was really not much of anything; he was an agnostic, he did not know what to think. He finally did convert to Christianity. So what we have here is kind of a code from him.

The “unsatisfied desire” is a human’s desire to be in total union with God. So let us put that in there. Joy is the unsatisfied desire to be in total union with God, which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction.

He is looking at it from a human point of view.

I am not saying that I agree with this definition. But I wanted to tell you what he—after a lifetime of thinking about this and going through the things that he did with Joy, his wife—that he came to the conclusion that this is what it was.

For him, it was the feeling that his future union with Christ was so wonderful that it was more than anything else—any other satisfaction that he could have—even though he had not attained it then.

Like I said, Lewis’ definition can be a hard one to fathom. He means that a Christian wants to live eternally with God so much that he derives boundless contentment and satisfaction and pleasure just from knowing that that is his destiny.

That is not bad. Just thinking that God has chosen us and given us such a wonderful future—just that feeling that arises in us at the joy of God’s pleasure in us and that He is going to give us so much in the future—makes you feel joy.

If nothing else, if we do not remember anything else about what C. S. Lewis said, it gives us the understanding that joy is a profound and very much inhuman virtue. We are talking about the joy that Jesus wants us to have. Joy is a profound and very much inhuman virtue because carnal people do not derive contentment and satisfaction from things they have not received. People do not feel joy not having something. They want it and they want it now.

But this kind of joy is something beyond that carnal urge to have. It is knowledge that something is actually going to happen, and feeling so much gratitude to God that He has chosen for us for that.

A worldly human’s best imitation of this kind of joy is perhaps like the anticipation of getting married and having a life with another. We could say humans come closest to this when you anticipate the birth of a child. Jesus uses this in John 16 where He says that even though a woman goes into labor, she goes through all that pain, all that is forgotten when a child is brought into the world. And it is that joy of a new son or a new daughter in the family. That is about as best as we can think of this kind of joy that C. S. Lewis was talking about—the joy that one has thinking about that a baby is on its way. You have not gotten the baby yet, the baby has not yet been born, but you have this wonderful upwelling of feeling that it is going to happen.

But, really, when it comes down to it, that kind of human joy—if you want to call it that—is really happy sentimentality. It is just an emotion. It is not really Christian joy.

Finally, John Locke, the philosopher, had a definition that was kind of similar to C. S. Lewis’. I just thought I would pass it along. This is his:

Joy is a delight of the mind from the consideration of the present or assured approaching possession of good.

He puts an ‘or’ in there. I think it would have been better had it been “Joy is a delight of the mind from the consideration of the present AND assured approaching possession of a good.”

What you really do is you look at your state now and you look at how much more

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wonderful it will be in the future, once you possess the good thing.

So, from this and from Lewis' definition, we can see that true godly joy has a tight connection with hope. The reason it is connected with hope is that joy depends on expectation of future good. It has ties to faith as well because it comes as the result of assurance that that future good is going to be given to us by God, because God is faithful; if He promises a thing, it is going to come to pass. He has promised this to us, and so we could have joy because we are assured that it is going to happen.

To me, it was very interesting to get these scholars' opinions on this matter because they went through the same thing I did, in some ways, trying to pin down what joy actually is.

But I am not going to take their definitions, not in full. I think they were on the right track. But there is something more to it than that, something more than, as C. S. Lewis put it: "an unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction." I do not think that quite cuts it. It might have worked for him, but it does not for me.

So let us go to Galatians 5 and just lay the groundwork here. We will read verses 22 and 23. These are obviously the verses for the fruit of the Spirit.

What Paul does here is (this is actually in the middle of a passage), he is encouraging us. He is telling us that we need to walk in the Spirit (verse 16) instead of walking in the flesh. He is telling us we have to change our conduct. We have to change our way of living from the way it was—which he calls, we had produced the works of the flesh—and now we have to produce the fruit of the Spirit. And we do this under the Spirit of God or through the Spirit of God.

Now let us just read verses 22 and 23, because this is where joy comes into the picture.

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

We are free to do all of these things and they are all wonderful things. This is just after he had given us the works of the flesh in verses 19 through 21, so he is obviously drawing a contrast. There is an opposition here.

The virtues that the Spirit produces in us are opposed to the things that we work on in

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our flesh. We tried to do these things in the flesh before we knew God. We end up doing a lot of these things. But when God's Spirit comes in, all of those bad things—the works of the flesh—are supposed to be put aside (we are supposed to mortify that part of our lives) and we are supposed to grow in the fruit of the Spirit.

I think we all know this. That is not something that is new to anyone here.

Now the difference between these two lists—the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit—is that God's Spirit is present in the Christian. It is the same human. Let us say we are talking about one person and his pre-conversion life and his post-conversion life. So there is one human. That is something that goes straight through all of this. Before his conversion, as it shows in verses 19 through 21, he did these things: He was envious, hated people, and was selfishly ambitious. He did all of these things. But when Christ came into his life, things changed.

The difference between his life then and his life now is the presence of Jesus Christ and God the Father through the Spirit. That is what makes the life entirely different, understandable again. So it is the presence of God's Spirit, then, that allows the Christian to conduct life in the Spirit.

Before we walked in the flesh, we did not need any help doing that. But when Christ came into our lives, He gave us His Spirit so that we could shrug off those works of the flesh and start doing the things that He wants us to do, which will end up in growing the fruit of the Spirit.

It is not said explicitly here, but it is intimated that these virtues in the fruit of the Spirit are impossible to produce without God's Spirit.

Let us just flip over quickly to I Corinthians 2. I kind of alluded to this before, but I want to visit it this time.

I Corinthians 2:14 But the natural man [a person before God gets a hold of him] does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

It takes the Spirit of God to come into a person's life before he could begin to really build on these things. (I keep using the word 'build,' when I mean to say 'grow' to keep with the metaphor of a fruit—you grow fruit; you do not build fruit).

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But it takes God's Spirit to come in and actually produce these things: to produce the love, to produce the joy, to produce the peace, to produce the longsuffering. It takes God's Spirit to do that. So, just as we cannot know the things of God without His Spirit, we cannot exhibit these characteristics—the fruit of the Spirit—without God's Spirit in us.

Now I want to put a caveat here on this. This does not mean that these spiritual values do not have carnal counterparts. There is such a thing as human love, and human love can reach pretty high in certain narrow confines.

Mr. Armstrong used to talk about mother love and how unselfish that is in most cases. She gives her all to her child, or her children. She is willing to place her life on the line for those kids.

There is the love of sacrifice among buddies. We always hear about soldiers. One of them will jump on a grenade and save the rest of his crew; or someone who will jump in front of a bullet, take it to save the other person. Those are pretty high expressions of love—giving up one's life for a friend.

There is even deep friendship between people that are very loving and good and outgoing.

So it is not that there cannot be expressions of this in a human before God gets a hold of him. But they are not really godly. They are still human. They are aspiring towards godliness but they are not really, because it takes the Spirit of God to actually produce these things.

We can find satisfying peace and tranquility and contentment, but they are not the peace of God. That is different. Some have a well of patient endurance and they seem like they can take anything, and they do not break. But it is not true longsuffering.

What I am saying here is that we can go through this list and find corresponding emotions or actions in the world.

So when Paul is talking about love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, he is not pointing to these human counterparts but something greater. It begins with the human counterparts, but they step up a level from them. It is a level that they could not have done without the Spirit of God.

Joy in the Spirit is a similar virtue to any kind of human joy, but it is elevated; it is greater

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than run-of-the-mill joy. We can begin to see this in some examples. There is something about the joy in God—spiritual joy, godly joy—that is impossible to achieve without God’s Spirit working in us.

Let us go back to the book of Luke. We are going to be taking these examples from the Gospels. This is Luke’s version of the Beatitudes. We are just going to read the last one, starting in verse 22, so we can get an idea of the kind of joy that Jesus was talking about.

Luke 6:22-23 Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man’s sake. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, for in like manner their fathers did to the prophets.

Can you immediately see a difference in godly joy—the kind of joy that Jesus expects of His disciples? There is actually a truly startling difference between human joy and godly joy.

A joyful reaction to hatred and persecution is not the normal response to suffering. 99.99 percent of people would react with something like self-pity, or despair, or anger, or violence; or if they are so beaten down, with abject surrender—they just give up.

But Jesus expects His disciples, when faced with these crushing things, to leap for joy. That is astounding. Why?

If you notice here, in verse 23, there are two lines that begin with the word ‘for’ and that is a clue to you and me that He is giving us reasons. We could put in ‘because,’ or ‘for this reason.’ He gives a two-part answer here of why a disciple should leap for joy, rather than react some other carnal way.

The first one here—“For indeed your reward is great in heaven”: He says the reason why we should leap for joy is we have an assured expectation of future reward. He says your name is written in heaven, and what is implied is that if your name is written in heaven, then you are going to be saved, and you are going to have all the things that come with salvation.

The second ‘for’ gives us the second thing that He mentions as His answer why we should leap for joy. He says we are being treated in the same anti-God way as the world treated the prophets in the past.

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Did you notice here that He points to the past, He speaks of the present, and He points to the future? He gives us good reasons why we should leap for joy rather than react some other way.

Now the past thing is that the prophets were hated and persecuted in the past. What this does, in pointing us to the past—in showing how the prophets were treated—gives us an idea: “Hey, this has happened before. And what happened to them?”

We are not supposed to think, necessarily, that they were sawn in two, or that they had all these terrible things happen to them. But what happened after that? They will get their reward. They were assured of salvation. They finished their fight. They won!

So Jesus is saying, “Look back at the past. People went through this before and God praised them and said, ‘This is the kind of people I want: People who are willing to go to their deaths, if need be, because they believe that this way of life is the only right way, and they are willing to stake it all on it. And because of that, I have already said that they are going to get what I promised them. They are tops in My book.’ ”

And then Jesus says that the Christian is going through this right now—if he is being persecuted, if his name is being cast out, if men hate them. That is the way it is now.

So you are between the past—what happened to the prophets—and the future. Now the future, what He says is great is the reward. It is assured.

He is looking at this whole spectrum of time and He wants us to keep that in mind. What happened in the past and God’s reaction to it impacts on what is happening to us now, because He is going to react the same way. He is going to have great pleasure and respect for our doing the same thing as the prophets did. And you know what? In the future we are all going to get that same reward for doing those things. So we have this great overall view of the way God is working. And Jesus says “Rejoice!” because you are in the plan. God is working with you.

The person who is undergoing persecution can leap for joy because he sees proof of God’s faithfulness in His promises, that if we do what we are doing at this time—that is taking the persecution in a godly way—then we have a true and glorious future ahead. That should fill us with satisfaction, even with exultation.

Let us go to Romans 8 where Paul puts this in a very different way.

Romans 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not

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worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

II Corinthians 4:16-18 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

This is what I meant earlier when I talked about having a different view, that we have a larger view of what is going on.

A Christian can express joy in the midst of suffering because he has an entirely different perspective about what is going on. The revelation of God through His Spirit gives the Christian, what we might call, an eagle-eyed view of time and life. We do not see the hatred and the persecution by itself. It is something in a much larger event. We see its wider context. We see its passing nature. We see what it had produced in the past, in the prophets, and what it will produce in us. We see the comparative value of the suffering versus the reward.

Paul here calls it a light affliction because he sees that it is really not that bad compared to what we will receive in the resurrection. Most of all, though, we see God's hand working in our lives. That is the thing that really sets it apart. We see that He is there, that He is bringing us to perfection, that He is actually lifting us to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Because, as Paul and the other apostles said, they were fulfilling the sufferings of their Savior. They were being put on the same level as their Savior, having to go through some of the same types of things, in order to bring them up to His level of character as much as possible.

So if you want to put it in a nutshell, the Christian can express joy because He sees God. He is there, He is working, and He is faithful. The Christian sees that God is in everything that happens to him, and that gives him confidence and satisfaction and a true feeling of blessedness. As a matter of fact, that is the word that Jesus uses back there in Luke 6: "You are *blessed* if you take this kind of persecution and the result is real joy."

Let us go to Luke 10 because I do not want to stop there. I want you to see it in a little bit different context. Normally, when we read this, we get it out of Matthew 11. But I wanted to come to Luke because Luke uses a form of joy.

Luke 10:21-24 In that hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit and said, “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.” Then He turned to His disciples and said privately, “Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see [He is saying they are blessed. Why?]; for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen it, and to hear what you hear, and have not heard it.”

Luke says here that Jesus felt joy in this, and He said that the disciples should also feel joy—this feeling of blessedness. I think Luke brings it out very well throughout the whole gospel because—believe it or not—he is the one who talks about joy the most of all the gospel writers.

But what we see here is that Jesus rejoices in the wisdom of God in revealing His truth to simple folk rather than the wise and the prudent. What we see here is that Jesus’ joy is in God. He had this rejoicing in the Spirit because of something that God had done, that God had revealed His way to those who normally would not have been able to see it because they do not have what it takes upstairs, you might say. They were just simple people.

But His joy is in God and His ability to see God at work and to know what God is doing is working out for the best. And it thrilled Him to see “Yeah, this is what God is doing. He has opened up His Word to these simple people. And He’s going to convert them, He’s going to make them His brethren, and they’re going to go out and eventually teach others. And this is just going to spread through God’s plan until all mankind has the knowledge of God.”

He could see it, and this gave Him great joy to see how God was working and that God was opening this up through Him, and He could see down the road of history. Remember, we are looking at this from a long view. He could see how God was working, by opening up the minds of 12 men in Palestine at that time, and how that would just work to eventually cover the whole globe in the way of God. He could see it and that gave Him great joy.

Then He turns to the disciples and said they were blessed because God had opened this salvation to them, He was going to use them, and they were going to be rewarded

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handsomely for this. He says, "Look, you guys are special. Prophets and kings wanted to know this." In another place it says angels wanted to look into this, but they were not given the access. But we have. It is going to end up, not only with their glory, but to the glory of God. That gave Him a real thrill. And it says: "This should give you a thrill too because you are on the fast track. You've been chosen first. You have this wonderful opportunity even though you started out as one of these babes. And God is going to work it out so that it all comes together to His glory."

You understand what He was getting at, why that gave Him joy. He could see in just the small little things that happen, that they comprehended something, that this was going to work for the glory of God, and the glorification of the sons of God, and the salvation of all mankind. Just in this one little thing. He thought it was marvelous and He felt joy.

Peter kind of echoes this in I Peter 2. It is something we read all the time.

I Peter 2:2-5 As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones [Peter is grouping Christ there together with the church and saying, "Look, you're special! God used Christ to do all these things. He did His work and now you as living stones], are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

I Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

Do you see what he is saying? He said, "Because you're such special people and because God is working with you, your job now is to rejoice and spread it around." We are proclaiming the praises of God.

We can have true joy because we are different and we have a glorious future. We have inside knowledge of what God is doing in us and in the world, and this should fill us with just all the energy we need, all the satisfaction, all the pleasure, all the contentment, to keep going to reach forward to what has been set before us.

I did want to go to John 15:11. This is where Jesus tells His disciples: "I have spoken these things that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full." I do not have

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time to go through all of that, but let me just put it in a nutshell.

What He is saying here is the fact that we are in Christ.

We have to look at back at John 15 and what had been said before. It starts out that He is the true vine, that His Father is the vinedresser, and that we are branches on the vine and that we abide in Him—in the vine—and the vine (Jesus Christ) abides in us. He says we are connected now.

He goes on later in His prayer and saying: “I in you and you in Me; I am in the Father, the Father is in Me, and then you in Me; and we are all One.” He says, “This should fill us with just loads of joy—joy to take us all the way into the Kingdom because we have a direct access to God and Christ because He is in us.”

Now, because Jesus’ joy is full, our joy can be full because He is there in us and we have this access and abiding life with God. So if God is in us, who could be against us? That should make us joyful to no end. If God is in us, nothing is impossible to do. If you have faith as a mustard seed, you could move mountains. But we have the faith of Jesus Christ because He is in us. Jesus is saying, “Tap that, access that, and be very happy about it.” Because it means everything to us. If God is in us, we have all the power we need to attain to His Kingdom. No wonder He expects fullness of joy from us. We have everything we need to successfully complete the mission we have been given.

So what is joy? After all of this, what is joy?

It is fundamentally an attitude toward life that views and accepts matters as they are. It is a confident, contented, expectant way of looking at life that is deeply rooted in faith and hope with a keen awareness and trust in the Sovereign God through Jesus Christ.

Joy, we could say, is a positive perception of reality, that we know what is really going on. And this knowledge generates hope and endurance, no matter what the circumstances are around us. Because we know this is only a passing thing. It enables Christians to see beyond any particular event, good or bad. Because when we look beyond the event, we see God who stands above every event and ultimately has control of everything, and He is going to bring all things to the right conclusion by His sovereign will. And if we know that, we can be content and we can be happy and we can take great pleasure in how God is using us.

Let us conclude in I Peter. I want you to hear how Peter begins with praise of God and ends up in joy. Just see the process here that he takes us through. He says:

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I Peter 1:3-9 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.

Peter describes godly joy as inexpressible (unexplainable, if you will)—something beyond our ability to put into words. And it really is. No wonder I had a problem with it. Because you cannot really define it to our satisfaction.

But I am going to try.

If I can put all my muddled thoughts together for one final sentence of what godly joy is, it is the pure elation of spirit that revels in the awareness of knowing God and knowing that His plan, which includes us so prominently, will culminate in our eternal salvation and glory with Him in His Kingdom.