

# The Joy Of The Lord Is Our Strength!

Joy Springs from the Relationship

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In this world of unprecedented prosperity and luxury—this world of boundless accomplishment and breath taking advances—human reasoning tells us that there should be great joy throughout the world. We see just the opposite. This nation has just come through the greatest sustained economic growth, and accumulation of wealth, the world has ever seen. Yet, there is great sorrow and unhappiness! We just heard about the difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow. That worldly sorrow leads to death.

The world has such hopelessness. Depression, despair and suicide are commonplace. We see a world that is in agony.

- The National Institute of Mental Health says this about adult American citizens: 18.8 million American adults suffer from clinical depression. Remember that clinical depression is the more serious—9.5% of the adult population cannot function properly in society because of severe depression. In a sense they are mentally incapacitated to function normally in life.
- A 2003 National Comorbidity Study, sponsored by the same institute says: 35 million Americans suffer from depression severe enough to warrant treatment from one of the world's professionals.
- The same institute says: 19.1 million Americans 18-54 years-old suffer from anxiety disorders. This represents about 13.3% of this age group.
- Reuters Health said that one in five Americans are depressed or unhappy, and report high levels of stress, anxiety and sadness.

According to the National Institute of Health: Americans, 65 and older account for about 13 percent of the population, but almost 20% of all suicides.

We see in this world, what their banner is so to speak, and what they rally behind. It does not produce a future joy we can also have now. In the past 15 years, the number of people seeking treatment for depression in the U.S. has doubled. That is bad news, but, what may be worse is that according to recent research, 90% of those people left their doctors' offices with a prescription for antidepressant drugs. So, this society's

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solution is to turn to drugs. The children are seemingly unhappy in schools, and now some schools are beginning to require that the children be on specific drugs to control their behavior or they are not allowed to attend. We are seeing that our families are being attacked in many different ways by legislation that is unholy and evil.

Materialism, and people's obsession with the accumulation of physical things, has never led to anything but increased sorrow and being in the church we realize that. It seems that what little happiness and joy there is for people in the world, someone is always trying to take it from them because of pride and greed.

True, lasting joy is based neither on material accumulation nor in extraordinary physical accomplishments but in faith in Jesus Christ. This true joy is in the hope of salvation and the wonderful promises that the loving God has set before us. Faith, hope and love are all important factors with respect to joy.

There are several different types of joy, ranging from earthly happiness and temporary human joy, to spiritual godly joy. This is the full joy that the apostle John speaks of. The human joy may be the birth of a son or daughter. That joy may continue for a while, but it is not assured, because if the child becomes unruly or rebellious, he becomes a curse—someone who brings great sorrow and great unhappiness to a family. Even something as wonderful as the birth of a child is not necessarily lasting, although we always hope it is.

According to the Bible, the whole mind and outlook of the world is opposed to God. It is under the dominion of Satan and in the grip of the wicked one. We must realize that we are living in such a world, and because it is a world that is opposed to God, it will be doing everything it can to drag us down. The result can be a stressed, even sorrowful life, even for individuals who are attending God's church.

The world will try to fill our minds with things that will try to temporarily satisfy us and thereby keep us from obeying God and Christ. It is a world in which we have to fight for our mental health every minute of every day, seven days a week, and twenty four hours a day. For the average human being, it is easier to degenerate with the world, than it is to traverse the straight and narrow road of righteousness.

John reminds us of the chasm between the church and the world. He records the words of Jesus, assuring His disciples that their sorrow will be turned to joy. That is what our focus is today, that joy that Jesus promises. The same joy that was promised to His disciples is available to us. And, that joy no one will take from us. That is Jesus' promise.

**John 16:16-24** A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father." Then some of His disciples said among themselves, "What is this that He says to us, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'; and, 'because I go to the Father'?" They said therefore, "What is this that He says, 'A little while'? We do not know what He is saying." Now Jesus knew that they desired to ask Him, and He said to them, "Are you inquiring among yourselves about what I said, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'? "Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. "A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. "Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you. "And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. "Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

We see that the apostle John does not tell us to start by trying to reform and improve the world. That has been a misconception in mainstream Christianity that has negatively influenced the true church of God in the past. The church has, at times, imagined that it is her function to try to change and improve the world.

Over the centuries the line between the mainstream Christian church and the world became so vague as to be almost non-existent. Even the true church has sometimes lost her focus of the importance of her responsibility to guard the truth and prepare the bride. We see some of the groups that are trying to obey God, trying to reach the world and to change it.

On the other hand, we are NOT to turn our backs on the world in the sense that we would turn our backs on someone in need. We should not become hermits, but we should, as Jesus tells us, let our light shine.

**Matthew 5:14-16** You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. "Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your

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Father in heaven.

The first responsibility of the church to the world, is to set a good example and to give a true witness by good works. Part of doing that, is having the joy that Christ spoke about, that full joy that He promises.

The teaching of the whole New Testament avoids the extremes. It is NOT a plan of world improvement, nor is it a plan of world abandonment.

The Bible depicts the same type of situation that we find ourselves in the world today. There is an opposing spiritual force, a spiritual power that is represented by the world. Our struggle is with that, and we are taught in the epistle of I John, that we CAN conquer it. John tells us that we can rise above it, and that we can defeat it, in spite of everything that is so true about this world that we live in, and the enticements and the constant bombardment that we receive from it. It is not easy to have that joy that Christ talked about and that John also emphasizes.

In spite of the trials and dangers that plague us everywhere, we can triumph and prevail and we can be more than conquerors. This is succinctly stated in the apostle John's statement in I John:

**I John 1:4**, "And these things we write to you that your joy may be full."

We just read in John 16:24, "*Ask, and you will receive that your joy may be full.*" Ask for what? Faith, hope, love, contentment, understanding, God's grace, His forgiveness and so on. A factor of joy, is that we must ask God for it, and for the right things and to be able to do His will and not ours.

John wants the church to have fullness of joy, though we are in the world that lies under the sway of the evil one he still wants us to be joyous, and especially at the Feast to rejoice.

This is a wonderful thing to be offered and promised to us. It is a message that permeates the whole New Testament. We see it in Paul's epistle to the Philippians:

**Philippians 4:4** "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!"

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The emphasis there is that we should be rejoicing, and that is what we are doing here at the Feast. Jesus promised the same thing in John 16.

**John 16:33** "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

This is another way of saying rejoice, or have joy. We see His encouragement, that as we overcome the world we also have that fruit of joy given to us by God.

Here, Jesus describes the world as an unpleasant place and He forewarns us what to expect. He said the world would "*hate you as it hated Me*." His great promise was that He would give us then same joy that He Himself had. I am sure that many of you have seen the movie that came out recently, "The Gospel of John". I was so impressed with that movie, that we have seen it several times already, and I know some of you have. There were two things that really impressed me about Jesus in that movie, and the way that they portrayed Him.

Once you get past the long hair, and Mary Magdalene's head popping up here and there where it was not in scripture, the rest of the movie is quite good. Jesus is just always upbeat and excited about the messages that He has to tell. He is never down and He is the type of person that you always want to be around. You sit there just enjoying being with this person that is portraying Jesus Christ. The words that He is speaking are from the Good News version of the Bible, and so it is in a modern English sense. He says, "*I tell you the truth*". He is so excited about the truth, and you can just see it in his eyes.

The actor does a wonderful job of portraying that, and after watching the movie you feel uplifted and wonderful, and anxious to meet Jesus Christ. It is a very exciting movie to see and I highly recommend it. It is not one that you want to sit down with small children, because since it is read from the Gospel of John there is quite a bit of that dialogue in there. Jesus was just upbeat, positive and cheerful and someone you really wanted to be with.

There was to be a period, from His arrest to His Resurrection, when the disciples would be unhappy, of course, and miserable. Their close friend and Savior had been physically killed. But, remember we already read in John 16:22, Jesus' words, "*you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you*." We have that same promise today, as we fight the world, and we have our trials and our problems that we are trying to overcome. We have that promise, that

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with the help of the Holy Spirit, He will help us have that joy in our lives today.

One of the major characteristics of the book of Acts, is that it is exciting with regard to this uncontainable joy that the church had in confirmation of Jesus' promise in John 16:22. The book of Acts is a wonderfully upbeat book, even with Stephen's martyrdom. Jesus also told His disciples, in John 15:11 *These things I have spoken to you that my joy may remain in you and that your joy may be full*. This is His promise, that He will make sure that His people have that joy, and have access to that joy. Not just to the disciples, but to all of us, who obey and submit to Him is His promise given.

This is something offered throughout the Bible that is very concrete and definite. The Saints are meant to be full of joy! This is one of the characteristics of God's church. And it should be quite obvious that God's people are happy and joyous even with regard to their trials. We have sad faces and we do have some sorrow at times, but generally our lives should be marked by a joy that just radiates from our faces. It is not something that a human being can increase in themselves, but again it takes help from the Holy Spirit.

It is an essential part of the true witness of God's way of life. It is a fruit of the Holy Spirit that is produced by living by the example and teachings of Jesus Christ. There is no other way to have that joy.

But, many of us are not even sure what this joy is! So, I have to ask the question "What is joy, what is this godly joy, this New Testament joy, that is spoken of?" We have received a little glimmer of it from Jesus Christ's words, but let us continue on and see what that is. Sometimes, in defining something, it helps to see what it is not.

Let us start by seeing what joy is NOT!

We, as Christians, have no right to be in a state of melancholy or unhappiness because the world is as it is. Jesus and the apostles have made sure that they have let us know that. We should have, above all others, a realistic view of life in this world. We should know more about it than anyone else. We are not like people of the world, who think that things are better than they are. We, as God's people, are realistic and we realize that there are times that we are to weep and be sad, and that there are times that we are to be happy.

The essential thing that must be true of us, is that we are honest and realistic. We do not just look on the surface, but we look beneath it. We do not always minimize our problems, and we do not act like things are not as bad as they appear to be. We hit them head on and we overcome them with the help of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

We are not always looking for artificial ways to avoid our problems. We do not look for the easy way out to bypass our troubles. We do not ease our fears with false hopes. We know all that is spiritually immature and irresponsible. We work very hard in our lives to overcome sin, the world and Satan. Sometimes we forget that we are to have joy and we overlook it. I know that I have a problem with that. I get so intent on duty that I forget to be joyful and look to the goal that gives us that.

Most people, when confronted by this danger, become depressed and unhappy. There is a danger of discouragement in saying that this life and this world are so terrible and hopeless. We have to take a positive approach, and realize that our lives are not hopeless, and not terrible, but that they are going to end with an exciting eternal future.

We have all fallen into the pit of despair at times. When we are feeling depressed we are not experiencing the full joy of Jesus Christ. He wants us to have this joy at all times, even when we are going through trials.

Similarly, we are not to just resign ourselves to the world in its present condition. God never intended that we just make the best of a bad life. This is an easy trap for most people. When we just resign ourselves to the fact that there are bad conditions in our lives, and that there is nothing that we can do about it (or that can be done about it by anyone else), there is no way that we can have that full joy in our lives. Obviously, we have to be optimists and not pessimists. A pessimist cannot have full joy in his life.

Paul, in writing to Timothy in II Timothy 1:7, said, "*For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.*" Although we may think that we believe this, it is very difficult for us not to be fearful in a world like this. We see the forces of evil and we are aware of our own weaknesses, so we may allow ourselves to become fearful. Joy is not possible with fear.

I have observed in many retired people in the world, who work their entire adult lives hoarding wealth in preparation for happiness and joy in retirement. They go through life fearful that they will not have enough money to retire on, or that there will not be someone around to take care of them. During their miserly lives they develop a somewhat unhappy disposition. They are always focused on accumulating more money. Investing to make sure that they are getting and getting constantly. They are always fearful of not being provided for because of the separation that they feel from God, without even realizing it, because of their sins and the enmity that they have against Him.

Retirement arrives and they become fearful of spending their extravagant savings for

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fear of running out of money before they die—for fear that there is no one to provide for their needs. They are miserable. They may have more wealth than all of us combined, but they are still unhappy. Many of these people end up being nasty, stingy and miserable. Not only do they not have full joy, many times they also do not have any joy at all. That is the culmination of a life with enmity towards God.

This is not to say we should not be careful with our spending, of course we should. I thought it was interesting that the 18<sup>th</sup> century American statesman, Benjamin Franklin, had some timeless words of wisdom on the subject. I know we all struggle with finances, and here he sums it up:

"There are two ways of being happy—we may either diminish our wants, or augment our means: the result is the same; and it is for each man to decide for himself, and do what happens to be the easiest. If you are idle, or sick, or poor, however hard it may be to diminish your wants, it will be harder to augment your means.

If you are active and prosperous, or young, and in good health, it may be easier for you to augment your means than to diminish your wants. But, if you are wise, you will do both at the same time, young or old, rich or poor, sick or well; and if you are wise, you will do both in such a way as to augment the general happiness of mankind."

I thought this was so insightful that in his life what he learned that to serve others was a way of having happiness and also watching your own use of personal possessions. Sometimes, people become so focused and intent on what they are doing, to further their own desire, that they squelch any joy that may be possible.

On the lighter side, I ran across something that I got a little bit of a chuckle out of. The subject matter is uncaring devotion. I do not know who the author of this was, but I think some of you have heard this.

An elderly man was at home, dying in bed. He smelled the aroma of his favorite chocolate chip cookies baking. He wanted one last cookie before he died. He fell out of bed, crawled to the landing, rolled down the stairs, and crawled into the kitchen where his wife was busily baking cookies. This man really wanted these chocolate chip cookies bad, and at that time that was what was going to give him joy. With waning strength he crawled to the table and was just barely able to lift his withered arm to the cookie sheet. As he



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grasped a warm, moist, chocolate chip cookie, his favorite kind, his wife suddenly whacked his hand with a spatula.

"Why?" he whispered. "Why did you do that?"

"They are for the funeral" she replied.

What is distinctive about worldly joy? Worldly joy is temporary, because it is based in self-centeredness, on what we want and on what we want to do.

(I apologize for not smiling more in this sermon. Nervousness has me very serious. But, I am rejoicing at the Feast. I am very much enjoying fellowshiping with you all and learning very much from the messages. It is such a wonderful time.)

**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?

The way the language is worded here, expresses important insight about the joys of the hypocrite.

A hypocrite may have a type of worldly joy that is the counterfeit to that of a true Christian. The word 'hypocrite' is sometimes used to represent a religious hobbyist, who intentionally imposes his confused beliefs on others, while he makes self-important references to his own righteousness. He may have a certain amount of joy that appears on the surface, but again it does not last.

A person such as this, may have a kind of worldly joy. He may presume that he is a Christian, and that he has a rational hope of eternal life. He may even have been very upset over having committed sin, and when he assumes he has been forgiven for the sin even though he has not repented and changed, he will have a kind of enjoyment. But, that enjoyment, that joy is temporary.

The hypocrite has a short-lived worldly joy because he is a self-deceiver. There is no real truth to sustain it, so it is not long before it fades away. His first reaction may be that of elation, because he believes he has been forgiven. But, with the hypocrite it soon fades away, because there is no genuineness and sincerity in his repentance.

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The problem with the hypocrite's joy, is that his religious beliefs are just a matter of show and appearance. He has neither love nor earnestness for the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

Worldly joy passes on very quickly. You remember, "The parable of the sower." We are going to look at its explanation here. We are not going to go into it deeply, we are just going to read a few verses.

**Luke 8:11-13** Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. "Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. "But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away.

By the lifestyles of the average, worldly person, we can easily see that they live their lives according to the saying, "Ignorance is bliss!" But, God tells His people not to rejoice like the world.

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

Here, we see a distinct difference between earthly and godly joy. Righteousness is required for true long-lasting joy.

The spiritually bankrupt person rejoices in folly, and as a result goes the wrong way; but, the spiritually wealthy person rejoices in wisdom and as a result goes the right way. In order to have a full lasting joy, a New Testament, godly joy, there must be a progression of overcoming and growing in grace and knowledge. A stagnant Christian, a Sardis Christian, cannot enjoy that joy.

Let us look at 'this joy' a little more closely, in a more positive way. Remember what John said, in I John 1:4, "*These things we write to you that your joy may be full*".

We have just seen what we are not to be like. So, we have to ask at this point, "well what are we to be like?" This question seems simple enough at first, but the moment that we think about it, we realize the complexity of the definition that we would have to come up with for this godly joy. Can we accurately define 'joy' in a phrase or sentence?

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We cannot really, not godly joy.

*Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language* defines 'joy' in a secular way as,

"A very glad feeling; happiness; great pleasure; delight"—the synonym for joy is pleasure.

This worldly explanation of joy limits it to a broad generality that gives no attention to the source of that joy. From its perspective, we may receive joy from something as simple as accomplishment of either good or bad.

Someone who plans a bank robbery, for example, has temporary worldly joy if he is successful. But, this joy is not lasting and it is not full, because there are penalties to be paid for such an action. Any joy or happiness that is received in the process of sinning, of course, has penalties which brings misery. That bank robber worries that if he is caught he will go to jail. If he is caught he will be miserable in prison. But, if he is not caught he will never be satisfied to do an honest day's work. One way or the other he is going to be miserable.

Of course, there are those who seem too stupid to know even the concept of joy when they are committing a crime. We have all heard of the dumb crook incidences and examples. One that I remember, that brings a chuckle to me, is the man who went into the bank and handed the teller the piece of paper that said, "This is a hold-up, give me all the money". Then he rushed out with whatever money was in the cash register, but he had written the note on the back of his deposit slip. This was a stupid crook and he certainly was not thinking of joy, or his future, or anything like that.

So what type of joy is John, and the rest of the apostles, talking about? The apostle Paul spent the whole chapter of I Corinthians 13 on the theme of love. Why did he spend so much time on the theme of love? For the same reason that he would probably have to spend that much time to really give a full detailed listing or explanation of joy. Paul begins defining love by telling us what it does not do, and then what it does do.

Love is too magnificent to be defined in one sentence, and there is a great amount that could be said about love. Even then, we find that we have been inadequate in our description. Joy is the same way, because there are so many elements involved. It has so many positive features, and is such a major part of the characteristics of the Kingdom of God and of the Feast of Tabernacles.

So, in defining joy, we have a similar dilemma as we had in defining love. The first thing that we have to keep in mind is that any definition that we may give of New Testament or godly joy, cannot be found in a dictionary. We have to go to the Old and New Testaments to find what that true, full joy is. The reason is that it is a divine quality that belongs to members of the God Family. So, as we define joy, we have to be very careful that it conforms to what we see in Jesus Christ.

The world has never seen anyone who knew joy as Jesus did, and yet he was a man of sorrows at times and acquainted with grief. So, our definition of joy must match that as well.

We can also see how the disciples of Jesus produced it with the help of the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul knew a great joy even in prison. It did not matter where he was, it did not abandon him, and he was still joyful. So Paul's example is one from which we can glean valuable information, understanding and wisdom.

Paul assured the Corinthian brethren of their future resurrection, which was part of what brought joy to him and to the church itself.

**II Corinthians 5:1-4** For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life.

Paul tells us that we can rejoice even while groaning in anticipation of relief from the world, and the assurance of an eternal spiritual habitation or an eternal spiritual existence. Those are two of the things that we should focus on, and make sure that we are rejuvenating our joy and rejoicing at the Feast with.

The dictionary may say that joy is one thing or another, but we have to have a definition that will cover the joy that was experienced by successful members of God's church and, above all, by Jesus Christ Himself.

Most of the time, mainstream 'Christianity' promotes a false joy. They manifest it as lightheartedness and as a kind of brightness that is overdone. It is used in their evangelistic campaigns and television programs as something that cheaply makes

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people laugh. They have, what we might call in the sports arena, a 'pep rally' rather than a true understanding of God's future for all of them.

Many worldly preachers wear that silly grin on their faces. And you cannot help but wonder if they are really joyful, or are they just thinking about the money that is rolling in from their campaign or program. It is real sad what they believe that joy is.

We all dislike that kind of false sanctimonious show. It seems superficial and hypocritical; and it is usually a manifestation of self-righteousness. We can see this attitude depicted in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector.

**Luke 18:9-14** Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

False joy manifests itself as flippancy. Joy is not an act and it is not uncontrolled emotion, just as love is not.

We cannot make ourselves joyful in the New Testament sense; it is always produced by something else. Generally stated, godly joy is the mindset that results from stimulations of love, faith and hope in us with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Since that statement alone is too vague to be of any value, let us look at the details of what that means. There are various elements of joy that must be present in order to understand joy.

Let us look at just three elements of joy.

### **1. In joy there is a state of complete satisfaction.**

We do not have true joy unless we are satisfied. If we are dissatisfied in any way we

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cannot be joyful. Our intellect, emotions, and our desires must be satisfied and, more than that, they must all be satisfied together and at the same time. In a sense it is a miracle that happens, that turns our joy into full joy.

There are certain things in this life and world that can give us intellectual satisfaction. We may be perfectly satisfied intellectually, but our heart may be cold, and if that is true, then, even though our mind is satisfied, we are not in a state of joy.

It is exactly the same with desires. There are things we can do that will satisfy our desires, but our mind and conscience condemn us; there is pleasure for the time being, but there is no joy. We understand that contentment is a sense of inward sufficiency. So contentment is a prerequisite of joy.

United Feature Syndicate writer Jim Fiebig pictures the illusiveness of contentment in this tongue-in-cheek way: "If you can look back on your life with contentment, you have one of man's most precious gifts—a selective memory." Many of us feel that way at times.

We live in a world of discontent people. Especially in the United States, most people are dissatisfied even though they live in an affluent society. They never seem to have enough money, a big enough house, a nice enough car, or perfect enough spouses or friends. They are inwardly miserable, while looking outwardly happy!

The core problem with their discontentment is that they believe life has been unfair to them. They think others are better off than they are and have less problems. As a result of their perception of the "cards of life that they have been dealt", they retain a resentful attitude toward other human beings and, often without realizing it, toward God. In fact, always without realizing it toward God.

**Ezekiel 18:25-29** Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not fair.' Hear now, O house of Israel, is it not My way which is fair, and your ways which are not fair? "When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity, and dies in it, it is because of the iniquity which he has done that he dies. "Again, when a wicked man turns away from the wickedness which he committed, and does what is lawful and right, he preserves himself alive. "Because he considers and turns away from all the transgressions which he committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die. "Yet the house of Israel says, 'The way of the Lord is not fair.' O house of Israel, is it not My ways which are fair, and your ways which are not fair?

Ancient Israel always had a problem with complaining. And today, the descendants of Israel retain this flaw. Of course we, as being mostly Israelites, also have this problem, in fact it is a facet of human nature that all people have a problem with.

When the twin towers of the World Trade Center were destroyed, many thought God had been unfair to allow such a thing to happen.

They denied that the sins of this nation had anything to do with it. And, when a very few religious leaders pointed out that it was the sins of the people that were a factor in why God allowed the terrorist attack to happen, they were threatened and made to recant their warnings.

Vivian Greene, in her work, *Words of Women Quotations for Success*, rightly stated, "It is not our circumstances that create our discontent or contentment. It is us."

That is true, if we are discontent it is because we are not taking care of our attitude.

We know that the sins of society have an impact on us. The constant bombardment of negativism from the world affects us, even though we work to bear up under the assault. Much of the time we feel constant fatigue from the effort we exert in resisting the world and Satan. Discontentment affects us in much the same way.

It is exhausting to be discontent! On the opposite side of the spectrum, we do not feel exhausted when we have that joy. When we are at the Feast we are rejoicing, and while we are rejoicing we have an energy, but as soon as we get back to the room we have that energy loss where we are just ready to collapse. We can see why God wanted rejoicing at the Feast for so many reasons, one was to sustain us through it.

We know that the sins of society have an impact on us and we are constantly bombarded by this negativism. But we must overcome this temptation of discontentment that the world so fiercely has.

Contentment is freedom from irritation, anxiety or worry. The idea of contentment comes from a Greek word that means "independence" or "self-sufficiency." So, we see there that if we want to be discontent just be self sufficient and self centered. Of course, we do not want that...

For Paul, and other New Testament writers, there is a paradox to joy, because it prevails in the midst of afflictions. Here on earth, we can live joyfully in a wicked world, during the most intense persecution and through the worst affliction. An example of this

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joy in suffering is seen as Paul and Silas are in a Philippian jail, praying and singing hymns at midnight.

Paul could be content whether in poverty or in abundance. He continually gave God thanks in every circumstance. Here, in Philippians, we see Paul's attitude even in this state.

**Philippians 4:11-13** Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

There again we see the source of that joy, and that strength that we need to bear up under whatever may come our way. In Paul's journeys and imprisonments, he could not help but be, at times, wanting. But he had learned to bear his own personal trials without anxiety.

In verses 11 and 12 Paul said, "*I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content.*" He said that he had learned this. It did not just happen. He had to work at it because contentment requires faith—the faith that God is just and fair. And, we know that faith without works is a dead faith. That faith that we need to have requires that we have action behind it, and then in turn, we will receive that joy that Jesus promises.

Probably, by nature, Paul had a mind as prone to impatience as others. God had placed him in circumstances that, through hard work and the help of the Holy Spirit, would produce a patient and content frame of mind. He had plenty of experience, and, in the course of his life of trials, he had acquired invaluable lessons in contentment. God had prepared him for the suffering and the persecution that he was to receive.

Remember, in II Corinthians 11:24-27 Paul lists the types of trials he had to endure as a minister of God's church. You are very familiar with these.

- Five times the Jews gave him 39 lashes with the whip.
- Three times he was beaten with rods.
- Once he was stoned.
- Three times he was shipwrecked.



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He traveled often. We know just with the traveling to the Feast how much of a strain it is on our bodies and on our minds. Back then, it was much harder than we have, even with sitting for sixteen hours or whatever it took us to get here. He lists his perils as that of waters, of robbers, of his own countrymen, of the Gentiles, in the city, in the wilderness, in the sea, and among false brethren. His health was affected by weariness and work, by sleeplessness often, by hunger and thirst, and by cold and nakedness. Yet he was able to remain content even when he was in prison, because he had that full joy that we so desperately want.

He had more than enough time to reflect on the relative value of different aspects of his life, and he had concluded that there was great enough reward in preaching God's way of life to enable him to bear trials with resignation. He always had the goal of the Kingdom in mind, and the goal of helping people wherever he could to learn God's way of life and the happiness that came from it.

Paul had the perspective that it is wrong to complain at the effect of divine intervention. Paul knew that a spirit of impatience does not produce good fruit, solve any problems, fulfill any desires, or supply any needs. Paul knew that God could provide for him in ways that he could not foresee, and that his Savior was able to abundantly sustain him. This is the feeling that we all strive for and desire.

"To be content," in the Hebrew means simply "to be pleased." Of course, we are not talking about contentment or pleasure with evil, wickedness, or sin. Paul makes this clear in I Timothy 6, where he qualifies what contentment must be teamed with.

**I Timothy 6:6-8** Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.

Godliness must precede contentment, which precedes joy.

The Greek word from which contentment was translated in verse 6 means, "self-sufficiency," and is used here, in a positive sense, to indicate "a mind satisfied with its lot," and with the cards that it has been dealt. If righteousness, or in other words, the right application of the truth of God is united with peace of mind, the result is true riches, which is true satisfaction.

True contentment is a deep-seated habit, or permanent state of mind, and must be based in godliness. It is more than just plain satisfaction, and it is more than just plain

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pleasure, that has to do with some specific occurrence or object. So, if it is one that is related to God Himself then it is going to be a longer lasting happiness and joy.

A content mind arises from the hard work of character building that produces the conviction that God is always right, and that His will is always the best for us. One of the secrets of joy is to have a mind totally content with all the allotments of the providence of God. It is the conviction that God is fair in ALL His dealings with us, no matter how much at the time they may look disparaging. *All things work together for good for those who love God.*

The satisfaction that is a part of joy is a complete satisfaction. The mind, heart, emotions and desires are all fully satisfied, and full satisfaction is an essential part of joy. But joy does not stop at that. Let us look at the next element of joy.

## **2. In joy there is a spirit of excitement!**

We do not have true joy unless we have a feeling of excitement that exceeds happiness.

What is the difference between happiness and joy? Joy is more positive than happiness.

Just to give you an example. Our grandsons sit in our family room playing with a toy and they are happy and content, but they are not joyous, they are not rejoicing so to speak. But, if I were to walk in that room with a new toy, especially one that was bright and colorful, their eyes would light up. The older one, three year old, Jordon, would come running and the one year old would come crawling faster probably than he could cope with. They would have that excitement and that joy to get to that item that had just appeared, that new thing that they wanted so much. So that is partly, just in a very physical way, the difference between happiness and joy. There is an excitement there that comes from that joy that is received through the Holy Spirit, and that we see in Jesus Christ.

Joy is more active than happiness! Our grandchildren were happy before, but now they are joyful; there is this positive spirit of excitement and rejoicing.

Happiness is more dependent on circumstances. We feel happy when a job promotion comes. We feel cheerful when our financial dreams come true. We are glad when our favorite sports team wins. But, these feelings last only for a short time or until the next trial or failure occurs. With happiness, there is no enduring significance to any event or

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material possession.

Joy, by contrast, is not dependent on circumstances. No matter what comes our way, we can have joy because we are living God's way of life, by following the example of Jesus Christ. This is something unending and continuous.

We can count on God's promises to be never-ending with only exciting positive results. We are excited by the tremendously positive future ahead, so much so that our present sufferings and trials are merely momentary bumps. Notice how, after we have gone through a trial, and we have been helped through it, that the trial did not seem all that bad afterwards. But while we were going through it, it was a major source of anxiety and despair.

God is a God of joy. When we receive His Spirit we also receive His nature of joy. The Spirit of God, that filled Paul with love, courage, patience, faith, hope and excitement, will also help us to have joy.

Along with the mind of God in us to excite us, we have the guiding example of Jesus Christ, who endured the cross for the joy He maintained by doing the will of His Father. Doing the will of God is extremely important

Hebrews 12:2 ...looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

That was one of the things that enabled Jesus to endure the suffering that He had to go through. He was looking forward to what His sacrifice would accomplish, and what joy that He would be able to provide to us as members of God's church, and to those who would be called and converted, and then to those who will be resurrected into the Kingdom. All these things were so joyful to Christ that it helped Him face His crucifixion. Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, continually appearing in the presence of God on our behalf. He persists in his intercession as our Mediator. Jesus has joy from knowing that He redeemed mankind and put into process the salvation of humanity. But, the reason He maintains His excitement in joy is because He looks to the glorious future of the family of God of which we will be included. That can maintain our joy as well.

Jesus feels a spirit of excitement, and that continuous joyousness comes from doing the will of the Father. We cannot have that full joy without doing His will.

### **3. In joy there is always a feeling of power and of strength.**

Joy infuses us with dynamic power in a way that happiness cannot. This is why false conceptions of joy are so easily exposed. There is never anything superficial about it. This feeling of power and strength is genuine and exhilarating.

Joy is one of the strongest powers in the world. Someone who is in a state of joy is, in a sense, afraid of nothing. This is one of the reasons that Jesus was able to face what He faced, because He was afraid of nothing. Yes, He had faith in His Father that He would see Him through it, but He also had this joy as a result of the spirit in Him to sustain it.

In the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, Nehemiah stepped forward to do the will of God. He did what God had put in his mind, and found that the joy of the Lord was his strength.

As a result, he was able to overcome intense opposition and threats: by taking wise defensive measures, by setting a good personal example, and by forging ahead with his obvious courage.

In Nehemiah 8 we will see the tie in to the Feast of Tabernacles. We see there that Nehemiah, who was governor, was there as was Ezra, the Priest. So, Nehemiah speaking to the people said:

**Nehemiah 8:10, 13** Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our LORD. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." Now on the second day the heads of the fathers' houses of all the people, with the priests and Levites, were gathered to Ezra the scribe, in order to understand the words of the Law.

So, we see either that Ezra was preaching the Law to them and actually reading about how to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. We see the description of building the booths with olive branches, olive trees, myrtle branches and palm branches and so on.

**Nehemiah 8:17** So the whole assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and sat under the booths; for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun until that day the children of Israel had not done so. And there was very great gladness.

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The Hebrew word translated "gladness" here in verse 17 is the same word translated "rejoice" in verse 12. Both can also mean joy.

The Feast of Tabernacles is a time of "great rejoicing" and of "very great gladness!" This time of great joy is a type of the spiritual excitement and exaltation, and feeling of power and strength that will be characteristic of God's Kingdom.

Nehemiah told the people, that the joy of the Lord is the strong power that would carry them through whatever obstacles and enemies that they were going to face. We see that the strength that we get from the joy of the Lord is a powerful strength, giving strong influence that will carry us through anything. The obstacles of those Israelites and their enemies were visible threats. But, ours are primarily spiritual threats from the influences of Satan and the world.

But, this same "joy of the Lord" is our strength during trial and testing. It helps us stay encouraged and puts things in the right perspective. That right perspective is that the "joy of the Lord" gives us the sustained boost needed to conquer Satan and the world, as well as, our own human nature.

King David called the Lord "my Rock", "my strength", and "my shield". This kept him from feeling threatened to the point of despair.

**Psalms 28:7** The LORD is my strength and my shield; My heart trusted in Him, and I am helped; Therefore my heart greatly rejoices, And with my song I will praise Him.

It is God who fills us with joy. David trusted in the "Rock" of his salvation, and that "Rock" proved to be a reliable, faithful God from which the fruit of joy came through the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Romans 15:13** Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Joy and peace are two characteristics of the Kingdom of God. Both the joy in God, and peace of mind, arise from a sense of our justification. One result is unity among brethren.

Worldly joy comes from pride without essence; therefore, the world may laugh, but their

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hearts are sad. True spiritual joy comes from God with lasting essence that satisfies our heart and mind. In this way God fills and replenishes us with hope, peace and joy.

In joy there is always a feeling of spiritual power and of strength.

Joy is something very deep and profound, something that affects our whole personality. We all want it. We all need it. So how do we have true joy?

Basically, it comes down to this: Only God can give us spiritual joy and He will only give it to those who do His will. We have our responsibility to carry out in order to receive it. We have to meditate on God's inspired written Word. We have to apply the essential life and teachings of Jesus Christ in our own lives. We have our work cut out for us.

We cannot be "Sabbath Only" Christians. We have to live righteously twenty four hours a day, seven days a week! About thirty years ago, I had a boss who told me, "I give God fifteen minutes on a Sunday morning the rest of the time is mine." He said it with arrogance. We see there a glimpse of what the world thinks about what God has to offer. We have the opposite attitude 24/7—that is how we can have this godly joy. We are to have it to the limit.

**I John 1:1-4** That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us— that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.

In the Greek, this word "full" means 'filled full', filled to the brim. Our joy in this world is to be full in that sense.

We may live in a world that lies under the influence of Satan, and we may have many bothersome things happening to us, even still, our joy is to be filled to the brim, true fullness without limit. That is what Jesus, the apostle Paul and the rest of the writers in the New Testament were trying to get across to us.

*'These things we write to you, that your joy may be full'*, may be better translated: *'These things we write to you, that your joy may remain full'*, not only that it may be, or become,

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but that it may remain, complete with joy.

Not only should our joy remain full while we are together worshipping God, singing praises, and fellowshiping, but also when persecution strikes, or we are suffering from a severe ailment. No matter what our condition is, like the apostle Paul, we are to be content. This is why the strength element of joy is so important.

We have not truly received the joy of the Lord if our joy is inconsistent and dependent on circumstances and things that may happen to us. True joy is a profound dynamic thing that enables us to persevere through whatever is happening to us.

Spiritual joy enables us to endure whatever is happening in the world, because we reverence God, because we fear Him, because we obey Him, and because we know that nothing can separate us from Him and His love.

To have true joy we must have deep intellectual satisfaction; our emotions must be fully satisfied; our every desire must find contentment in God's way of life—the way of life Jesus lived as an example of what we must do to have complete satisfaction in joy. This spirit of excitement is what we are meant to enjoy! And, this feeling of power and strength is what we are meant to have!

In having this true joy, no one can take it from us, because it is a gift from God given only to those who do His will!

What an exciting and awesome God that we have that He wants us to have such a wonderful characteristic for eternity. Have a joyful rest of the Feast. I will speak to you on this subject, of how we can have joy, later on in the Feast.