

Living Successfully In Christ

HOW TO HAVE ABIDING JOY

Key Verse: "...that my joy might be in you and that your joy may be complete" (John 15 :11)

These words were spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ, and it is most important for us to notice when He uttered them. It was a very strange time to talk of joy and gladness, for in a little while He would be in dark Gethsemane, and shortly after that He would be facing His accusers and hearing the taunts and mockings of those who hated Him. Yes, it was just prior to facing the agonies of Calvary that He spoke of "My joy...", and it is very significant that, so far as the scripture records are concerned, this is the only time He did speak of His joy. How unique the Lord's joy must have been if it still remained with Him in the time of such great trial and testing! – and His desire and provision for us (that is, for every believer), is that His joy, which is so different from that of the world, should be our joy – "...that my joy might be in you and that your joy may be complete."

1. CHRISTIAN JOY SHOULD BE THE PREVAILING CHARACTERISTIC OF THE LIFE OF EVERY CHRISTIAN

Too often we are sad, gloomy and dejected; but as Christians we ought to be joyful in everything – look up Philippians 4:4 "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" and 1 Thessalonians 5:16. "Rejoice always," The A-to-Z of our

Christian experience should be marked by joy: joy at conversion (Acts 8:39 "When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing"); joy when reading God's Holy Word (Jeremiah 15:16 "When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, Lord God Almighty"); joy in prayer (John 16:24 "Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete"); joy in the midst of trials (James 1:2 "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds"); joy when suffering (Acts 5:41 "The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name"); joy when serving (2 Corinthians 1:24 "Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm"); and joy at the journey's end (Hebrews 12:22 "But you have come to Mount

Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly"). If we love and belong to the Lord we should always be rejoicing.

2. WHAT, THEN, IS CHRISTIAN JOY, THE JOY WHICH WE AS CHRISTIANS SHOULD EXPERIENCE?

· It is Christ's Joy: "...that My joy may be in you" (John 15:11). "My joy...in you..." The Christian life is the life of the Lord Jesus Christ in a man or a woman – look up Galatians 2:20 "But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly," and Colossians 3:4 "When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.." Christian joy is Christ's joy in a Christian, and this means that this deep-down, abiding joy is not found anywhere else except in Him. There are other kinds of joy found in other places, but His joy is found in Him alone.

· It is Fullness of Joy: "...that your joy might be full" (John 15:11). There is a great difference between joy and fullness of joy. The vessel may be partly filled or completely filled. Our Lord's desire for us is that we should experience fullness of joy continually – look up Psalm 16:11 "You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand".

· It is Abiding Joy: "...that My joy may be in you" (John 15:11 " These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."). By "remaining" in Him and His "remaining" in us means that His joy will always be in us. Our joy is not an intermittent experience, but a permanent one. It is a joy which is unaffected by circumstances – see what the Lord said to His disciples in John 16:22 "So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.." These first followers of our Lord were to pass through many trials and testings, but He told them that nothing could rob them of their joy – His joy in them. Consider the following three illustrations of the abiding nature of Christian joy, and of the fact that Christ's joy in us is unaffected by outward circumstances and conditions:

- o John 15:11 – as we have seen, our Lord experienced this joy in the shadow of the cross – compare John 17:13 "I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them.."
- o Luke 10:20 – surely our Lord meant by this: "Do not let your joy depend upon anything earthly or temporal, but let it depend upon that which abides...in Heaven."
- o Acts 16:25 – Paul and Silas, though in great trouble, were filled with Christ's own joy which enabled them to sing praises at midnight – compare Isaiah 61:3 "and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor."

It is a remarkable and a wonderful thing that true Christian joy is not only unaffected by adverse circumstances, but it is actually promoted by such trials and testings – look up James 1:2 "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds"

3. HOW MAY WE HAVE THIS JOY?

1. By having Him. If this deep-down, abiding joy is Christ's joy, we can only have it by having Him. In Acts 8:8, we read that – "There was great joy in that city." Why was this? Verse 5 tells us! Verse 35 tells us! If we would possess His joy we must possess Him – look up John 17:13 "I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them."

2. By reading His Word. When we read the Bible and receive the truth, we experience great joy – look up 1 John 1:4 "We write this to make our joy complete." This is akin to having a "burning heart" as the result of fellowship with the Lord as He speaks to us – look up Luke 24:32 "They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

3. By submission to Him. Notice in Luke 10:21 "At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do" - that we are told two things: first, that "Jesus was full of joy..."; and second, that He was completely submissive to His Father's will. His joy was the joy of complete and continual submission to the will of His Father in Heaven. It was Madame Guyon who said, "Oh, the blessedness of an accepted sorrow!" When we accept suffering from His hand, sorrows as well as pleasures, then our joy will be full indeed.

4. By the Holy Spirit. The literal rendering of Luke 10:21 is: "Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit", and one translation reads: "In that hour Jesus was filled by the Holy Spirit with rapturous joy" – look up and compare Romans 15:13 "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit".

At this very moment the Lord Jesus is exalted, the perfect Man in a perfect human body, in Heaven. His desire is that His joy should be complete in us. How can this be, for He is there and we are here? He is in Heaven and we are on earth! The answer is – by the Holy Spirit. "The fruit of the Spirit is...joy..." – look up Galatians 5:22 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness", and compare Acts 13:52 "And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit" and Ephesians 5:18 "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit"