**True Happiness – Joy**

In our first article of this three-part series, we observed that many who seek to be happy fail to achieve any lasting satisfaction because they have never learned the secret of contentment. The person who trusts God to provide for their needs and to make all things work together for good to those who love Him will enjoy a peace of mind that is impervious to the difficulties of life (Philippians 4:6-7).

Grounded with a calm contentment that cannot be shaken, a person is free to enjoy the things of greatest value in this life; relationships and accomplishment. Family and friends can be a source of real joy to Christians and non-Christians alike. To the extent that those relationships are based on humility, selfless sacrificial love, mutual respect and support and absolute trust, they are a blessing. When relationships are devoid of these attributes, they become sources of misery and abuse.

Man was designed to work toward worthwhile accomplishment (Genesis 2:15). We work to provide for ourselves and our families, but there is also great satisfaction and joy in watching the unfolding of the fruits of our labors. Again, work is most enriching when performed with honesty, integrity, diligence and initiative. People who have convinced themselves that work is a loathsome burden to be avoided have done themselves a grave disservice.

While these relationships and pursuits are legitimate sources of real joy in our lives, a word of caution is in order. The secular things of this life can, and often will, fail us. Family members and friends may bring more sorrow into our lives than joy because of selfishness, unfaithfulness or neglect. Good bosses and corrupt bosses come and go, budget cuts and plant closings threaten our sense of employment security and endeavors fail despite our best efforts. A sense of well-being based entirely on factors outside our control is a fragile form of happiness. There is a better way.

There is one relationship that will never fail us. God promised, “’I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you’ so that we may say, ‘The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?’ (Hebrews 13:5-6). There is little wonder that nearly every reference in the New Testament to joy and rejoicing is in regard to the spiritual. We rejoice in the hope of eternal salvation made possible by the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. We derive great joy from the liberty in Christ; freedom from the slavery of sin and the justification we enjoy by the grace of God instead of the condemnation inherent in a system of perfect law-keeping. Even the trials of life are viewed from the perspective of suffering like our Master and an appreciation for the strength we derive from adversity.

Like contentment, joy in Christ is not dependent on the circumstances of life. “Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, ‘For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:35-39).

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