

Christian Retirement

Part 64

By [Thomas Reade](#)

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ON JOY

Christian joy is not a tumultuous passion, or feverish affection; but a calm and composed frame; a holy serenity of soul; a gladsome rest in the faithfulness and grace of Jesus. It sheds a luster over the countenance; beams forth at the eye, and often causes it to be suffused in tears. It creates an indescribable delight in the heart.

Paul was in this heavenly frame, when he said, "I am filled with comfort; I am exceeding joyful in all my tribulation." This holy joy does not depend on outward circumstances, for the apostle could say, "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." No one possesses this inward joy, but the real believer. "A stranger intermedles not with it." It is the fruit of the Spirit, and flows from a living faith in the divinity and atonement of Jesus.

So inseparable from Christian joy are right views of the blessed Savior, that John commences his first Epistle, as he did his Gospel, by refuting those two heresies, which, like poisonous weeds, were then springing up. The one propagated by the Gnostics or Docetae, who denied the real humanity of Jesus; the other by the Ebionites, who denied the essential divinity of the Redeemer. How conclusive are the declarations of John; "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 of the word of life." What language can more fully describe the real humanity of the Son of God?

"For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us." What a striking attestation to the divinity of Christ! "That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto 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 write we unto you, that your joy may be full."

Thus the apostle clearly and unequivocally states, that Christian communion can only be maintained in its blessedness, and Christian joy possessed in its fullness, by a cordial reception of Jesus Christ, as "God manifest in the flesh."

It were well, if all who profess to believe in Jesus would examine the ground of their faith, and the source of their joy, by this highly important passage in the word of God. Holy joy is a portion of heaven brought down into the soul, and enables the believer to soar above the troubles which assail him. Like the Alpine traveler, he looks down upon the storm which agitates the valley beneath. Even when compelled to exclaim, "without are fightings, and within are fears," he can "rejoice evermore."

Habakkuk was truly happy, when, raised above all the changing scenes of life, he thus sang to the harp of prophecy; "Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vine; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights." Habakkuk 3:17-19

The apostles sang in the prison. The martyrs praised God in the fires. They rejoiced in hope of the glory of God, and were made more than conquerors through him who loved them, and gave himself for them. This holy joy, this peaceful state of heart, is, nevertheless, susceptible to be disturbed and ruffled.

Through the remaining corruption of his nature, the believer is often sorely harassed and distressed. The enemy plies him very closely with his temptations. Thus he finds hourly need for watchfulness and prayer, as well as for deep humiliation and self-aborrence. If ensnared, through the subtlety of Satan, or by sudden surprisals of temptations, the enemy exults, and his heart is grieved. Yet, what must he do? Through grace, he betakes himself to the blood of sprinkling. He goes mourning to his heavenly Father, acknowledging his sin; pleads the merit of his Savior; implores the continued aid and protection of the Holy Spirit; lies low in self-abasement at the foot of the cross, and there receives this gracious word applied powerfully to his soul "go in peace, your sins are forgiven." Light beams once more in his heart; joy once more fills his soul. He hates himself and loves his Savior; watches more narrowly over the inward motions of his spirit; distrusts himself; and relies more confidently on the grace of his covenant God.

Thus the enemy of souls is baffled; his growth in humility is promoted; and God, through his restoring grace, is glorified.

"Affliction," says the apostle, "is not joyous, but grievous." Hence outward troubles may dampen the believer's joy, while he looks off from the Savior to the

boisterous wind and waves which rage around him. Peter did so, and began to sink. Faith, however, clings fast to the Savior and exults in the storm.

Paul was compelled at times to say, "I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart." But where arose this grief? It sprang from the deep concern which he felt for his perishing brethren according to the flesh. Thus many favored souls who are happy in the love of God, and who rejoice in Jesus with a joy unspeakable and full of glory, can sympathize with David, and say, "Rivers of water run down my eyes, because men keep not your law." Their personal joy may be in lively exercise, while their hearts are greatly grieved for a world which lies in wickedness. Is not this the characteristic feeling of the children of God?

Christian charity is a compound of active benevolence and tender compassion, flowing from a supreme love to Jesus Christ. The true believer is, therefore, the genuine philanthropist. He not only feels for the miseries of others, but labors to remove them by prayer and suitable exertion. His heart can melt at another's woe, and gladden at another's welfare. Hence he rejoices over one sinner that repents. He feels his own joy increased by each increase to the church of God. He rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth. As sin pains him, both when felt in himself and seen in others, so holiness delights him, when, like Barnabas, he beholds its growing influence in those around him. The joy of the Lord is his strength. When faith is in lively exercise, and joy is springing up in his soul, he can brave every danger, and boldly encounter every enemy which may oppose his way to glory.

Such is the happy experience of the believer in Jesus. It is his privilege to rejoice. A God of sovereign love wills the happiness of his people. As nothing but sin can separate the soul from God, or cause him to hide his face from us; so nothing but sin ought really to dampen our joy. Woe be to him who can feel joyous in his sins!

The Gospel is good news, glad tidings of great joy. Those worldly people greatly mistake its nature, tendency, and design, who suppose it to be a mere system of restraints; an enemy to innocent enjoyment. Its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace. The Gospel bids us to be happy. All that it condemns is an abuse of divine mercies, and that alienation of heart which leads us to seek from the broken cisterns of the world that happiness, which can only be derived from the eternal fountain of uncreated excellence.

The Gospel, while it faithfully reveals to us our ruined state as sinners, and our utter unworthiness of the least of God's mercies, graciously opens to our view the way to unspeakable felicity, through the incarnation and death of the eternal Son of God. Those who reject the Gospel, and choose the forbidden pleasures of sin, find the fruit of their choice to be bitterness and death; while those who cheerfully renounce the world, and yield themselves unto God through Jesus Christ, have a spring of holy joy opened in their souls, which shall flow onward, until it issue in

everlasting life. Oh! my soul, is this your experience? Do you feel this inward joy in a crucified Jesus? Are you leaning on the bosom of your Savior; resting on covenant faithfulness and unchanging love?

Enable me, blessed Lord, with joy to draw water out of the wells of salvation; to come daily unto you, the fountain of consolation; who has said, "drink, drink abundantly, Oh beloved." When I feel my inward depravity, Oh give me grace to see, with the eye of faith, the glorious remedy which you have provided. May I lay hold on Jesus Christ, and never let him go, until he bless me. Shine into my heart with the bright beam of your heavenly grace. Shed abroad your love in my soul. Give me the witness of the Holy Spirit. Grant that I may taste your goodness here, in the sweet refreshing streams of Gospel joy, until, borne with gladsome wing to the fountain-head in glory, my soul shall be lost in wonder, love, and praise.

How sweet the sacred joy that dwells
In souls renewed by power divine;
Where Jesus all his goodness tells;
Oh! may this joy be ever mine!

Descend and bless your servant, Lord,
Your loving Spirit now impart;
Speak the all-enlivening word,
And seal salvation to my heart.

From earth, and all its fleeting toys,
Be all my fond desires withdrawn;
Oh fill my soul with heavenly joys,
Of endless bliss the glorious dawn.

Then shall my raptured spirit sing,
In strains of pure celestial love;
When, borne on some kind seraph's wing,
I soar to brighter worlds above.

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