

Fruit of the Spirit. Joy
(John 4. Psalm 126)

Someone who has become a Christian will often remark that they've begun to see things differently. Something seems to be changing inside of them causing them to look at life, people and things from a new perspective. This is a good sign! For this is evidence that the Holy Spirit of Christ has moved in and is making Himself at home!

When someone begins to be less irritable and more patient and charitable with others. When someone finds themselves less ambitious about amassing personal wealth and worldly prestige and more motivated by church, the Bible, the prayer meeting and how they can serve to help those in need. What's happening?

It's the Holy Spirit. He was working on you before you become a Christian, convicting you of your sin, drawing you to trust in Christ. He brought about a spiritual new birth in your soul. He now lives within you and the more you seek the things that please God, the more Christlike perspective and attitude He produces in you. The more you drink from this living spiritual source, the more Christlike fruit He grows in your heart. Things like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Last time we looked at love, today we consider joy.

Joy is so much more than just feeling happy, for then it would be dependant on outward circumstances. We'd be joyful and exuberant when things go well and down in the dumps when they don't. Joy is an altogether deeper quality, an attitude of mind and heart that can remain positive and grateful and energised even when times are tough. It's one fruit of Christlike character the Spirit works to develop in all Christians.

Let's think of it under three headings: Joy is –

1. Delight in knowing the Lord
2. Pleasure in serving the Lord
3. Strength in suffering with the Lord

1. Delight in knowing the Lord. In the Old Testament book of Nehemiah, after a period of destruction and national humiliation the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt. But the people were ignorant about God and His Law so Ezra the scribe and a group of Levites gathered a huge crowd and read to them from the Law of Moses. The people began to weep for they realised their sinfulness and that their grandparents' sins had brought disaster on their nation. But Nehemiah encouraged them saying, "Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength" (Nehemiah 8 v 10), whereupon the people began to celebrate. They were understanding the scripture, they were coming to know the Lord, that though He is holy and hates sin, He is also loving and strong to save and restore.

His fullness has been revealed to the world in Jesus Christ His Son through Whom anyone may come and find strength and joy in knowing God. Paul in his New Testament letter to the Philippians urges Christians to rejoice always "in the Lord". While our circumstances change our Lord does not so we can always praise Him for His person, all He is, and thank Him for His love, all He does for us.

We delight in His holiness, for we are surrounded constantly in this life by corruption around us and within. We delight in His grace and redeeming love in saving us from our sins, making us strong with the joy of acceptance, reconciliation, newness of life.

2. Joy secondly is pleasure in serving the Lord. Let's be realistic here – serving the Lord can be hard work! Great people of faith in the Bible like Moses, Samuel, Nehemiah and the Apostle Paul all had high levels of stress in their ministries. The Psalmist in 126 says that

before returning with a harvest of joy there is a long and at times tearful labour of sowing.

And yet as we look at our ultimate example the Lord Jesus we find that even though He was often misunderstood, disappointed, slandered, rejected and ill-treated. He found joy and fulfilment in service. In John 4 after sharing with the woman at the well in Samaria and her neighbours He told His disciples that His food was to do the will of the Father Who had sent Him. Meat and drink to Jesus was to share the Good News. His need and His pleasure were to spread the Gospel.

We come across so many Christians who get stalled and short-circuited in their growth in the faith because they stumble at this basic level. Disobedient refusal to go make more disciples or at least try to be fruitful witnesses for Christ halts their progress as disciples and robs them of their joy. How is your joy level today? Have you discovered or perhaps neglected the pleasure of serving the Lord? Lord grant us a willing spirit and joy in His service!

3. Finally, joy is strength in suffering with the Lord. Christians suffer disappointment, bereavement, hurt and illness just like others and are often badly treated for our faith as well.

Most of the apostles were cruelly martyred. Accounts are plentiful over the centuries of God's people facing hardship, brutality, even death with calmness and courage, astounding observers with their willingness to forgive their oppressors.

Consider the Lord Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, overcome with sorrow, in total anguish at the prospect of the trial which lay before Him. As He prayed His anxious sweat seemed like drops of blood. And yet in a short while when the mob came to arrest Him He was calm, composed ready with a godly strength and dignity to face the trial and prove victorious.

This same quality of joy – strength in the face of suffering – finding a calmness and confidence that God is working all things together for good for them that love Him – this quality is made available in Christ’s followers through the indwelling influence of the Holy Spirit. So that we might persevere through the valley of the shadow of death, comforted by the Good Shepherd’s presence, like Him anticipating the joy that is yet before us, resurrection, reunion and eternal life.

Lord, You know the path of suffering and sorrow yet found joy and strength in completing it for us! May Your Spirit develop the same profound attitude in us, even in our darkest days, that we might experience joy, giving us strength to persevere and keep serving, until we join the celebration before Your throne in Heaven!

Amen