

Is this choice fruit of the Spirit missing from your life?

BY ERN BAXTER

Joy is not an easy word to define. As the old Scottish woman said, it is "better felt than telt." Yet that is not totally true, for joy has to do with the mind and conviction as well as the emotions. Like the Scottish woman, many Christians would be amiss in their explanation of joy. We know we are supposed to have it, but that's about as far as our understanding goes. More than having a good working knowledge of joy, however, we need to be able to experience it every day of our lives. That experience comes through understanding.

In our attempts to explain joy, we sometimes try to draw a contrast between happiness, as men generally understand it, and joy, as we Christians understand it. Although it is true that there is a difference between them, the difference is not in the emotional nature of the joy but in the source and stimulus of the joy. One may experience considerable happiness and pleasure from something that is completely illicit, and we would not think of this as being Christian joy. Yet the same set of emotions when stimulated by sheer righteous ecstasy are the means of expressing holy joy. The ultimate nature of joy is determined by its source and that to which the emotions are responding.

Two Kinds of Joy

There is a joy and a happiness experienced by non-Christians and there is a joy and happiness experienced by Christians. It is interesting that *Webster's Dictionary* uses a scripture to provide an example of joy: "I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Hab. 3:18).¹

To the Christian who has experienced both kinds of joy, the joy of his life before conversion, and then the joy of his new life in Christ, there is no question about which is the superior kind of joy. Beyond all argument the joy of the Lord is incomparable!

These two kinds of joy might be related to the descriptions of joy in the Scripture, where it is referred to as being "in the Lord" (see Philippians 3:1; 4:4) or "in the flesh." Any joy that comes from the realm of the flesh or self-gratifying behavior is referred to as "the pleasures of sin for a season" (Heb. 11:25). Obviously the pleasure that comes outside the Lord is seasonal and transitory and has no essential permanence. The joy of a Christian, on the other hand, goes on forever. Paul writes, "Rejoice evermore" (1 Th. 5:16). One essential difference between the joy under the lordship of Christ and the joy under the lordship of self is the difference between permanence and impermanence.

Joy or pleasure generated by self-indulgence is connected with

the kingdoms of this world, which are "passing away." Joy in the Lord is connected with the kingdom of God, which shall never pass away. This joy springs from basic well-being. As Paul says in Romans 14:17, "The kingdom of God is...righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." It is obvious that joy is the fruit of righteousness and peace. Therefore to experience this pure kind of emotional and situational well-being is to know righteousness, which results in peace and finds its emotional expression in joy.

Impaired Joy

Often, when Paul addressed churches that were in serious trouble from either indulging in gross sin or coming under the bondage of legalism, he found that their joy was impaired. When our basic understanding of and participation in righteousness is faulty, our peace will be disturbed and the result will be joylessness. To the Corinthians who had allowed gross sin to come in and contaminate the church, Paul says that while their faith remains valid their joy has been affected, and that he wants to help their joy (see 2 Corinthians 1:24). The manner in which he helps their joy is by correcting their unrighteousness.

Joy cannot be helped until the causes of its absence are dealt with. Therefore, Paul addresses



When our basic understanding of and participation in righteousness is faulty, our peace will be disturbed and the result will be joylessness.

the fornication, the division, and the doctrinal error as well as the other irregularities in the Corinthian church, all in an attempt not only to restore them to righteousness, but to joy as well. Their recovered joy will be a clear manifestation of restoration to righteousness.

As we look at the nature of biblical joy we find that although it is emotional, it must be soundly based on a clear understanding of one's right relationship to God. No superficial stimuli serve as adequate substitutes for the deep foundations of genuine joy. Genuine Christian joy is able to express itself in the most adverse circumstances because it originates in the historical acts of God, which affect us in our relationship to Him.

Paul, speaking to the Romans, prays for them:

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 (Rom. 15:13 NIV).

Joy here is based upon trusting

God. One cannot trust what he does not know about. Through the hearing of the gospel we have the revelation of God's plan for the forgiveness of our sins and our acceptance before Him in Jesus Christ. When we embrace this truth and make it our basic conviction for living, then we have put ourselves in line for that pure permanent joy that cannot be interrupted by lesser circumstances.

Our Lord Jesus puts this joy based on conviction above the joy based on accomplishment, for when His disciples returned from a mission rejoicing that the spirits were subject to them, He replied, "Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (Lk. 10:20 NIV). What He seems to be saying here is that while the use of our authority and gifts may be intermittent, our relationship to God through Jesus Christ is unchanging. Therefore, although we may rejoice in what God does through us, our primary base of joy is our relationship with God. The joy of a Christian is firmly fixed in the unchanging fact of his relationship to God through Jesus Christ.

Three-dimensional Joy

This firmly founded joy appears to be three-dimensional. First, it has historical roots. Writing to the Romans, Paul says, "Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation" (Rom. 5:11 NIV). Our joy is based on the fact of Christ's completed redemption on the cross and in the resurrection, which provides our reconciliation to Him. Our joy rests solidly in that great historical event.

The second dimension is the present. Paul urges the Thessalonians to "be joyful always" (1 Th. 5:16 NIV). Because the basis of our joy is unchanging, the expression of our joy should be equally unchanging. Therefore, no matter what our circumstances may be at any given time, they shouldn't affect the basis of our joy. There are a number of scriptural examples of men who rejoiced in God even though their physical circumstances were adverse and painful.

The third dimension is the future. Addressing the Romans again, Paul says:

Through our Lord Jesus Christ...we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God (Rom. 5:1-2 NIV).

When our Lord Jesus was going to His cross, He said to His disciples in the upper room, "Ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice; and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy" (Jn. 16:20).

Although His death would cause the disciples great sorrow and the world would celebrate His punishment, in the resurrection their sorrow would be turned to joy. They may not have fully understood it, but He was providing a future ground for joy in the midst of the most terrible calamity. When He reappeared among them in resurrection, joy was the chief characteristic of their gatherings. But at the ascension when He announced He was to go away again, He provided the promise that He would return and that at His return, joy would know no bounds.

During the in-between time we must endure all of the varied experiences of life, many of which bring with them pressure and sadness, but in it all we have cause to rejoice, for the certainty of His glorious return. It is said of Him that He "for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb. 12:2). On the cross, our Lord Jesus, in the midst of all the inexplicable agonies of body and soul, was upheld by an inner exultation that looked past His ordeal to the endless glory that would be His in the new order. He saw that the fruit of His suffering would be "a great multitude, which no man could number" (Rev. 7:9). Too often we become so engrossed with the pressure and pain of the moment that we miss the great

value of this future dimension of joy.

Despite Our Circumstances

This future dimension of joy provides one of the major differences between joy "in the flesh" and joy "in the Lord," as it relates to the whole matter of circumstances. To the carnal man, Christian joy is a mystery. He sees Christians who are experiencing physical and environmental pressures and yet by some secret source of happiness are able to rejoice in the midst of their trial. It must be very difficult for him to understand how "the apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name" (Acts 5:41 NIV).

A carnal man may endure such suffering stoically and philosophically. Certainly, there are records of men enduring suffering in this manner. Enduring it with joy, however, is reserved for the person whose source of joy is "independent of circumstances" (Phil. 4:11 Twentieth Century New Testament). The apostles were men who had been abused in every way, including physical punishment; yet they came out of their ordeal with great joy, because their joy was based on their relationship to the Lord Jesus.

Paul, describing the nature of his life and ministry, says that he is "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" (2 Cor. 6:10 NIV). This is certainly paradoxical, and yet the Christian rightly instructed and related to truth can know the permanence of joy that comes from his relationship with Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. On another occasion, the apostle says, "I am greatly encouraged; in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds" (2 Cor. 7:4 NIV). Here he is witnessing the success of the gospel and the growth of the young Christians.

Did You Know?

Did you know that we pray for our readers every day?

Each morning members of our staff meet to pray for requests sent in by readers. During this season of giving thanks, we want to thank the Lord for His response to those prayers and to share with you some of the answers we've received:

It's been some time now since I wrote you requesting prayers for my niece. Everything was wrong with her, but God has been kind and has heard the prayers you made for her. Today she's out of the hospital and has started school for this new term. Her illness had affected her whole being, but we have seen the goodness of God at work in her.

—J.M., Jamaica, West Indies

Had to take a minute to drop you a quick note to let you know my brother called me—after twenty months! He has been running from God, but was under such conviction to call home, so he did! Thank you for your prayers.

—K.M., Moorpark, CA

We're here to promote your spiritual growth, and praying for your needs is an important part of that mission. When you have a need, write us. We're thankful to the Lord for answering our prayers for our readers, and we thought you'd like to know. □



Charles Simpson on the Incarnation

Next Month in New Wine: The Mystery of Christmas

Charles Simpson urges us this Christmas to cut through the glitter and tinsel and to celebrate the essence of the season: the mystery of the Incarnation.

Don Basham looks at the lives of two little-known biblical characters who, although they appear only briefly in the story of Jesus' birth, set the stage for His life and ministry.

Charles Green, chairman of the Network of Christian Ministries, shares the exciting signs of unity he's seeing.

Also, our annual Christmas story, along with other features to help you celebrate the joy of the season.

All in the December *New Wine*

Although it is accompanied with much suffering and persecution, his joy knows no bounds because the source of his joy is not in circumstances.

On yet another occasion, Paul congratulates the Thessalonians, writing:

You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit (1 Th. 1:6 NIV).

Here, obviously, we are in the presence of a joy that man cannot know unless he is related to God, the source of such joy. The Thessalonians were enduring suffering, yet they were filled with joy because of the glorious stimulus of the Holy Spirit's witness to the truth of the gospel.

Relationship to the transcendent enables people to be joyful in the midst of trial. The writer to the Hebrews says:

You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions (Heb. 10:34 NIV).

This is strange ground for the man who is an earth dweller and bound by earth's horizons. But for the person who has entered into a relationship with God and is not bounded by time or circumstances, and who is an heir of God and a joint heir with Jesus Christ, it is possible to suffer with joy the loss of the temporary and transitory as he tightens his embrace on those things that are eternal and unchanging.

There are many other scriptures that point to this paradox, and undoubtedly many of us who are Christians could write our own list as we think of the times

when disappointment and adversity could have crushed us if we were not joined to God through Christ. But in the midst of the adversity we know that God has redeemed us, that He is caring for us, and that He has ensured our future. Therefore, we experience great joy as we consider and realize how blessed we are to be a part of God's community of redemption.

Corporate Joy

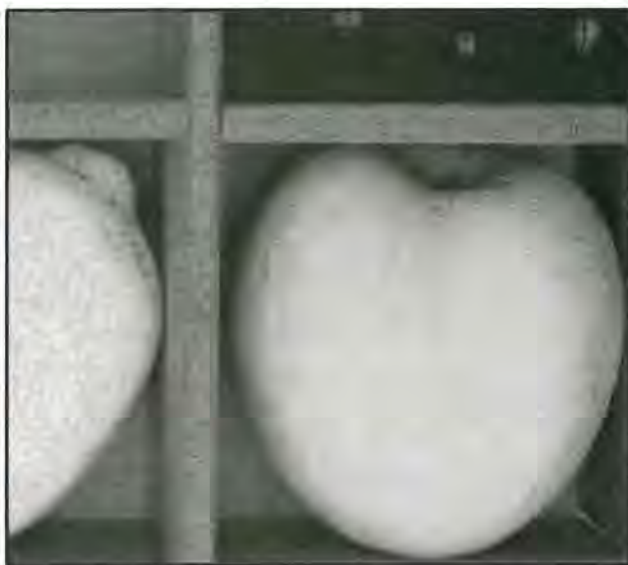
One final aspect of Christian joy often overlooked is that not only is it highly personal and private but to be fully orbbed, it must also be relational, or corporate. The Scriptures seem to make it clear that we do not rejoice alone, but that we belong to a community of joy.

We belong to a fellowship of happiness, and in this blessed company we share our situations and "rejoice with those who rejoice" and "mourn with those who mourn" (Rom. 12:15 NIV). Mourning is probably the exception, as joy is the rule of the Christian life. But there are times in the Christian life when a fellow believer is enduring distressing circumstances, as in the loss of a loved one, that we enter relationally into his temporary sadness, knowing that "weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Ps. 30:5).

Therefore, our joy is not a selfish joy but a shared joy, and probably we can all testify to times of great spiritual exhilaration found in the company of fellow believers. At such times we experience heights of corporate joy that seem to be foretastes of the great ultimate intention of God in bringing His people into His presence, glorified and complete in Him. As we speak of relational joy we are probably touching on a legitimate joy source that we have not sufficiently appreciated.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 7,

The redeemed community must be careful to maintain righteous relationships and the pursuit of peace among its members, that joy might be in constant and full manifestation.



Paul speaks about the return of Titus after his visit with the Corinthians, and says that he and his companions were comforted not only by the joy of seeing Titus again

...but also by the comfort you had given him. He told us about your longing for me, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever (2 Cor. 7:7 NIV).

It was a great joy to Paul to have his young associate Titus back with him, but even greater joy was experienced as Titus brought expressions and affirmations of love for Paul from the Corinthians.

Personally, I can think of no greater joy than that of seeing men and women coming to Jesus Christ and becoming a part of the community, and then watching them grow in God. There comes to mind at this moment the names of many who have been a source of great relational joy as I've witnessed their steady growth in God, and have felt the joy of knowing that God used me to

play some small part in their lives. Perhaps we underestimate the joy of our fellowship with one another and need to cultivate it more, not only for the sake of increasing the joy of others, but for the great corporate joy of the Christian company that in turn brings joy to the heart of God.

Paul makes reference to this kind of joy in a letter to the Thessalonians:

How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? (1 Th. 3:9 NIV).

A great source of Paul's joy was the people whom he had been instrumental in bringing to Christ and nurturing toward Christian maturity.

Writing to the Philippians, he shows the place that joy should play in the corporate community when he exhorts them, "Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord!" (Phil. 3:1 NIV). Unquestionably, a major component of the character of the Christian community is its togetherness in joy. When joy is missing, peace has been

disturbed, indicating a flaw somewhere in the corporate righteousness. The redeemed community must be careful to maintain righteous relationships and the pursuit of peace among its members, that joy, the end product of the kingdom of God, might be in constant and full manifestation.

Likewise, in our individual lives, we must maintain a righteous relationship with the Lord to experience His joy.

"The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." □

Footnote

¹Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1973), p. 989.



Ern Baxter, a long-time leader in the charismatic renewal, is a member of the Integrity Communications Board of Directors. He and his wife, Ruth, live in San Diego, California, where he is involved with South Coast Christian Fellowship. His time is divided between working with the fellowship and traveling in ministry.

How blessed are the people who know the joyful sound!" (Ps. 89:15 NAS).

And the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people" (Lk. 2:10 NAS).

The joyful sound of the psalmist and the good news of the angel was the prophetic announcement that God's government had been established on the earth in the person of His Son, Jesus. Those who receive the proclamation and submit to the rule of the Son have truly heard the joyful sound. Through their holy living—not merely their salvation—they live a life full of joy.

All Christians have access to this joy, and many have experienced it, but the key issue for us is once we have it, not to let it get away.

An Everlasting Covenant

God makes an everlasting covenant with all who joyfully receive the announcement of Christ's government and submit to the commands of the King. Psalm 89 tells of the covenant that God made with David and his sons, which is a prophetic foreshadowing of the Lord Jesus and those who would believe in His name. The most important aspect of this covenant is God's promise that it will last forever. Even if we break the terms of the covenant, God promises to remain faithful to it:

"If his sons forsake My law, and do not walk in My judgments, if they violate My statutes, and do not keep My commandments, then I will visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. But I will not break off My lovingkindness from him, nor deal falsely in

My faithfulness" (vv. 30-33 NAS).

The scripture doesn't say, "If his sons forsake My law, I will cut them off and send them to hell." But God is often pictured as a kind of a big bearded ogre with a huge hatchet in His hand, who stands waiting for us to fail. And if we do, He's ready for us! He cuts us off, and we are finished. Over the years I have counseled literally hundreds of people who felt they had committed the unpardonable sin and were forever cut off from God.

I'm glad that the people who don't understand God's grace aren't in charge of the Lamb's Book of Life. I can hear them now: "I saw what you were doing. I saw you smoking. That's all for you! I'll take your name right out of my book!"

But notice that the scripture says, "If his sons forsake My law...I will visit their transgression with the rod" (a rod, not a hatchet). God says He will bring discipline, but He won't take His mercy from us. The body of Christ needs to understand that God's discipline does not cancel His covenant but corrects unrighteous behavior so that we can walk in the "righteousness, peace, and joy of His kingdom!" (see Romans 14:17). When we submit to His discipline, we once again receive the announcement of His government with great joy.

We Must Love Righteousness

When God disciplines us, He's trying to teach us something about His joy and its relationship to righteousness. Hebrews 1:9 says, "Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." The word *iniquity* makes us think of bank robbers and grandmother beaters. But that is not what is involved here.

Lawlessness means going our own way. It means acting as a man without law: "I don't want anyone to tell me what to do. I don't want to be restricted. I want to be free!"

Lawlessness is a real issue we face in our society. But Jesus, the King of God's kingdom, has another way: His yoke.

"See this hole?" He asks me.

"What is that?" I ask.

"Just put your head in the hole."

"I don't want to put my head in the hole!" I protest.

"Now, Bob, this is My yoke."

"Yoke?"

"It's all right. My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

"But it's a yoke!"

"Put your head in."

The yoke is a symbol of God's law. One of the great problems of our generation is that we have not understood what Jesus meant when He said, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill" (Mt. 5:17 NAS).

The oil of joy, or the oil of gladness, spoken of in Hebrews 1:9 is given without measure to the person who learns this important lesson: to hate lawlessness and to love righteousness. I don't mean we should *tolerate* or *endure* righteousness. I mean we should *love* it and at the same time *hate* lawlessness. When I say, "Lord, I love righteousness," the Lord's response is, "If you continue to do that, I'll pour My joy all over you."

God's Proposition

To help us further understand how discipline and joy are related, let's take a closer look at the covenant God makes with each of His children. When I received Christ as my Savior, I came to God and ratified a covenant. He offered me a proposition, saying, "If you believe My