



SERVING GOD
WITH

Joy

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After being saved “by grace ... through faith” (Ephesians 2:8), Christians are expected to serve God. Serving God is doing “good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). Moreover, we are to “Serve the LORD with gladness” (Psalm 100:2a). Glad or joyful service is what God requires of us in our Christian life. Joy is one important aspect of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. If we are truly Christ’s disciples, we will be recognisable by the fruit of the Spirit, which includes joy, in our service.

However, not every Christian understands what it means to serve the Lord with joy. Some serve reluctantly; some serve with murmuring and complaints; some serve with hidden agenda and motives; some even serve with a boastful and competitive spirit. Actually, all such serve with a wrong kind of spirit; instead of joy, they often experience insecurity, fear, envy and strife. Yet, when a faithful saint serves God with singleness of heart for His glory only, there is great joy. Besides, some also have a wrong notion of joy. They equate joy with earthly happiness, which is dependent on pleasant circumstances and freedom from troubles and sufferings.

JOY AND TROUBLE CAN GO TOGETHER

Biblical joy is affected by none of these. It is focused on what God has done through His Son Jesus Christ: “but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement” (Romans 5:11). As a result of our sins forgiven and us being reconciled to God by the death and resurrection of Christ, “in whom ... ye rejoice with joy unspeakable” (1 Peter 1:8b), we now have the unshakable joy of salvation. Hence,

we read of how the apostle Paul served God with inextinguishable joy amidst trying circumstances (cf. Philippians 1:18; 2:17; 3:1; 4:4, 10) – be it imprisonment, sacrificial labouring, dealing with false and unruly brethren, or making do with meagre provisions. A Christian’s joy in serving God rises above external circumstances because it recognises “the power of (Christ’s) resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings” (Philippians 3:10). If anything, there is unmistakable joy in being “counted worthy to suffer” afflictions and even persecutions in the midst of God’s service (cf. Acts 5:41; 1 Peter 4:13).

No wonder the apostle James exhorts Christians to “count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations (or trials)” (James 1:2). He goes on to say that the trying of our faith is to produce patience in us (1:3), and is thus a means to nurture the fruit of godliness and spiritual maturity in our lives (1:4). Trials “toughen” and “test” the genuineness of our faith. There is joy in knowing that we can be “more than conquerors” as we serve God amidst trials.

Scripture has recorded for us not a few biblical characters who serve God with joy. David is one such great example in the Old Testament, as can be seen from his life and the songs of praise he wrote in the Psalms. Though he had to live a fugitive life over many years hiding from the jealous King Saul and face treachery in his later years from those he had trusted, David retained his joy in serving the Lord. Consider a few (among many) of his testimonies of joy:

“But let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy, because thou defendest them: let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee” (Psalm 5:11).

“Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (Psalm 16:11).

“And my soul shall be joyful in the LORD: it shall rejoice in his salvation” (Psalm 35:9).

Yes, sometimes there may be a high price to pay in serving God, but He will reward us accordingly. “For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister” (Hebrews 6:10). Thus, for true believers, there is no “sacrifice” that is too great to make, especially when we consider how even Jesus “as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). Jesus is our best example of serving God with joy.

JOY DERIVES SATISFACTION FROM OTHERS' WELL-BEING

Another interesting thing about joyful service is that our joy is accentuated by the edification and spiritual growth of those we minister unto. As the apostle Paul reminds his readers, “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy” (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20). As we serve God through ministering to others, and they in turn become edified and grow unto spiritual maturity, what joy it brings to our hearts! As the Thessalonian believers (among whom Paul had served) became “ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia” (1 Thessalonians 1:7), Paul gives thanks to God, saying,

“For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God” (1 Thessalonians 3:9).

Joy does not exist in a vacuum. The apostle Paul links his own joy to the spiritual welfare and steadfast faith of those he has ministered to in the Lord. So must we – Christian joy is a shared experience. After being saved, believers are joined together in a living union with Christ and become members of Christ’s body, “made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13). That is to say, no Christian is an island. We are put into a community of saints – the church – to work and to serve. As Paul tells us, “So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another” (Romans 12:5), everyone has his role to serve in the church. As we minister to our fellow brethren in the church and “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others” (Philippians 2:4), even “Rejoic(ing) with them that do rejoice, and weep(ing) with them that weep” (Romans 12:15), mutual care will flourish in the church. Indeed, as the saying goes, “Shared sorrow becomes halved, and shared joy becomes doubled.”

CONCLUSION

Dear Christians, let us serve the Lord not out of obligation but willingly with joy. The Lord who calls us is faithful and He is a rewarder to those who serve Him faithfully. May the Lord grant us grace to labour on till our time is over on this side of heaven, that we may have the ultimate joy of hearing Christ say to us, “enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Matthew 25:21b).



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*“Every man according as he purposeth in his heart,
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