

HAPPINESS OR JOY IN CHRIST JESUS?

Proverbs 3:1-18

My son, do not forget my law, but let your heart keep my commands; For length of days and long life and peace they will add to you. Let not mercy and truth forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart, and so find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and man.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.

Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh, and strength to your bones. Honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine.

My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor detest His correction; for whom the Lord loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights.

Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding; for her proceeds are better than the profits of silver, and her gain than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all the things you may desire cannot compare with her. Length of days is in her right hand, in her left hand riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who retain her.

It has been suggested or at least implied by some, when I have asked what is the fruit of the Spirit, that happiness is or should be a fruit of the Spirit. I bring that up because our passage of Scripture tells us, that wisdom from God "is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who retain her", which SEEMS to be saying that the Wisdom from God bears the fruit of happiness. Yet King Solomon tells us elsewhere, in **Ecclesiastes 1:18**, "For in much wisdom is much grief, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow." How can that be? As we know, there is a real danger to taking the Scriptures, aka the Word of God, out of context, and we can't just make it say what we want it to say. That is, after all, how cults are established, and how one ends up straying from God's Word and from Jesus, as He is the Word of God ("In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."-**John 1:1**), and then also God's Word leads us to the understanding that Jesus is, as He claimed, the "Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (**John 14:6**)

The Apostle Paul told Timothy, to "be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (**2 Timothy 2:15**) and that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the **man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.**" (**2 Timothy 3:16-17**) As we rightly divide the Word of God, as the Holy Spirit leads us in the truth in Christ, through His Word, we WILL be made complete and thoroughly equipped for EVERY good work. It is impossible for someone who is honest with themselves, to read the gospels of Christ, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John or any of the other books in the New Testament and come to a conclusion that we just believe on Christ and then go about doing whatever we want to do or that having Jesus makes all our problems go away and we can just be, or should be, happy, happy, happy.

Just to get it out of the way, so that I don't keep you wondering, that word happy, in our passage of Scripture in **Proverbs 3**, comes from the root of the Hebrew word "ashar" (aw-shar), which really means "to go straight, go on, advance", which then implies, based on the context of its usage, that wisdom from God is an encourager, a blessing, a guide, to lead one in continuing in the Way. We all know hopefully that Jesus alone IS the Way! Also, happiness really is an emotion that is self-specific, as when something good comes our way and it makes us happy. Similarly, wisdom is also self-specific. King Solomon tells us, "For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in His sight; but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting, that he may give to him who is good before God." The fruit **of the Spirit**, on the other hand, is what works in us, as children of God, to bless others, to encourage others, and to help others in what they are going through and to keep us in the Way, Truth, and Life in Christ Jesus! My happiness, like when I am happy while eating a bowl of ice-cream, is not going to translate into anyone being blessed in Christ (including myself, although I can say thank You Lord for this ice-cream). Nevertheless, that could just become a matter of semantics on how we define happiness. So, suffice it to say, the Apostle Paul did not list happiness as a fruit of the Spirit. It is in the fruit of the Spirit that works in us, that we do then share and SHOW the love and the gospel of Christ Jesus, as His character becomes us! Likewise, wisdom from God is not intended to just "make us happy". Hopefully for all of us, we are not looking for "happiness" in this world, but as the Apostle Peter stated, "Though now you do not see Him [Christ Jesus], yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory." (**1 Peter 1:8**) The joy **of the Lord** far supercedes any happiness that we may experience in this world. One last thing about happiness, if you are seeking happiness, you are setting yourself up for much disappointment and bitterness as we will experience in our lives pain, sorrow, grief, trials, tribulations, sufferings, and even the death of loved ones.

Our passage of Scripture in **Proverbs 3:1-18**, begins, "My son, do not forget my law, but let your heart keep my commands; for length of days and long life and peace they will add to you. Let not mercy and truth forsake you; bind them around your neck, **write them on the tablet of your heart**, and so find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and man. Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths." Once again, we can't make that say what it isn't really saying. If God chooses to take us home to glory while we are in the prime of our lives, are we going to quote to God His Word that says that wisdom from God was supposed to ensure length of days and a long life? Elsewhere in Scripture we are told that we are not even guaranteed tomorrow, that today is our day of salvation. (**2 Corinthians 6:1-2**) The Apostle James, Jesus' half-brother tells us "you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away."

What Solomon was saying is what can be called a general principle and not an immutable law of God's. Jesus Himself did not live a "long life", nor did many of His disciples. Some of you may undoubtedly know of a godly person that was taken home to be with the Lord before the fulfilling of having a long-life. The length of days, as we understand it, by the Wisdom that comes from God, is in those who have the Spirit of Christ-they will live for all of eternity in God's glorious kingdom. The New Testament reveals to us the New Covenant that God has established for all who will believe on Christ Jesus and receive Him, so as to become born-again, that is, by receiving the Holy Spirit to become a child of God AND have life eternal in Christ.

Our faith in Christ Jesus is ultimately defined by the next verses in **Proverbs 3:5-6**, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths." THAT is what being a child of God IS. We are living by faith in Christ Jesus, from one day to the next until He calls us home. It won't all make sense, for sure, but we can have the confidence in Christ to say, as the Apostle Paul said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, **"The just shall live by faith."** (**Romans 1:16-17**) From faith to faith. Our living by faith in Christ includes our living in our faith in Christ, which leads us to the understanding, and the wisdom that comes from God to live our lives according to His great commandment to **"love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength."** This is the first commandment. And the second, like

it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:30-31)

God, our Creator, has given us this life, revealed His will and purpose for us, and tells us to put our faith in Christ Jesus, from when we first believe on Him, to when He takes us home to live forever in His eternal kingdom which means that in the meantime we are to love God with all that is in us and to love others as He loves them, as He desires for none to perish. "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9) The wisdom that comes from God reveals to us that "God" intends to be our God, as HE alone IS God. He also intends to be our Lord, for HE IS Sovereign over all of His creation, and our Savior, as Jesus died on a cross for our sins against God. HE IS then to also be our Heavenly Father as we are reconciled to Him by the forgiveness of our sins against Him through the redemptive work of Christ Jesus. He then wants us to be of the same spirit and purpose in living in our faith by loving God and loving one another. THAT IS THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST!

Speaking of love, as God is love (1 John 4:8), the context to what Paul was getting at, in mentioning the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5, he was making a comparison, or really a contrast, in the differences between the fruit of the Spirit (which is the expression of the character of God) and the works of the flesh. Paul tells us, "Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that **those who practice such things** will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, **let us also walk in the Spirit**. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another." (Galatians 5:19-26) The carnal mind can find much happiness in the works of the flesh, yet the Spirit gives us the joy of the Lord, if we choose joy!

Sound familiar, walking in the Spirit? "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:8-10) That is where it can be said, God is not just saving us so that we can eventually prance around in the fields of glory and swim in the crystal sea in heaven. We are reconciled back to a right relationship

with God through Christ Jesus, as He died on a cross for our sins, taking our sins upon Himself, and raising from the dead on the third day, conquering death and evil, making a way for us too to overcome the sting of death and to have an eternal life in Christ Jesus-which begins when we believe on Christ Jesus and receive Him. "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." (**John 1:12-13**)

Getting back to the fruit of the Spirit , in contrast to the works of the flesh, Paul, of course, was not saying that anyone who commits any of those sins will not inherit eternal life. Who then could be saved? "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the **sins that were previously committed**, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." (**Romans 3:23-26**) As we are led by the Holy Spirit to believe on Christ and then to receive Him, that is, the Holy Spirit, we then are then born-again as Jesus spoke of in **John 3**, and then we become a new creation in Christ. The Apostle Peter made the contrast between the just and the unjust (meaning those who are justified and righteous to have fellowship and a standing with God and in His eternal kingdom), saying, "They stumble, **being disobedient to the word**, to which they also were appointed. But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy." (**1 Peter 2:8-10**) Being disobedient to the Word, as Peter put it, seems to comply with what Jesus said, "**For many are called, but few are chosen.**" (**Matthew 22:14**)

As the Apostle Paul said, it is pretty apparent to those around you as to whether you're living according to the flesh or the Holy Spirit, also referred to as the Spirit of Christ, by the Apostle Peter, in speaking of the prophets of old having the Spirit of Christ (**1 Peter 1:10-12**) and the Apostle Paul when he said, "So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, **but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.**" (**Romans 8:8-10**) That is one of the four key elements that Christ Jesus works in us through the Holy Spirit, as Paul mentioned in **1 Corinthians 1:30**. Those four things that are critical, not only for our salvation, but for our continuing

to live according to the working of the Spirit, to BE LIKE CHRIST. Those four are WISDOM, RIGHTEOUSNESS, SANCTIFICATION, AND REDEMPTION. By the revelation that comes from the Holy Spirit, He gives us wisdom to accept the free gift of God, His Righteousness in Christ Jesus, and to then live in His Righteousness (to abide in Christ as the Apostle John records Jesus as saying in **John 15**), to live in His Righteousness and to have fellowship with God, and He then sets us apart to live in His Holiness (that is Sanctification), and we begin our new lives in our Redemption that is in Christ Jesus!

As Paul starts off **Galatians 5**, prior to his contrasting the works of the flesh vs. the fruit of the Spirit, he says, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage." That freedom that we find in Christ Jesus is not the freedom that is spoken of in the world. It is the freedom to live IN His Righteousness and not to be a slave to sin.

The Truth Shall Make You Free

"Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, 'You will be made free'?" Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed." (**John 8:31-36**) The Wisdom from God is telling us be reconciled with God through Christ Jesus and to abide in His Word, as Jesus said, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

Jesus is our Wisdom and He is our joy of the Lord. Eternally blessed are those who find Him and abide in Him. Amen.