

Giving: Proof of Your Love

By Thomas Baxley

Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord, begging us with much entreaty for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God. Consequently we urged Titus that as he had previously made a beginning, so he would also complete in you this gracious work as well. But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also. I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich. ... Therefore openly before the churches show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you. (2 Corinthians 8:1-9, 24)

Christian Joy

By Louis Rushmore

Mankind often seeks joys, pleasures, gratification, happiness and even thrills. It is not wrong to enjoy life on earth. Pleasure becomes sinful, though, when the activity from which one derives joy is itself sinful (e.g., adultery, alcohol) or when a right activity is abused (e.g., eating, sleeping). Something not itself sinful can also become sinful if family, employment or Christian responsibilities are neglected to seek pleasure (e.g., recreation, hobbies).

The ways in which Christians may find joy in life are nearly as numerous as people themselves; I find great joy in my family and I also enjoy writing, computers, model railroading and woodworking. However, besides the earthly joys Christians (or other people, too) may know, there are joys that only Christians can experience (Romans 14:17-18). The Book of Philippians is an epistle peppered with references to Christian joy (e.g., Philippians 2:16-18).

Among the joys enjoyed exclusively by Christians is the joy that arises from the forgiveness of sins. Following his baptism for the remission of his sins (Acts 2:38; 8:26-39), the Ethiopian noble continued on his way rejoicing (Acts 8:39). With the apostle Paul and the Philippian church to which he wrote, we, as well as all other Christians, can "rejoice in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:3) because through Jesus our sins have been taken away (Acts 22:16). Further, through the blood of Jesus our sins are continually forgiven (conditional upon our continued espousal of God's Word) (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:7-9; 2:1).

This joy alone should pervade our every waking moment and offset a mountain of both this life's woes and mundane affairs.

Another joy experienced by Christians alone is fellowship with God and fellow Christians. The apostle John penned, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). All men are called into this fellowship by the Gospel (1 Corinthians 1:9); unfortunately, many do not hearken to that call. The call is an unending call into the fellowship of Christ and other Christians that must ever be answered by 'walking in the light' (1 John 1:7). The lack of fellowship with God is one of the horrid characteristics of eternal hell (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). All troubles and even earthly joys pale in view of fellowship with God and his children.

The avenue of prayer to God is also a joy that belongs exclusively to Christians. Sinners do not have the privilege of conversing with God through prayer (John 9:31); "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination" (Proverbs 28:9). The law by which Christians are bound today is the "perfect law of liberty," James 1:25 -- the Gospel. God does, though, hear "the prayer of the righteous" (Proverbs 15:29; 1 John 5:14) and he responds to such prayer (James 5:16; 1 John 3:22). What immeasurable joy it is to realize that we may always, anywhere talk to God.

The chief possible joy, again available only to the faithful children of God, will be eternal life in heaven in the very presence of God himself. At the Great Final Judgment, we long to hear addressed to us the words: "enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matthew 25:21, 23). Jesus described this joy as "mansions" in heaven (John 14:1-3), whereas Paul, James and John spoke of the commencement of this supernal joy as a "crown of life" (2 Timothy 4:7-8; James 1:12; Revelation 2:10). Certainly this is incomparable joy unending!

Present and future joys reserved for Christians alone far outweigh sufferings in this life (Romans 8:18), "the pleasures of sin for a season" (Heb. 11:25) and even the temporal joys one may experience on earth. Christian joy has a solid basis, is enduring and is sufficient to carry us through earthly habitations to celestial shores. Christian joy, oh how precious!