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Practical Faith, Part 5

A frequently misunderstood verse is 1 Timothy 4:7-8.

1 Timothy 4:7b-8, "On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and *also* for the *life* to come."

We read a verse like this and think that the distinction being made here is between physical

fitness (jogging, training, exercising, etc.) and godliness, "...discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; for bodily discipline is only of little profit."

Now, while we would affirm hands down that the "discipline of godliness" is more important than physical fitness, yet that is NOT the focus of this text OR the contrast being made here. Based on the context (v. 3 speaks of the ascetic practices of "forbidding marriage" and "abstaining from food" as a vehicle of honoring God), the contrast is between (1) *Religious asceticism* as the basis of true spirituality and (2) *Godliness*!

Paul says that "godliness" — living in reliance upon Christ in and through all things in the fear and love of the Lord — "is profitable for all things." Because it "holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come." In this regard, I have a question. Because godliness "holds promise for the life to come" is obvious (most of us would expect that) how is it that godliness "holds promise for the present life"?

In just a few short years following the writing of 1 Timothy Paul would say, "And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12)! That most certainly is NOT very promising! So what promise does godliness give? What temporal benefits come from godliness?

The answer to that question is addressed in 1 Peter 1:6-9. Peter's final point in this seminar on "practical" faith is the temporal results that come from living in reliance upon Christ in the midst of trial and difficulty. We have seen that love for God is the first temporal result. As Christians we should trust God in the present and have a faith nourished by the person, work, and plan of the Lord! And we must continue to make the conscious choice to serve the Lord and so give ourselves to Christ regardless of what the world might say! That is Biblical Love.

Where's the passion? Where's the feeling in this Biblical love? The "love" referenced here — ἀγάπη (*agapē*) love — is NOT first an emotion. It may and, in fact, most often will impact the emotions. But think of it: When Christ died on the cross on account of His love for the world, He most certainly was NOT experiencing a warm feeling in His heart or goose-bum Psalms

And so it was amongst the people of God at the writing of this epistle. Did they have a warm, fuzzy feeling toward God when they were being tortured? We cannot know. But from this passage we do know that they did NOT shrink back from serving the Lord (that was evidence of their love, cf. John 14:15). Like Joshua, they made the choice to serve the Lord (cf. Joshua 24:15) regardless of their external circumstances!

That is what Biblical love for God is all about! And that is the first temporal result of practical faith. Notice that the second temporal result of a practical faith is a life filled with Joy.

1 Peter 1:8b, "And though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory." - we have here a repetition of Peter's thought flow in vv. 6a & 7a, except

backwards. Recall, as ones “rejoicing” in God’s future plans (v. 6a), we “believe” (v. 7a). Here it is reversed: “...but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice...”

The word used for “rejoice” in v. 8 once again is ἀγαλλιάω (*agalliaō*) which, as we have seen, first and foremost is an activity of delighting in WHO God is and WHAT He has and is going to do! It is making much of God — who He is and what He’s done! Now when we do this, what happens? The result is “joy” which is then modified by two expressions, “...inexpressible... full of glory.”

Joy is defined this way, (χαρά [*chara*]): like love, “joy” is NOT an emotion (though again, it can have a massive impact on our emotion). Joy is the deep-seeded conviction that it is well with your soul when it comes to God.

Horatio Spafford after losing his four daughters when the ship on which they were travelling sank responding with those well-known words:

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
when sorrows like sea billows roll;
whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
‘It is well, it is well with my soul.’ (Great
Commision Publications 1990, Hymn 691)

Practically speaking, I can think of no better example of what the Bible means by “joy” than this. Biblical joy is the conviction that if you were to stand before God this moment, you know it would be well with your soul on account of Christ! If this is your conviction, then you have Biblical joy regardless of how you may feel! Now if you think this is insignificant, you have forgotten what Nehemiah told the people of God who were suffering severe regret on account of the exile and the destruction of the temple.

Nehemiah 8:10b, “Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

Think on this for a bit! What strength does a person have knowing that a Being, before whom the universe is but a speck, is well-pleased with them? That individual would be impervious to wind and waves of this life! For after everything has been said and done, Regardless of the physical state in which they enter into glory — whether it be by the hair of their chinny-chin-chin or as if soaring on eagle’s wings— it is well with his soul! A. W. Tozer put it this way:

The man who comes to a right belief about God is relieved of ten thousand temporal problems, for he sees at once that these have to do with matters which at the most cannot concern him for very long [That, family of God, is Biblical Joy! To understand this, Tozer continued...]; but even if the multiple burdens of time may be lifted from him, the one mighty single burden of eternity begins to press down upon him with a weight more crushing than all the woes of the world piled one upon another. That mighty burden is his obligation to God. It includes an instant and lifelong duty to love God with every power of mind and soul, to obey Him perfectly, and to worship Him acceptably. And when the man's laboring conscience tells him that he has done none of these things, but

has from childhood been guilty of foul revolt against the Majesty in the heavens, the inner pressure of self-accusation may become too heavy to bear. ¶ The gospel can lift this destroying burden from the mind... (Holy 1920, 10-11)

And when it does, the result is Biblical joy! In this regard, Biblical joy truly is inexpressible: (ἀνεκλάλητος (*aneklalētos*); this references something so profound, so deep that it is unable to be fully expressed (the root is ἐκλαλέω [*eklaleō*] which means “to speak out”). Here it is in the negative and so is translated as “higher than speech”!

In this regard, do you see how Biblical Joy is the believer’s strength? It transcends the difficulties and burdens of life. It has an eternal bent to it that “relativizes” everything in this passing world! And so, it was in the life of Christ. How is it that Christ went to the cross and there offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sin? Listen to the answer.

Hebrews 12:2b, “...who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

It is the joy of the Lord that enabled Christ to offer Himself as a sacrifice for the sinner! It was knowing that, “...the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God, and was going back to God” (John 13:3)! With this conviction, Jesus went to the cross... saints of old went to martyrdom... and God’s people rejoiced in the midst of suffering! Listen to the dying words of Paul.

2 Timothy 4:6-8a, “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day...”

Though Paul doesn’t use the word “joy” here, we nevertheless are reading the expression of it. Paul most certainly could lay his head down in peace, knowing that it was the Lord who held his life in His hands (cf. Psalms 4:8)!

It is this knowledge which defies the pain and miseries of this life and so enables each and every one in Christ to be “more than conquerors” (Romans 8:37)!

That is what “joy inexpressible” is all about! In this regard, consider ways and doings of Biblical joy.

Joy Distinguished

Joy [that is] full of glory: χαρᾶ... δεδοξασμένη (*chara dedoxasmenē*) is an interesting statement that has at least three implications. First, a “Joy Full of Glory” is a weighty joy and so a steadfast joy.

Behind the expression, “full of glory” lies one word, δεδοξασμένη (*dedoxasmenē*). You will recognize the root, δοξάζω (*doxazō*) which is the New Testament equivalent of the Old Testament כָּבֵד (*kabad*) which references weight, substance, glory.

The joy experienced by the Christian trusting Christ is indeed “weighty”! It is like the rocky coast against which the waves crash and yet cannot move! That is the Joy we have in Christ! It is “steadfast and immovable”! And how is that? Because our joy is the fruit of a faith whose object is NOT subject to decay, change, degradation, or death! As such, the joy we have in Christ is weighty/immovable/steadfast/impervious to the things of this life!

Hebrews 11:6, “And without faith it is impossible to please *Him* [and here we get a cross-section of the working of faith], for he who comes to God must believe that He is [This we have already seen; faith is fueled as we live in light of the Person, work, and will of our Lord. Notice the second half...], and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.”

We just read about this in the life of Paul. It was this conviction with which he faced his impending doom! On account of God’s grace, he had the confidence that God NOT only was “a rewarder of those who seek Him”, BUT in fact was/is the reward!

Christian don’t miss it! When Christ is all you want in life, the temporal result is a man/woman/child who is impervious to the things of this life! King David was a man who knew what it was like to be hated. When he was younger, his king sought his life. And when he became king, many an enemy worked toward his destruction including His children and close companions. Yet listen to that which buoyed him in his affliction.

Psalms 62:5-7, “My soul, wait in silence for God only, for my hope is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I shall not be shaken. [Once and again, this is the essence of Biblical joy!] On God my salvation and my glory *rest*; the rock of my strength, my refuge is in God.”

It was in light of this, that C. H. Spurgeon wrote this:

My best security is within the fortress of an unchanging Jehovah, where His unalterable promises stand like giant walls of rock. It will be well with you, my heart, if you can always hide yourself in the bulwarks of His glorious attributes, all of which are guarantees of safety for those who put their trust in Him... In Jesus the weak are strong, and the defenseless safe; they could not be more strong if they were giants or more safe if they were in heaven. Faith gives to men on earth the protection of the God of heaven. They cannot need any more and need not wish for more. (Spurgeon 1991, Evening Reading November 20)

Notice a second implication is that a joy full of glory is a responsive joy on account of the fellowship we have with Christ.

As the Old Testament is the backdrop for the “glory” of our joy, those receiving this epistle would naturally have thought of the worship ascribed to God in the Old Testament — specifically the Shekinah glory of the Lord which filled the temple when God’s people sought His face! At the culmination of the dedication of the Solomonic temple, we read this:

2 Chronicles 5:13b-14, “...then the house, the house of the Lord, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God.”

Accordingly, a “joy full of glory” is a joy that results from being in the presence of God! Wayne Grudem put it this way:

This word (*doxazō*) is the verb which corresponds to the noun ‘glory’ (*doxa*). These terms would quite naturally remind Peter’s readers of the frequent Old Testament mention of the glory of God, that bright shining radiance which surrounded the presence of God himself. The sense of this word *exalted* (a perfect passive participle) could be given more fully by paraphrasing, ‘joy that has been infused with heavenly glory and that still possesses the radiance of that glory’. It is thus joy that results from being in the presence of God himself, and joy that even now partakes of the character of heaven. It is the joy of heaven before heaven, experienced now in fellowship with the unseen Christ. (Grudem 2009, 71)

In this way, our joy is responsive — it flows from our fellowship with Christ.

- Think of Moses when once he left the presence of God, how his face shone (Exodus 34:29-30)!
- Think of Peter when in the presence of the Transfiguration of Christ how all he wanted to do was build a tent, essentially staying there as long as Christ allowed (Matthew 17:4)!
- Think of the Disciples on the Road to Emmaus when the glory of God humbly descended upon them as Christ joined them on their trek. How did they describe it?

Luke 24:30-33a, “And it came about that when He had reclined *at the table* with them, He took the bread and blessed *it*, and breaking *it*, He *began* giving *it* to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight. And they said to one another, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?’ [Family of God, this is ‘joy full of glory’- which I hope you see is NOT simply an emotion, BUT the heart’s response when in the presence of that for which we have been made! Because of this, these disciples had an unnatural boldness and so, though travelling the roads of Judah at night was treacherous, nevertheless we read...] And they arose that very hour and returned to Jerusalem...”

“Joy full of glory” is akin to the response of a baby lamb in the warmth of the sunlight... what

does it do? It skips for joy. So too, when the child of God beholds their Lord by faith, regardless of their earthly environment, their heart skips for joy as they bask in light of warmth of God's grace! Now, there is a third implication that accompanies the word "glory."

A "Joy full of glory" is an intrusive joy. Because "the joy of the Lord" is a weighty/heavy joy, it also penetrates into our heart/mind such that it impacts our entire being. The first temporal result of faith is "Love" which we saw is NOT first and foremost an emotion.

Does that mean, that we are to be automatons and so unfeeling drones in our relationship with God? Absolutely not! For herein every faculty of our person is impacted (and so it would be with "love" as well)!

The joy we have in Christ is "full of glory" and therefore penetrating deep within us. This is that facet of our creation in which we NOT only glorify God, BUT enjoy Him... and so delight ourselves in Him! David, speaking of the Joy of the Lord, wrote this:

Psalms 4:7, "Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than when their grain and new wine abound."

With God as his delight, David testified that normal living was likened to the festival of First Fruits. The joy and delight that God's people felt before the Lord on account of His abundance was that which David enjoyed on account of Christ. Speaking of himself, David later wrote this:

Psalms 21:6, "For Thou dost make him most blessed forever; Thou dost make him joyful [as] with gladness in Thy presence."

Early in his reign, when God was His strength and focus, David reaped the benefits. As he moved amongst God's people executing the call of a king, it was as if he was always standing in the presence of God in worship! It is as Korah discovered:

Psalms 84:5-6a, "How blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee; in whose heart are the highways *to Zion*! Passing through the valley of Baca [the valley of weeping], they make it a spring..."

How is sorrow and suffering made "a spring"? Because we know that the God of eternity is well-pleased with us and so is with us now and forevermore! With this, let me tell you of the story of Mr. Lo.¹

Mr. Lo spent his entire adult life serving the Lord with great vigor. Yet there was a back story you and I must know, As a young boy in China, a missionary came to his village and started a school. Here he learned English as well as the glorious message of Christ. After coming to a saving relationship with the Lord, one day Lo was reading the gospel of Matthew. When he got to the Great Commission, his entire life was changed. For when he read it, he thought

God had written to him *personally*.

Matthew 28:20b, “..and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

He took the word “lo” as if God was addressing this promise to him personally! Aglow with the joy of his newly-discovered partnership with God, he exclaimed, “Look, missionary, it says, ‘Lo, I am with you always!’”

Christian, that is the conviction we all must have when it comes to God’s promises and so His word. Trusting God accordingly, you will know the joy of the Lord which will penetrate your entire being and impel you in your service of the Lord! The second temporal result of practical faith is the joy of the Lord!

Now this amazing way of living — this supernatural living — is not beyond anyone of us! For it flows from simple, practical faith — relaying upon Christ in and through all things. But this is where it gets so difficult. For when given the choice to trust Christ or be intimidated by the things of this world, we generally opt for the latter. We are as Peter in Matthew 14 on the Sea of Galilee. When Christ came walking on the water in the middle of the night after His disciples had been fighting for their lives for over 9 hours! In the midst of their fear over the storm, they were confronted by the glory and greatness of Christ which made them even more afraid. Yet by grace Peter recognized the Lord and so he asked Christ to bid him come, which the Lord did. At first Peter walked on the stormy waves without problem. But then, what do we read?

Matthew 14:30-31, “But [Peter] seeing the wind, he became afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried out, saying, “Lord, save me! And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?’”

This so often is us! How we must pray and plead to Christ that the Lord might “help our unbelief” (Mark 9:24)! For truly this alone is that which hinders us from living in light of the “joy of the Lord”!

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End Note(s)

¹ Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc., 1996), p. 815.