

THE ABOUNDING JOY OF NEW TESTAMENT HOPE - Part eight

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THE FRUIT OF HOPE - JOY

Romans 12:10-13 - "Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. [11] Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. [12] *Rejoice in hope*, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. [13] Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality."

Today we launch into a new section of our study on Biblical hope. Having looked at the practical *importance* of hope (*how it fuels both faith and holiness*), then the *sources* of hope (*the grace of God, the body of Christ and the encouragement of the Scriptures*), and having studied some of the *objects* of our hope (*the second coming of Jesus, the redemption of the body at the resurrection, and the hope of righteousness in the age to come*), we're going to start looking at the *fruit of hope*. So the question will be: what does hope *produce* in our lives?

Picture a tree. The Scriptures are packed full of this particular image. See the roots growing down into the soil of the *sources* of hope. See the branches being the *objects* we are hoping for. What we're wondering right now is what *grows* on these branches? Does the hope in our hearts make any difference in the way we live? Does Biblical hope produce *fruit*? And if so, what is that fruit?

The New Testament answers the first question - does Biblical hope produce fruit? - with a resounding "**yes.**" We're going to look at **four** of the fruits of hope. They are **joy, love, boldness** and **endurance**. Each of these fruits is specifically, directly traced back to the root of hope.

Let me say the same thing in another way. Without hope, you will never possess joy, love, boldness or endurance **as graces of the Holy Spirit** in your life. There is a **kind** of joy you can have without Christ. Just as there is a love, or a boldness, or an endurance you can have without Christian hope.

All of these traits can be summoned **to a degree** by a strong will and sheer discipline. But they are not produced directly by the **Holy Spirit**. They are not **spiritual** graces, there is nothing **distinctly Christian** about them. They are merely human characteristics, residing in the human will. There is nothing **glorifying to God** in them.

The natural man can find a certain joy in material goods and good health. People can easily express love as long as they find themselves in a state of romance. People who don't know Jesus at all can endure hardship out of sheer toughness of will.

That's why when we study each of these four fruits of hope, I want to show each one in its distinctly **Christian** light. We're looking at spiritual fruit that stems from the **promise of God's Word**. They are **enlivened by the power of the Holy Spirit**. They have the **glory of God** as their ultimate goal.

The phrase we are going to examine in detail is found in **verse 12** of the text I read: "**Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.**" One translation says, "**Let your joy be the joy that comes from hope!**" That makes it very clear that we're talking about a specific **kind** of joy.

Now, most of us know how this great twelfth chapter of Romans reads. We've been studying it in close detail on Sunday nights. The whole chapter is an expansion of the two themes nailed down in the first two verses. It's a chapter about **worshipping God with renewed minds and obedient bodies**. And it's a chapter about **constantly pressing back the encroaching penetration of the world and its ways in my life**. That's what Romans twelve is all about.

The verses following one and two simply amplify and give the details of how those two themes are to be worked out day to day. And there are quite a few points to remember and develop. None of them is particularly easy for us to do. That's why, right in the middle of all those instruction verses, Paul includes this little gem of **verse 12** - "**Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.**"

Romans twelve gives us much to do. It requires diligence and perseverance. I think Paul knows we will never make it without learning to "**rejoice in hope**"(12:12). Joy is the fuel that leads to endurance. True joy keeps us on our knees depending on God - notice - "**Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer**"(12). It keeps us looking toward heaven because joy is **constantly rooted in the hope we have set before us**.

So today we're going to look at the **fruit** of hope as **joy**. I want to ask, and hopefully answer, these four questions concerning joy: **What exactly is Christian joy? What is unique about this joy? How can the Scriptures command this kind of joy?** And then finally, **how can we obey this command?**

- 1) **WHAT IS CHRISTIAN JOY?** - ***“Christian joy is an overwhelming delight in the grace and presence of God through Christ, that keeps looking forward to its final fulfillment when Jesus comes again, and faith becomes sight.”***

This seems to be the pattern of joy throughout the New Testament: **1 Peter 1:3-9** - ***“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope [Remember, this is a series about hope] through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, [4] to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, [5] who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. [6] In this you rejoice, [The “this” is the *hope* in verse 3] though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, [7] so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. [8] Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy [We're talking today about *joy* as the fruit of *hope*] that is inexpressible and filled with glory, [9] obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.***

So here we see Peter describing that same process Paul talked about in our Romans text. Paul talks about ***“rejoicing in hope”*** (Romans 12:12) or, ***“having the joy that comes from hope.”*** And then Peter talks about joy that is ***“inexpressible and filled with glory”*** (1 Peter 1:8). That's what this joy that comes from hope is like. Clearly, it is not some **doctrinal** understanding. It isn't just **cold** knowledge. And this joy that comes from hope isn't just a decision to **tough it out** or **keep my chin up** until Jesus comes again.

No way. Notice those words - ***“joy inexpressible and filled with glory.”*** Those last three words are important. When Peter says this joy is **filled with glory** we might think he just means that it makes him really, really happy. And it should!

But Peter isn't using the word ***“glory”*** to describe the **degree** of joy so much as the **nature** or **kind** of joy he has in mind. When you read those verses in 1 Peter you realize that this joy is **filled with glory** in the sense that ***the object of the joy is a glorious object rather than merely an earthly object.***

This joy is full of glory - **stuffed** with glory, like stuffing in a turkey - because the joy is **rooted in a glorious hope in a glorious God**. That's where the glory of this joy comes from. It's all about the glory that we **have experienced** and the glory we will **still experience** in fuller and deeper ways in the future. In other words, what makes this joy glorious is ***it's rooted in a glorious future with God.*** Which is just another way of saying this is a **glorious** joy because it is a joy rooted in a **glorious hope**. ***This joy is the fruit of a glorious hope.*** So the same glorious genes are in the **joy** that are in the **hope**.

The first chapter of 1 Peter is the place where Peter ties joy most tightly to **hope**. Joy is seen repeatedly as the **fruit** of hope over and over:

1 Peter 1:3 - ***“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead....”***
This is where my hope for eternal life comes from. This is my hope for my resurrection and eternal life with Him.

1 Peter 1:4 - ***“....to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you....”***This gives me **confidence** that this joy is a **certain** joy. It's not going to evaporate or disappear. This is nothing like your stocks or mutual funds. Pitiful sources of joy, those are. This is a **reliable** joy, which makes it a **deeper** joy.

1 Peter 1:5 - ***“....who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”*** Whatever joy I experience **now** in knowing Jesus, it is small in comparison to the fully fleshed out wonder of the salvation still to be provided by the power of Almighty God.

1 Peter 1:7 - ***“....so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”***

No wonder Paul says, ***“Rejoice with the joy that comes from hope (Romans 12:12)”*** Here is a very plain, sometimes hard to digest truth for an age and a people who just look to Christ for comfort, bliss, and freedom from trial or pain in life. The Scriptures take us in a different direction entirely. God’s Word says “Don’t anchor your boat to ***earthly*** joy! It’s too fleeting and transitory. You need ***hope*** in your ***joy***, and this world and the things in the world can’t give you any hope. So set your affections on things above. Rejoice with the joy ***that comes from a certain, glorious hope!***”

I said we were going to look at the ***distinctively Christian grace of joy***. We’re going to analyse what makes Christian joy unique and transcending. ***This is the only joy that brings glory to God***. All human beings rejoice in good health. All human beings rejoice in material prosperity. Everyone rejoices in a happy home and good marriage.

There is absolutely nothing distinctly God glorifying in those joys. Everyone shares in them. Which leads us directly into our second question:

2) **WHAT IS UNIQUE ABOUT CHRISTIAN JOY?** - ***“It is a joy that is undiminished by the changing trials and circumstances of life in this fallen world”***

This too is an unavoidable definition of joy in the Scriptures, and it just makes sense. Because Christian joy is anchored and focussed on the world to come, it transcends the fluctuations of this world in which we live. And here too, the Scriptures give resounding testimony:

Romans 5:3 - ***“More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance....”***

1 Thessalonians 1:6 - ***“And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit....”***

2 Corinthians 8:2 - ***“....for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.”***

2 Corinthians 6:10 - ***“....as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.”***

So we learn an important truth from these verses. It’s not that Christians don’t experience sorrow - sometimes, even deep sorrow. But there is still this unique feature about Christian joy. ***Because it has its roots in hope, it can live in sorrow like a fish can live under water***. Sorrow is real but it doesn’t ***destroy*** Christian joy.

In fact, ***because Christian joy is rooted in hope, the sorrows that strip away earthly sources of happiness only serve to strengthen the longing and hope for eternity***. Behold, Christian joy grows ***deeper*** - more preciously ***hopeful*** - in times of sorrow. That’s what makes it so unique.

This is exactly what Jesus taught in **Matthew 5:10-12** - ***“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. [11] “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. [12] Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”***

3) **HOW CAN THE SCRIPTURES COMMAND THIS KIND OF JOY?**

There’s no question that the Scriptures ***do*** command joy in our lives:

Matthew 5:12 - ***“Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”***

1 Thessalonians 5:16 - ***“Rejoice always....”***

Philippians 4:4 - ***“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.”***

1 Peter 4:13 - ***“But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.”***

Now surely those verses pose an obvious question. How can ***joy*** be ***commanded***? How can God command something that only He, by His Spirit, can do in my heart? Does this make sense?

When I was a kid my mom would sometimes make things for dinner that the four Horban boys didn't fully appreciate. And my dad always kept loyalty with mom. More than once he'd see me grimacing at the appearance of broccoli on my plate. My father didn't have time for the **"You're just going to sit here at the table until you finish that,"** speech. And there were never any **"One, two three"** counts. He'd take my arm, look me square in the eye, and say in a quiet but unmistakable tone, **"You're going to eat this. And you're going to enjoy it!"**

Is that what God is doing when He tells us - **commands** us - to rejoice? Or is there something deeper and more loving going on in those verses we read together?

Yes, God **commands** joy. But He commands it in just the same way He commands us to receive a new heart and be born again:

Ezekiel 18:30-32 - "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord God. **Repent and turn from all your transgressions** [Command], lest iniquity be your ruin. [31] **Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed,** [Command] and **make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit!** [Command] Why will you die, O house of Israel? [32] For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God; **so turn, and live.**"

Or, **John 3:7** - "Do not marvel that I said to you, **'You must be born again.'**"

How can God command something only **He** can perform? It's really quite simple. Because of God's great love and grace and faithfulness, He knows that the **only thing standing between His command for joy and my reception of that joy is a wayward, stubborn heart.** He knows that there is full provision made for all of us to be partakers of His joy because of His grace. But, like in the reception of salvation, **there must be the turning from self-will, self-fulfillment, self-satisfaction, and self rule.**

Only **God** can make this change. In other words, **I can't make the wind blow, but, by His prevenient grace, I can put the sail up.** I can make room in my life for the Holy Spirit. I can renounce idols. I can study to set my affections on things above. I can pray and learn to seek the true glory and delight of God Himself.

Actually, we used to sing about this all the time: **"Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace."**

4) **HOW SHOULD WE OBEY THE COMMAND TO REJOICE?**

Let me wrap this up quickly:

- a) ***Intentionally renounce the things of this world. Tell yourself*** that there is no permanent joy to be found in trinkets. ***Remind yourself*** that the world and its lusts are passing away.
- b) ***Build your life around service to God and His Kingdom.*** You can't just ***tell*** yourself God is important. ***Train*** your whole being to make the kingdom important by Christian service. Don't get so busy that the things of God get squeezed out of your life. Delete other things first.
- c) ***Spend enough time with God each day that the impact of eternity holds your affections more engaged than the attractions of temporal living.***

Romans 12:12 - "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, **be constant in prayer.**"

You can't rejoice in hope by **sheer will-power.** Joy is given by the Holy Spirit. That's why Paul links together, "rejoicing in hope" with "constant in prayer."