**Happiness – Gladness**

We conclude our three-part study of happiness where many begin: the pursuit of happiness through fun and games. There are some among us who have no real sense of joy, contentment and peace of mind, and so they try to fill their lives with partying, games, social media and entertainment. The euphoria of pleasure makes them feel “happy” for a while, but when the party is over and the music has died, they are left with the empty realization that these trivial pursuits bring them no real and lasting joy.

To make things worse, their futile search may lead them into self-destructive behavior: alcohol and drug abuse, irresponsible sexual activity, porn addiction, gambling addiction, just to name a few. The irony of the unrestrained pursuit of pleasure is that it boasts the liberty of doing whatever you want, while the end result is slavery to addiction, poverty, destroyed families, homelessness, ruined health and even premature death. The person who throws self-discipline to the wind in their search for happiness will, instead, find themselves enduring the most miserable existence imaginable.

According to the teachings of Scripture, fun is not a four-letter word. Throughout human history, good people have gathered to enjoy one another’s company and there was nearly always food and music involved (Job 1:4; Genesis 31:27; Genesis 21:8). The New Testament describes celebrations of weddings, of homecomings and other joyous occasions (John 2:1-2; Luke 15). Merriment has a place in the life of the Christian today, but there are two important principles to keep in mind.

**Living right, God’s way.**  Moses told the Israelites that the commands of God are for our good always (Deuteronomy 6:24). Paul contrasted God’s way with worldliness in Galatians 5 and the differences are remarkable. The life directed by divine precept is characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (vs. 22-23) and these values will be reflected in our recreational activities as well. Folks involved in immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outburst of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness and carousing are rebelling against God’s will and there will be consequences. Not only do they separate themselves from their Creator, they bring upon themselves untold misery in this life. Our leisure activities should enhance our joy, not detract from it.

**All about priorities.** The person who thinks happiness is all about fun and games is destined to profound disappointment. The whole of man is to fear God and keep His commandments (Ecclesiastes 12:13). True and lasting happiness is based on the contentment and peace of mind that comes from complete trust in God and gratitude for His providence. Joy can be found in family, friends and accomplishment, but the joy derived from the spiritual blessings in Christ is a joy that can never be taken away. With this solid foundation of contentment and joy, the child of God enjoys wholesome fun with friends and family while constantly remembering the words of Jesus: “Seek first God’s kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” This is the only joy that depends on my relationship with God, not on the circumstances of my life.

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