

You can have a



*Happy
Life!*

E. C. Hadley

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Grace & Truth, Inc.

210 Chestnut St., Danville, IL 61832 USA

or • P.O. Box 4902, Kaduna Junction P.O., Kaduna, Nigeria
gtpress@gtpress.org / www.gtpress.org

“These things I have spoken to you,
that My joy may remain in you,
and that your joy may be full.”

John 15:11

Why are so many Christians restless, worried and unhappy, even though the verse above tells us clearly that this is not what God intends for His children? In this booklet, we hope to address this question to discover God’s remedy so that we might be able to say with Paul, “I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content” (Phil. 4:11).

BURDEN OF GUILT

One of the basic causes of unhappiness is a sense of guilt that burdens the conscience and robs the soul of peace. Before we can have true happiness there must be peace with God.

If there are any doubts about our peace with God, there can be no settled peace in the soul. If we are to succeed in finding peace, and the happiness that results from it, we must begin with this question of guilt and how it can be removed.

Guilt destroys happiness and peace. It breaks down self-esteem and robs us of self-confidence. How can we trust ourselves when we know that we have done many wrong things? We may try to run away from our conscience by pursuing earthly pleasure, or we may attempt to quiet its voice by reasoning that times have changed, and that now “everybody does it.”

Still, there is that uneasy feeling that something is not right. We instinctively know that God has not changed and that sin never ceases to be sin. No matter how much we try to repress the guilty feeling, it is still there—making us restless, uneasy and fearful.

Coupled with a sense of guilt is a consciousness that we deserve to be punished. This increases our fear. God, who knows all about this, has said: "Be sure your sin will find you out" (Num. 32:23). We cannot have peace and true happiness until the question of our guilt is settled in a way that is just.

Our God-implanted conscience, part of the moral nature of man, makes us feel guilty when we have done something wrong. It also makes us realize that we deserve punishment. Some try to ease their guilt by joining a church and getting involved in religious activities, but they know deep down that this will never bring peace.

DEALING WITH GUILT

Guilt produces a fear of God whom we know we have offended, and a fear of the punishment we instinctively know we deserve. There is only one way to lift this depressing sense of guilt and fear. It is through justification by faith in the redemptive work of Christ on the cross. In the epistle to the Romans, Paul deals directly with the question of our guilt and God's answer to it. There we read that all the world is guilty, but God provides the means for our justification: "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 ... that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:23-24,26).

In that same epistle, we also read of the results of that justification: "Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ ... And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation" (Rom. 5:1,11). God's way not only lifts the depressing load of guilt but also gives us a consciousness of God's love that produces joy.

The guilt that once made us tremble at the thought of judgment now becomes the means by which we measure the love of God, who did not spare His own Son but delivered Him up for us. The memory of our guilt, becomes a wellspring of thanksgiving to God who redeemed us and justified us.

How can a guilty soul have peace with a holy God? The only answer is through the blood of the cross: "Without shedding of blood there is no remission" for sin (Heb. 9:22). On the cross, Christ was made an offering for all our sins, and He bore the punishment due our sins (Isa. 53:4-6,10). This suffering and death of Christ are the only grounds upon which a righteous God and a guilty creature can be at peace.

SEEKING PEACE

Once a sinner acknowledges his sin, his first concern is how to obtain peace with God. But the great question is not, "How can a sinner make peace with his God?" It is, "How can a holy, sin-hating God make peace with this sinner?" God accomplished this by giving His Son as the sacrifice for sin: "Having made peace through the blood of His cross" (Col. 1:20). It is not by any effort of the sinner that peace is made; God has already made peace through the blood of the cross.

Peace with God does not depend upon our feelings. We may deceive ourselves into believing we will come out all right in the end. But such false peace is the fruit of unbelief, for God plainly states, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). The only way to true peace is repentance; the Bible says, "Unless you repent you will ... perish" (Lk. 13:5).

The first step to true peace then is to accept this fact. The next step is to believe God's evaluation of the sacrifice of Christ: "Who ... when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1:3). Peace is an accomplished fact; and God is so satisfied with that sacrifice for our sins that He has placed His Son at the right hand of His own throne in glory to prove it.

God always sees the believer as clothed in all the merits of that sacrifice, which washed away all his sins once for all and obtained eternal redemption for him (Heb. 9:12). Therefore, God's attitude of peace towards the believer is unchanging because the sacrifice upon which it is based is perfect. However, the measure to which the believer enjoys it may vary greatly. If we get self-occupied we may lose the sense of

it. We can only enjoy it as we rest in full assurance of faith in the sacrifice of Christ.

We may know that God is at peace with us through Christ and still not have a sense of the peace of God ruling in our hearts. Sin may bring us under the chastening hand of God. In chastening, He is only seeking to deliver us from those things which are robbing our souls of the enjoyment of His peace. (See Heb. 12:5-11.) He chastens in love, not counting us as enemies, but always as His well-beloved children.

OBEDIENCE NEEDED

The conscience enlightened by the Word of God demands obedience to God who loves us and has redeemed us. If we do those things which displease Him, or if we leave undone things He wants us to do, our conscience accuses us and inward conflict results. We have no peace because we cannot quiet the voice of our conscience.

Besides the conscience, every believer in Christ also has the Spirit of God abiding in him. (See Rom. 8:9,15; Eph. 1:13; Gal. 4:6; 1 Cor. 6:19.) One activity of the Spirit of God is to bring to our hearts the love of God, and to show the things of Christ to us (Rom. 5:5; Jn. 16:14). Both give joy and peace to the soul, but "the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another" (Gal. 5:17). The constant effort of the Spirit of God is to oppose the flesh and prompt us to do the will of God in obedience to the Word of God.

If we yield to the flesh we throw ourselves into conflict not only with our conscience, but also with the Spirit. On the other hand, if we yield to the Holy Spirit and to our conscience, He gives us the strength to do the will of God. And what happens then? Instead of inward conflict, we are in harmony with God, His Word, and His Spirit; and consequently we enjoy a deeper sense of His love and a fuller measure of His joy and peace.

When we walk in obedience to God's revealed will, we enjoy His love shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (1 Jn. 4:9; Rom. 5:5-8). Then we can say, "If God is for us, who

can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31). Trouble may be all around, but we will not fear because Psalm 4:8 tells us: "I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; for You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety."

If we are disobedient, the peace of His presence will be lost and our conscience will accuse us while the Holy Spirit convicts us. When the Word of God is neglected, the soul does not enjoy peace. The power of God, which gave the heart confidence while walking with Him, will now work to humble us.

We will meet with disappointment. Plans will be overthrown. Things we thought would be sweet to the taste become bitter. He uses circumstances to make us taste the bitterness of disobedience and to break down self-will. His chastening hand is felt.

GOD WORKING

How graciously God works to bring us to our senses! Waywardness not only dishonors Him but also robs us of joy and peace. If God allowed us to continue in the path of disobedience, we would eventually have to reap the consequences. But in love, He lets us feel His chastening hand and uses circumstances to break down our rebellion to His will. Proverbs 3:11-12 tells us: "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."

A loving Father may have to chasten His child for his own good. The child may doubt the motives of the Father, but the child's inability to discern the Father's purpose does not change the Father's love or methods. If the child had more confidence in his Father, he would believe Him—even though unable to understand. This makes it easier to yield to the Father's will and obtain peace as well. Confidence in God is necessary to enjoy peace.

The Holy Spirit speaks to our heart and conscience, through chastening and the Word, to bring us to confess waywardness and turn again to the paths of righteousness: "Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful;

nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Heb. 12:11). Humbled “under the mighty hand of God” (1 Pet. 5:6), the soul is once more able to walk in the path of righteousness and reap its peaceable fruits.

If we learn the lesson of God’s chastening, we acquire peace. If we keep His commandments, we gain even more, because “in keeping them there is great reward” (Ps. 19:11). “Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with the whole heart! ... Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble” (Ps. 119:2,165).

PEACE OF MIND

“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (Jn. 16:33). When we read the account of the mock trial of our Lord, one thing really strikes us—Him standing peacefully in the midst of that mocking, hypocritical mob. How could He do it? He gives us His secret in John 16:32: “I am not alone, because the Father is with me.”

He was in perfect submission to His Father’s will, whatever the cost. He was with His Father throughout the ordeal, and so His peace was never interrupted. His Father’s plan was perfect and His faith looked on to the glorious results of that wonderful plan: “For the joy that was set before Him (He) endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2).

Now He has overcome the world and sat down in the glory. All power in heaven and earth is given into His pierced hand. What peace for our hearts and minds! He has a perfect plan for each one of His own. Let us trust Him then, knowing that His will is best. When we walk with Him, there is blessing and peace in our future: “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Heb. 13:5).

Why do we complain about our circumstances when His pierced hands are guiding us and His infinite wisdom has

planned the future for us? Either we don't trust Him or we don't want to go the way He is taking us. Our deceitful heart manifests itself by not trusting Him who died for us and into whose pierced hands all power in heaven and earth has been given.

For our own good, we must surrender to Him. The Potter is forming a useful vessel. Should the clay rebel when it feels the pressure of His fingers as He molds, turns and shapes it on the spinning wheel?

Trust in Him: "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace" (Jn. 16:33). Our circumstances may not change, our sorrows may not be removed; but if Christ is brought into our grief, we will be able to say with the psalmist: "You shall preserve me from trouble; You shall surround me with songs of deliverance" (Ps. 32:7).

His wisdom cannot err. His power cannot fail. His love can never change. Even His direct dealing with us is for our deepest spiritual gain. Knowing this should lead us to say in the midst of sorrow, pain, and loss: "The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21).

ABOUT OUR FEARS

One of the greatest hindrances to peace and security is fear—of sickness, accidents, death, job loss, financial trouble and so on. How can we have inner peace in a world full of injustice, conflict and uncertainty, where life is one long struggle for existence?

Job confessed that even in his great prosperity he was harassed by fears: "The thing I greatly feared has come upon me, and what I dreaded has happened to me. I am not at ease, nor am I quiet; I have no rest, for trouble comes" (Job 3:25-26).

If we had a father who was very wise, had inexhaustible resources, and would do anything for our good, wouldn't that calm our fears and give us a sense of security? As a child of God we have all this in our heavenly Father.

If He invites us to cast all our cares upon Him, because He cares for us (1 Pet. 5:7), why then can't we turn our fears over

to Him? Is it because we are afraid He will let us down? Is it because we are not willing to submit our wills to Him? Are we letting the devil get the best of us by making us feel we would be the losers if we completely surrendered our lives to Him?

We cannot leave God out of our lives and have freedom from fear. In the deep recesses of our souls we know that God exists and has almighty power. If we are not giving God His rightful place, we will have fear even though we may refuse to admit it. Denying God produces fear. It's as simple as that.

Fear is the painful sensation that danger threatens. The danger may be real or imagined, but the fear is real. Anxiety and worry are forms of fear. Anxiety is fear of anticipated danger. Worry is a brooding over these anxious fears.

Fear, anxiety and worry sap our energy and undermine our peace of mind. They are like weeds that grow and crowd out the flowers in our garden of happiness. Where do these weeds come from? Is there no way of getting rid of them? Has God left us with no way to cope with them?

CONFESSING OUR SINS

The Bible traces these fears to their real source and gives us the only effective remedy: "God is love ... There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love" (1 Jn. 4:16,18). Nothing will cast out fear like confidence in God's perfect love. Since love has blotted out all our sins through Christ's sacrifice on the cross, we can be sure that God has forgiven them and will never again hold us accountable for them.

An accusing conscience, that says that punishment is due us, is one of the major causes of anxiety, fear and worry. Genesis gives us the first record of fear that man had. In the Garden of Eden, after he had eaten the forbidden fruit, the Lord said to Adam: "Where are you?" Adam's response was, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked" (Gen. 3:9-10). He was afraid because he knew he had sinned and deserved to be punished.

Down deep we know that sin deserves punishment, and that there will be no deliverance until the things that are

troubling our conscience are cleared up in a way that is satisfactory to God.

When our conscience is troubled, we may try to forget our sins. It is natural to push them out of our mind or repress them altogether. But we can never really succeed, because deep in the unconscious mind the memory of them keeps surfacing in one form or another.

We may not be fully conscious of the fact that sin and self-will are the cause of our anxious fears. It is so easy to deceive ourselves and make ourselves believe that someone or something else is responsible. However, we will never get rid of our fears or have any real peace until we admit the truth and get things right with God.

A young lady, brought up in a Christian home, began to do things that her conscience condemned. Unwilling to admit them and confess them to God, she began to persuade herself first that God didn't care, and then that there was no God. For several years she claimed to be an atheist. But the sin in her life gradually developed into anxiety and fear.

She finally felt like she was losing her mind and ended up in a mental hospital. Many remedies were tried, but no relief came until she faced the fact that she was trying to rule God out of her life. Once she confessed her sins and surrendered to God, she was able to leave the hospital with her anxieties and fears gone and her mind clear.

JOY OF FORGIVENESS

We have to be conscious of God's forgiveness and His perfect love to have our fears cast out. But we can't have confidence in Him until we are sure we are forgiven. We can't have this assurance while we are unwilling to confess our sins to Him: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn. 1:8-9).

There are three steps we must take to really get rid of anxiety and fear:

1. Recognize the sin that is at the root of our anxious fears.

2. Believe that God really does forgive our sins when we confess them.

3. Put our sins, along with the anxiety and fear they produce, out of mind. Whenever they do come to mind again, instead of feeling anxiety, we will be reminded and thankful that God has forgiven them all.

When we take these three steps, we will be able to say with the psalmist, “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want ... I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me ... Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever” (Ps. 23:1,4,6).

A little child awakened by a storm cries out in fear. His father comes and takes him in his arms. Soon the child is asleep again. The storm has not ceased but the child’s confidence in his father gives him a sense of security and removes his fear.

PATH OF PEACE

What comfort and peace would come if we would just cast ourselves fully on Him and willingly let Him plan our life! His plan is infinitely better than anything we could ever work out for ourselves. His plan embraces all the details of our life here, and also has in view our eternal happiness.

What comfort to have Him as our Shepherd, Caretaker and Friend—to be able to say, “The LORD is my Shepherd; I shall not want.” (Ps. 23:1). Rest and satisfaction belong to the believer who is willing to trust and follow the Shepherd: “He leads me beside the still waters” (v. 2). The storms may rage around us, but when we are close to Him, we are at peace. If we are in a place of unrest, we can be sure He has not led us there, though He may let us pass that way to teach us how bitter it is not to listen to Him.

Are we listening to His voice in our daily life? Are we following Him step by step regardless of how rough the road? He says, “My sheep hear my voice ... and they follow Me” (Jn. 10:27). What a comfort to have such a Friend going all the way with us in every trouble, great or small.

What a path the Christian is called to follow! The Almighty Creator and Sustainer of this vast universe gave His life for us and now ever lives to comfort, counsel, guide and lead us. How is it that we let Satan get our eyes off Christ and rob us of our peace, giving us unrest and fear instead?

Satan wants us to doubt and fear. Will we yield to him or to the loving hand of God? Which path will we follow? That of sight that sees only the storm upsetting our plans, or that of faith that sees our Good Shepherd's loving hand guiding us into a fuller communion with Himself?

Are we in trouble? Do we fear tomorrow? Are we sick, sorrowing or in debt? Dear child of God: Christ died for us! Do not distrust His love. By these very trials He is working out for us a deeper joy and happiness than we could ever have any other way.

Paul triumphantly shouts in the midst of great troubles and distresses: "We do not lose heart ... For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:16-18).

The language of faith is brave because the eye of faith does not let the things seen occupy the mind. They are seen only as the elements that God is using to develop a richer, fuller spiritual life in us. We must keep our eye on Him who will lead us into peace and out of fear.

Certainly, there are trials in the path of faith, but each trial is a door to richer joy and peace in Christ. Don't shrink back at the entrance. If we do, we will find that there are greater trials in the path of unbelief, which are always bitter and disappointing in the end.

Christ endured the cross for us. If He sees fit to lead us through trying times, He will sustain us so that our joy will be richer for having endured the trial. As Paul met new trials, his eyes were on the "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" that would come to him because of them. He was not looking at his troubles in the light of the present, but in the light of the future eternal results.

If our heart is not at peace, what do we think we need to make it so? Write down what it is and take a good look at it. Now honestly ask, "Would its attainment restore the peace and quiet we want in our soul?" Satan wants us to think, as Eve did, that what God has withheld is something to be desired. (See Gen. 3:1-6.) Be sure that peace for our soul is found in our willingness to let God have *His* way in *our* circumstances.

FOLLOWING THE SHEPHERD

The Shepherd is waiting for us to follow Him. We will gain nothing by murmuring and rebelling against His purposes; we will only make our misery greater. But, if we yield to Him, then He will fill our heart with joy and peace. If there is failure and sin, we must confess it, and believe that He forgives it according to His promise: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn. 1:9).

What comfort for the weakest child of God who is submissive enough to trust Him: "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You ... In YAH, the LORD, is everlasting strength" (Isa. 26:3-4). To the extent that we are able to do this, we will have a steady peace which changing circumstances cannot take away.

It is a great thing to be persuaded by the Lord's love. The Lord of heaven and earth loves us with an everlasting love, which fills the heart and casts out fears. There is no other remedy. We do not need to say, "I am resolved in the future to do better." That would be leaning on self. Don't do it! Just say over and over again: "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. All His resources are mine. I can lean on Him."

But if we refuse to hear His voice, His blessings will be far from us and we will have nothing but self to fall back on in the shifting circumstances of life. Whether we admit it or not, when we are out of touch with the Shepherd, we are in trouble. Is there anything then that we cannot submit to, if it is the will of Him who sacrificed Himself on the cross for us?

ADJUSTING OUR ATTITUDES

It is not circumstances that make us happy or unhappy, but our attitude towards them. We are always striving to control our circumstances, and are able to do so to some degree. But many circumstances are beyond our control. Our tendency is to become discontented or even bitter when things do not go the way we want them to go. We act like children, crying or sulking or throwing a tantrum when we can't have our own way.

On the other hand, some are able to make the best of what can't be changed, by adjusting to their circumstances. Paul said: "I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content" (Phil. 4:11). A Christian knows he is a beloved child of God, and that His Father has all circumstances under control, allowing only those things that are for our greatest good: "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God" (Rom. 8:28). This is true, without qualification.

We are able to face whatever circumstance comes up and say with assurance: "My Father has a lesson for me to learn. He has a blessing for me in this. He's giving me a golden opportunity to exercise patience, submission, faith and confidence in Him as His child."

Read the life of Christ in the Gospels. Look at the circumstances He passed through. They were surely not what the natural man would like: fleeing for his life to Egypt as a baby (Mt. 2:13-14); working as a carpenter in the despised town of Nazareth (Mk. 6:3; Jn. 1:46); having nowhere to lay His head (Mt. 8:20); called crazy by His friends (Mk. 3:21); called a demoniac by the crowd (Jn. 8:48). What scoffing He endured! But He received all these circumstances from His Father's hand and found in them an opportunity to manifest His divine nature.

Now each child of God has been made a partaker of that same divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). He has Christ as His life. So all the circumstances we are passing through are God-given opportunities to let Christ take over and live out His life through us. This is exactly what Paul meant when he said, "For to me, to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21).

This should be the Christian's attitude toward the circumstances of life. And what a different outlook it gives to everything! No longer are things seen by human standards as trying and distasteful. They are now golden opportunities to develop our spiritual life as "children of God ... in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights" (Phil. 2:15). Even afflictions when looked at this way become an occasion for thanksgiving: "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Th. 5:16-18).

A positive Christian attitude brings true contentment to the child of God. All things are viewed as coming from the tender hands of a loving Father and are opportunities to learn valuable lessons in self-control, patience, faith and obedience, while gaining a rich blessing. Outward circumstances don't make us happy or unhappy, but our inward attitude towards them and towards God in them. Song writer Bill Gaither puts it this way:

I found happiness, I found peace of mind,
I found the joy of living, perfect love sublime,
I found real contentment, happy living in accord;
I found happiness all the time,
Wonderful peace of mind,
When I found the Lord.

PEACE ASSURED

"The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7). Who does not desire such an experience: the perfect peace of God Himself filling our hearts and minds? But why just desire it when we can have it? It is there for every child of God who wants it enough to meet the conditions.

Our Creator is the only one who fully understands the workings of our minds and all those feelings that well up in our hearts. Some of us have more emotional stability than others and do not swing as far and as often between extremes. Yet how few really know much of the perfect peace

so necessary for true happiness. No matter how much or how little we have experienced this sweet peace, we want more.

If we are hungry and neglect to eat the food God has provided to satisfy hunger, we can't blame others if we starve. Neither can we blame others if we are unhappy but don't make use of God's provision for happiness. The whole fault lies in us. It is important that we face this squarely; otherwise we will never make use of God's provisions.

In Isaiah 26:3 we read His first provision, which is *trust*: "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he *trusts* in You." In Philippians 4:6-7 we find the other two, which are *prayer* and *thanksgiving*: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by *prayer* and supplication, with *thanksgiving*, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

These three things—trust, prayer and thanksgiving—can give peace of heart and mind only to those who have full assurance of salvation. Many have assurance of sins forgiven; they know they are saved and have no doubt about their eternal security through the finished work of Christ. Yet they are often unhappy because they do not have that peace they desire and which God intends for them. They are neglecting these three simple tools.

TRUSTING GOD

What hinders us from trusting God? To trust Him we must first surrender ourselves to Him. No child can trust his father while walking in self-willed rebellion against him. Neither can one confide in God while walking in disobedience to Him. We know that He will not help us with something that is contrary to His Word.

Our failure to believe that God's way is always best makes it hard to yield fully to Him and trust Him with all our heart. With distrust comes lack of confidence. With lack of confidence comes restlessness and unhappiness.

When Satan talked Eve into believing that God was withholding something good from her, she began to distrust God.

He had told Adam that if they ate the forbidden fruit they would die (Gen. 2:17). But Eve looked at the forbidden tree and decided that it was “good for food ... pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise” (Gen. 3:6). She relied on her own judgment instead of yielding to God’s. What unhappiness she plunged herself into!

Today this is still the root cause of all the unhappiness in the world. Keep this fact clearly in mind: If we want happiness and peace we must stop thinking we know better than God what will make us happy. We need to be willing to yield to Him and let Him have His own way with us. His infinite love and His infinite knowledge assure us that He knows what is best for us. His infinite power guarantees His ability to make it happen.

We cannot let our thoughts go astray; we must keep them on Him. Isaiah 26:3 tells us the Lord will keep us in perfect peace if we keep our minds on Him and keep trusting Him. Why let our thoughts run wild with anxious fear? The Lord has all things under control. He is, after all, the One who is above all and able to change all; and He wants to do what is for our greatest good. If we trust Him completely and keep our thoughts on Him, we will have peace of heart and mind.

Notice in the Psalms how often David talked to himself about God’s care for him when he was cast down and harassed with fears. He was taught by God to do this, and was inspired to write these experiences for our encouragement. For example, when depressed and fearful he wrote:

- “Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God” (Ps. 42:11).

- “I was brought low, and He saved me. Return to your rest, O my soul, for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you” (Ps. 116:6-7).

- “The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? ... Though an army may encamp against me, my heart shall not fear ... For in the time of trouble He shall hide me” (Ps. 27:1,3,5).

- “Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You ... In God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me?”

(Ps. 56:3-4).

We can never go wrong if we follow David's simple method of exhorting our own souls. It is not only psychologically correct, but also scripturally sound. We need to learn these verses and repeat them over and over again when we feel depressed, fearful or discouraged. Doing this will work wonders for us just as it did for David and many others who have followed his example. It will help to keep our minds fixed on the Lord instead of on our feelings or circumstances.

PROVISION OF PRAYER

Prayer is a wonderful provision of God to ease our burdens, tensions and fears, and restore peace to our hearts and minds. The value of prayer as a vital factor in a life of peace and happiness can never be overestimated. (See Phil. 4:6-7.)

When we speak of the relationship of prayer to happiness, we are not talking about a few minutes spent each day repeating a stereotyped form of petition. Scriptural prayer is pouring out our hearts to God in simple childlike trust: "Trust in Him at all times, you people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us" (Ps. 62:8).

A school child comes to his father and says, "Father, will you help me solve this problem? I don't understand it." From this honest, simple request we can learn seven simple steps that govern effective prayer:

1. The child is conscious that he is in the presence of another person.
2. This person has the ability to solve his problem.
3. There is a relationship that the child is sure of—he's talking to his father.
4. He has confidence that his father has a personal interest in him and his problem.
5. He openly confesses his need for help with the problem.
6. He states his problem as clearly as he can.
7. He confidently waits on his father to show him the solution.

When we take these same seven steps and apply them to our prayer lives, they become simple rules for effective prayer:

1. When we pray, visualize in our souls that we are addressing a Person who is just as present as any earthly father could be.

2. Think for a moment of who He is and of His infinite power, wisdom and ability to understand and solve our problems.

3. Be conscious of our relationship with Him: He has made us His children; He is our Father.

4. As our Father, He has a very personal interest in us and our problems—more than any earthly father ever could. If He gave up His dear Son to die on the cross for us, we can be sure He is ready to give all that we need for our good.

So often we believe our prayers will be answered only if we do something to merit an answer. Since we know deep down that we have not been faithful to God, we feel we don't deserve what we are asking for. Therefore, we don't have confidence that He will answer. We must change our thinking.

Never ask anything on the grounds of personal merit, but simply on the grounds of our relationship with a loving Father who takes a personal interest in us. After all, by His grace He made us His for eternity. The Lord Jesus said: "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!" (Mt. 7:11).

5. Since we are relying on our Father's personal interest in us, and not our merits, we can freely confess our ignorance, our inability, and even our failure to Him. If there is any guilt weighing on our conscience, we should confess it to Him and get the burden lifted. He is more than ready to forgive, for He already settled the account when He gave His Son to die on the cross for us. Thus we can have confidence as we present our problems to Him. (See 1 Jn. 1:9.)

6. Tell Him what our problems are as honestly as we can. So often, when we don't really understand our problems, talking them over with our Father helps us get a clearer understanding of them. The very act of putting our problems into words gives us a clearer picture of them. Then too, telling Him about them gives Him an opportunity to give us a clearer picture of what our real need is.

He invites us to bring our requests to Him, but we are not telling Him something He does not already know. In fact, He knows them better than we ever will! By unburdening our hearts to Him, we get in touch with Him about them.

7. Confidently expect that, because of His personal interest in us, He will give us the solution to our problems at the right time. This attitude opens the way for Him to lead us into the right solution, or to solve our problems through divine intervention.

The invitation to bring our requests to God—"in everything by prayer and supplication"—does not necessarily mean long hours spent on our knees pouring out our hearts in prayer. While quiet times are important, we cannot over-stress the importance of constantly talking to God about everything during our daily activities.

This is what is meant in 1 Thessalonians 5:17: "Pray *without ceasing*;" and in Ephesians 6:18: "Praying *always*." Habitually referring everything to our Father in the midst of our daily routine keeps us in touch with Him so that His peace can keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

VALUE OF THANKSGIVING

If we are sad and depressed, we need to try thanksgiving. If we are discouraged and feel like complaining, we must try praise. God tells us in His Word that we should be found "giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 5:20). Let's discover how we can do this.

The prophet Jeremiah was greatly depressed as he listed many things that weighed him down: "He has set me in dark places ... He has hedged me in so that I cannot get out ... He has made my paths crooked" (Lam. 3:6-7,9). In all, he named some thirty complaints about his desperate circumstances, ending on this sad note: "My strength and my hope have perished from the LORD" (Lam. 3:18).

He felt as though he was hopelessly sinking under his burdens. But then his thoughts suddenly turned to God and he broke out with another thought altogether: "This I recall to

my mind, therefore I have hope. Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. The LORD is my portion ... therefore I hope in Him" (Lam. 3:21-24). What a change! And that's always the way it is when we turn to God in our troubles. We find there is so much to thank Him for.

We should take all our sorrows to the Lord, and give Him the opportunity to show us why these things are in our life; but we should never leave His presence without thanking Him for all our blessings. This will surely turn our complaining into praise, and our depression into rejoicing. Paul made no mistake when He wrote, "In everything give thanks." He knew what was needed to lift us up. The unconverted have nothing to fall back on in times of trouble. But we have the eternal God with unlimited resources who takes a personal interest in us.

How sad to see so many confused and burdened Christians disregarding the Lord's gracious offer: "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt. 11:28). How grateful we should be, knowing that He will sustain us when we come to Him with all our burdens. We should even thank Him for our troubles, since they bring us closer to Christ and are stepping stones to a higher spiritual plane. (See 2 Cor. 12:7-10.)

Some of us bring our burdens to the Lord, but are still weighed down with them, because we do not heed the Lord's simple instructions to give thanks in everything. If we did this every time we talked over our troubles with the Lord, we would find our souls uplifted by the awareness of our many blessings. We remain preoccupied with our troubles, when instead we should go on our way rejoicing because we have a loving Father who never fails His children. Praise and thanks work wonders.

EXAMPLE FOR US

If the Lord Jesus exhorts us to give thanks in every situation, He is not asking us to do something He Himself did not

do. We should never forget that He was tested in every point just as we are. When He was tested by that unrepentant generation, even after all His labors of love and mighty miracles, notice how He reacted: "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth ... for so it seemed good in Your sight" (Mt. 11:25-26). And in Luke 10:21, where the same incident is recorded, we find it also recorded that "Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit."

As always, in these trials He saw His Father's hand and heard His Father saying, "This is from me." He recognized that His Father had power over heaven and earth, so He willingly bowed to His ordering of these painful circumstances, giving thanks. If we yield to our Father, we too will find great relief from distressing circumstances and also find renewed strength in our souls.

If we are not inclined to answer and say, "Thank you, Father," it only proves that our own wills are not surrendered to His. We don't want Him to have His way with us, and so we fret and complain, making ourselves still more miserable.

Don't forget that in all circumstances, we respond to God who is speaking to us through them. Our response may be, "Thank You, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight." Or we may say, "Father, I won't thank You because I don't want what seems good in Your sight." We might be thinking, "I would never say such a thing to my heavenly Father." But if we fret and complain about our circumstances, our response has no other meaning than that to God.

When we learn the Lord's secret of rejoicing in adverse and painful circumstances, we will find rest for our souls. His delight was in His Father's will. We too will find happiness when we give up our will for His. But we must try it to see what a wonderful change it will make. Our painful circumstances may not change, but we will see a rainbow in the cloud and hear a song in the night.

Perhaps our Father has ordered our difficult circumstances just to teach us to yield to Him and say, "Not my will but Yours be done." If this is the case, when His end is achieved in our lives, He will alter our circumstances accordingly.

The Lord found peace in the midst of trials by submitting to them and thanking His Father for them. We will find

peace too if we do likewise. There is no other way. We cannot get peace by worrying or complaining. The more we yield our will to His, the more we will find the peace and joy of Christ in our souls.

LEARNING FROM HIM

When the Lord says, “Learn from Me,” it is as if He were saying: “I know what I am talking about. I am your Creator who became your Redeemer. Don’t be deceived by your own reasoning or by the opinions of men. Learn from Me, and you will find rest. My yoke is easy and my burden is light. But the yoke of self-will and sin is heavy with conflict and bondage.”

Would our loving Creator and Redeemer deliberately make it hard on us if we surrender our will to His? Of course not! As our perfect example, Jesus submitted to the Father when He said: “Father ... not my will, but Yours, be done” (Lk. 22:42). We are called to do likewise: “I beseech you ... present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:1-2).

Our will, if not surrendered to God, is self-will. And self-will is the root of all the sin, misery and unhappiness that has ever come into our lives. Don’t be deceived: it is not Satan, other people or our circumstances that bring about unhappiness in our lives; it is self-will. But God’s Son came into this world to do His Father’s will in love for us that we might have rest and happiness. A will surrendered to God is the gateway to happiness.

FINDING REST

To have a happy life, it is essential to be at rest. In explaining the way to find this rest, our Lord says: “Come to Me ... Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me ... and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Mt. 11:28-30).

The One who asks us to take His yoke upon us, gave us an example when He submitted to His Father's will saying, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God" (Heb. 10:9). To find rest we too must surrender our wills to God's. That's what it means to "take My yoke upon you." Have you ever seen a yoke of oxen? When they are yoked up, they submit their will to the master.

Sin is the cause of all unhappiness in God's universe, and the root of all sin is self-will, or substituting our will for God's. Not only does this bring us into conflict with our Creator, but it also creates a conflict within us.

A child of God receives a new, divine nature when he is born again. This divine nature loves God and hates sin. The Christian also has the Spirit of God dwelling within him. For these reasons, inner conflict arises when a child of God yields to self-will and sin.

When we make something, we have the right to govern its use. Likewise, God has a right to say what we should do, because He has created us. When we buy something, it belongs to us. God has purchased us with the blood of His Son: "You are not your own ... you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. 6:19-20). When a child is born, he is expected to obey his parents. When a person is born again, God expects obedience from him (Jn. 3:3; 1 Jn. 5:18; 1 Pet. 2:1-2).

We cannot disregard God's threefold claim over us—as His creation, His possession and His children—and expect inner peace. We must recognize God's rights. Therefore, if we exert our self-will in rebellion against God's will, inner conflict results.

HIS POWER

The power of God is so overwhelming that it should strike terror in the soul that is out of harmony with Him: "Even the demons believe—and tremble!" (Jas. 2:19). The power of God causes them to tremble. The legion of demons that possessed the maniac of Gadara trembled when Jesus commanded them to depart from him, because they knew His irresistible power

(Lk. 8:31). Only man is foolish enough to try to persuade himself that he has nothing to fear: "The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God"" (Ps. 53 :1).

Paul knew of this latent fear in the heart of men and he used it to awaken them to their need for the gospel: "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:11). There is an unconscious fear of God in every human being regardless of how ungodly he is or how much he tries to suppress it. Man's cursing, swearing and statements of unbelief are an effort to drown the innate fear of God that is troubling him because he knows he is out of harmony with God.

No one can ignore the power of God and expect to have peace: "God is greatly to be feared ... and to be held in reverence by all those around Him" (Ps. 89:7). It is this inherent fear of God latent in every human soul that Christ appeals to when He says, "I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!" (Lk. 12:5).

He goes on to couple this fear of God's power with a sense of confidence in God's care for them: "Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows" (Lk. 12:6-7).

The Lord continues to develop our sense of security with these examples of God's care: "Consider the ravens ... God feeds them ... How much more value are you than the birds? ... Consider the lilies ... If then God so clothes the grass ... how much more will He clothe you ... Your Father knows that you need these things ... all these things shall be added to you" (Lk. 12:24,27-28,30-31). What a comfort to experience God's awesome power over us and His care for us. Elizabeth Cheney wrote:

Said the robin to the sparrow,
"I should really like to know
Why these anxious human beings
Fear and fret and worry so?"

Said the sparrow to the robin,
“Friend, I think that it must be
That they have no heavenly Father
Such as cares for you and me!”

HIS WILL

It is a self-evident truth that God’s power is always subject to His will. If we are sure that we are His, then we can be sure that He is working out His will for our present blessing and our eternal good. He has irresistible power to carry out His wonderful purpose concerning us. With this in view then, let’s look at three statements about God’s will for His children.

First, in Ephesians 1:4-5, we learn what God’s will was for us even *before creation*: “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.”

Who could ask for a higher place than to be His sons brought into His eternal favor? Could anything be more blessed than this? Angels are creatures before the Creator, but we are beloved sons of our Father. And all this because it was the good pleasure of His will.

Second, we know His purposes concerning us in the *ages to come* from Ephesians 2:4-7: “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ ... that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

Here God reveals that in the future, His will is for us to discover the exceeding riches of His grace. Surely, God could not give anything greater than this! Why should we fear His power when we know the good pleasure of His will concerning us? His power, in fact, is our guarantee that His purpose concerning us will be accomplished in due time.

Third, in Romans 8:28 we find His purposes revealed in the events and circumstances that touch us *in our daily lives*:

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” Should we dread His irresistible power and sovereign will when we know that He is making all things work together for our present and eternal good?

How narrow-minded of us to complain about our circumstances in the face of such plain statements! What a shameful way to treat our God who has willed such marvelous things for us! We cannot have peace in our soul when self-will and a refusal to submit reveal our distrust in God.

Remember, we are fighting in vain when we fight against God: “Woe to him who strives with his Maker” (Isa. 45:9). Putting our trust in the One “who works all things according to the counsel of His will” (Eph. 1:11) is the happiest thing we can ever do.

SEARCHING SELF

Can we pray this practical prayer from our heart? “How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand ... Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Ps. 139:17-18, 23-24).

If we search, we will find that God, in His great love for us, will show us both what is causing our trouble and what is hindering our peace. Thinking about His will for us should bring great peace. And thinking about His power should assure us of His good purposes concerning us. However, if we are not submissive, we should tremble, because we will discover that self-will leads to grief.

The children of Israel were self-willed, and great sorrow resulted: “Woe to the rebellious children,’ says the LORD, ‘who take counsel, but not of Me, and who devise plans, but not of My Spirit, that they may add sin to sin; who ... go down to Egypt, and have not asked My advice, to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt!’ ... The Egyptians are men, and not God ...

When the LORD stretches out His hand, both he who helps will fall, and he who is helped will fall down; they all will perish together” (Isa. 30:1-2; 31:3). Now, contrast this to those who love and do His will: “Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble” (Ps. 119:165).

HIS CHASTENING

It is foolish to think we can have happiness and peace while showing disrespect for God’s power to chasten us: “For whom the LORD loves he corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights” (Prov. 3:12). As His children we should never disregard His authority. He is training His children: “If we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world” (1 Cor. 11:31-32).

How foolish to ignore His will and expect to have peace! We know we can’t break His natural laws and expect to get away with it. If we touch a live electrical wire we will get a shock. If we take poison we will suffer the consequences. Just as there are natural laws that operate in His physical creation, so there are moral laws that operate in His moral creation. We cannot ignore one any more than the other and expect peace and prosperity. It is foolish to try.

In fact, many of God’s moral laws have both a moral and a physical effect. For example, anger not only produces unhappiness but also effects the functioning of our vital organs. The worry, anxiety and tension that follow a fit of rage make us feel miserable and depressed. One hour of worry can cause more physical exhaustion than a whole day’s work. How many people are nervous, irritable and tired all the time simply because they are breaking the laws of God governing their moral being!

But apart from these laws which have a uniform effect upon both body and soul, there is also a direct dealing by God resulting in discipline, correction, chastening, and training for the practical holiness of His children, as well as for their peace and happiness: “Whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives ... Now no chastening

seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Heb. 12:6-7,11).

We should be aware that God’s hand is behind everything that affects us in our bodies, our souls and our circumstances. It is surprising how many of God’s children go through life oblivious to this important fact. No wonder we drift along making so little spiritual progress and having so little real peace. If only we were more interested in learning the lessons and reaping the benefits of His chastening, how much misery we could spare ourselves and how much happier our lives would be.

God never wants to harm His children. He wants to deliver us from those traits that are harmful and develop those habits that produce peace and happiness. For example, if we are inclined to be proud, God may allow someone to make a derogatory remark about us for our own development. But if we do not recognize this as God’s discipline for our correction, we are likely to get angry and say or do something we may regret later. However, if we see how God is delivering us from pride and giving us an opportunity to show a Christ-like spirit of meekness, forbearance and grace, His chastening will make us happy and peaceful.

God is always teaching us to renounce pride, hatred, anger, irritability, resentment, jealousy, envy, worry and anxiety, because these make us miserable and unhappy. He uses circumstances to give us the opportunity to develop the Christ-like traits of meekness, humility, gentleness, goodness, patience and self-control, because these produce peace and happiness.

God’s chastening allows us an opportunity to renounce self and develop that new nature we have as His children. If we yield to His chastening and cooperate with Him in it, the results will be inner peace and happiness. If we ignore His discipline and decide to rebel, our Father may chasten us through sickness, accident, loss or some other providential means. He loves us too much to allow us to go on in self-will which robs us of peace, joy and fellowship with Him. God cannot make His children happy while they ignore “that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2).

EXAMPLES OF CHASTENING

The Bible is full of examples of God's chastening. In the case of Jonah, God used a great storm, an east wind, a beating sun, a great fish and a worm to chasten and discipline His rebellious prophet (Jon. 1:4,17; 4:7-8). God has all things under His hand, and can use something as insignificant as a worm for chastening when He so chooses.

He used leprosy when chastening Gehazi, Miriam and King Uzziah (2 Ki. 5:20-27; Num. 12; 2 Chr. 26:16-19). The sword, revolt and adultery were used with David (2 Sam. 11-12). Storms, famines, sickness, locusts, wars, and so on were repeatedly used by God to chasten His people for sin and rebellion. In 1 Corinthians 11:30, Paul states that many were weak and sick, and some even died under the chastening hand of the Lord because of their sinful conduct.

An example for us today is that of a young woman dying from cancer. As a child, her godly mother taught her to know the Lord; but after her mother's death she drifted far into the world. Her battle with cancer brought her to the point where she could say: "My suffering will soon end in death, but the Lord has been speaking to me through it. I know why I had to suffer, and it has resulted in happiness." After a few weeks of peaceful suffering, the Lord took her home. Only the Lord knows how much suffering she might have been spared if she had surrendered to Him sooner.

While God uses sickness, accidents, and other trying situations to chasten His children, we must never conclude that God is disciplining us only because of sin. (This was the mistake Job's friends made regarding his suffering.) The Lord often uses sufferings and trials to draw us closer to Him. He may seek to strengthen our faith by putting us in situations where we have to depend upon Him.

When others are suffering, it is never wise to think that God is chastening them for wrong doing. We are not to judge; that's God's business. However, when we are being chastened personally, we should ask God whether He intends it as correction, training for usefulness, or character development. If

we do not get in touch with Him about His purpose, and cooperate with Him, we will not gain the happiness and peace He intends for us. Remember, God's dealings are a reality, and we will suffer great loss if we pass over them lightly. On the other hand, they will contribute greatly to our peace and happiness if we take them seriously. We can brighten our testimony for Him by cheerfully accepting our trials.

HIS PURPOSE

No matter what our circumstances, there is no reason to become upset or discouraged, because God is ordering them for our good (Rom. 8:28). This is the blessed truth that God wants His children to grasp. With a surrendered will and a confident heart, the child of God should be able to take everything from his Father without fretting or fighting. Instead, we should look for the benefit in it.

Let's make a mental list of all the things that upset us. Are others hurting our feelings? Are our surroundings getting to us? Do we seem to be battling against overwhelming odds? Are we nervous, tense and unhappy? Doesn't the God who allowed these circumstances also have the power to change them? Then why doesn't He? Because we know He does not send trials just to see us suffer, we can be sure that He has some lessons for us to learn.

How did Christ act in the circumstances of his life? Was he upset by them? No, He took them from his Father with a submissive heart, as an opportunity to display His own divine nature. Now He is abiding in us by the Holy Spirit as our source of power and strength for daily living. We need to let Him take over and live His life through us so we can find His peace and happiness. Like Paul, we want to be able to say, "For to me, to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21).

Nothing will give such peace and happiness as a life lived in conscious harmony with our heavenly Father's plan for us. Let's yield our lives to God and view our circumstances as ordered for our good. Let's see in them a God-given opportunity to live in harmony with His purposes for our lives. If we do this, we will experience His sustaining power and His

peace. Our circumstances may never change, but our lives will take on new meaning that will make for peace, happiness and a life worth living.

UNSELFISH SERVICE

A self-centered person never serves others unless there is something in it for him. But how different is the service of the child of God who finds true satisfaction and happiness in doing unselfish deeds. His good deeds are a source of joy and a spontaneous expression of his new nature.

Every born-again child of God has been made a partaker of the divine nature. This new nature is implanted in the believer by God's Spirit through the Word. It finds its greatest pleasure in helpful service to God and man. The believer can only be happy as he lives this kind of life.

Why did God redeem us by sacrificing His own Son? Why was Christ willing to die for our redemption? Because His own nature found its pleasure in unselfish love and service to others. A child of God partakes of this same divine nature and so unselfish service makes him happy. But a self-centered life depresses the believer and makes him miserable and unhappy.

We can only be happy when we act in accordance with our new nature which always finds its greatest pleasure in unselfish service to God and to man. But to understand why a true child of God is often unhappy, we must remember that we have two natures with opposite tendencies: a new, divine nature that we have received from God when we were born again; and our perverted, fallen nature that we have received from Adam by natural birth. To the extent that we yield to the natural, we will be unhappy.

POWER OVER SIN

Sin is destructive to happiness because it conflicts with the divine nature of the believer. It produces a humiliating sense of defeat. When we do things that our conscience condemns we feel miserable. We may try to forget about it but that is no

solution to our difficulty. Power over sin is the only thing that can make us happy. But how can we get that power?

Before he learns the secret of victory, every born-again believer commits sins that he hates but seems powerless to overcome. Here is Paul's description of this struggle that leads to finding victory in Jesus: "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells ... For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the *law of God*, according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the *law of my mind*, and bringing me into captivity to the *law of sin* which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin" (Rom. 7:18-25).

There are three laws spoken of in these verses. The *law of God* is that revelation of His will for man. The *law of the mind* is the working of the new nature in every born-again soul that delights in the will of God and hates sin. The *law of sin* is the working of the old nature that always wants to have its own way in opposition to God's will. These two natures—the divine nature that every Christian receives from God, and the sinful nature derived from Adam by natural birth—are entirely opposed to one another. One loves and clings to sin, while the other loves and desires to do the will of God. Struggles result, and the believer is sad whenever he gives way to sin.

This experience of struggle and defeat, often prolonged for months and even years, is very humiliating and painful. But it brings the believer to realize two things: that there is no good thing in him by nature; and that even after he has been made a partaker of the divine nature he has no power in himself to carry out the will of God.

While learning these painful truths, of our utter sinfulness and powerlessness to combat sin in our own strength, we often cry out in desperation as Paul did: "O wretched man

that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom. 7:24). We have to learn that if we are ever to get the victory over sin, the power has to come from a source outside ourselves.

As soon as we look outside for a deliverer, we discover Jesus Christ as the answer to our agonizing cry, "Who will deliver me?" He is the only One who can set us free from both the condemnation and power of sin.

HAPPY LIVING

Much of the misery of this struggle with sin is due to the conscience continually condemning the believer for giving way to sin. But the great and glorious fact of the gospel of God's grace is that though our conscience condemns sin, God never condemns us, because He sees us in Christ, who has already paid our penalty for sin on the cross. So we are free and beyond condemnation and judgment: "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).

The life we now have flows down from Him, its fountain and source, into our souls. "Because I live, you will live also" (Jn. 14:19), are His own words to us. Our response is: "Christ ... is our life" (Col. 3:4). This is the great soul-delivering truth of God. He does not see us in our old nature any more. He is done with that and sees us only in the new life we have in Christ. And He has given us His Spirit to dwell in us, to develop His new life in us and to give us His power over sin.

So Christ is the answer to all of our struggles. We must stop trying to overcome the sinful tendencies of our old nature in our own strength and begin to let Him work in us that deliverance and victory over sin we so much long for. Likewise, we have no power to produce fruit, even though in our new nature we long to do so. What relief from our misery when we come to the end of ourselves and begin to trust Him. When we realize our powerlessness and look to the Lord, He gives victory over sin and produces fruit that brings joy and peace.

Christ gave us a simple illustration of how this works: "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the

vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing” (Jn. 15:4-5). Where did the branch get the power to produce such wonderful fruit? Not from itself, but from the vine which sends its invigorating sap flowing into the branch to produce fruit.

Never lose sight of the great fact that Christ is the answer for every trouble. Without Him we cannot overcome. The more we keep in touch with Him the more fruit we will produce. Without Him fruit bearing is impossible. Without Him we will never have true and lasting happiness. He is the source of all joy. In Him we can have a happy life!

“These things I have spoken to you,
that in Me you may have peace.
In the world you will have tribulation;
but be of good cheer,
I have overcome the world.”

John 16:33

Grace & Truth, Inc.

210 Chestnut St., Danville, IL 61832 USA

or • P.O. Box 4902, Kaduna Junction P.O., Kaduna, Nigeria
gtpress@gtpress.org / www.gtpress.org