

Rejoicing as a Christian Duty

This title may seem odd because we tend to think of “duty” as an obligation to be borne with resignation, or merely because it “should” be done. For example, it is our duty to pay taxes. But we should not think of Christian duty as a negative thing. Our duty is what God expects and requires of us. It is what we do to fulfill his purpose, not only for our lives, but for the Kingdom of God, and for his glory.

What are some of our Christian duties? To read, study, and meditate on his Word, to pray, to function in our giftings in the local assembly of believers (the church) where God has placed us, to pray for, and support the local ministry (pastors), to love wives, to submit to husbands, to raise up godly children, to earn a reputation in the community for honesty and uprightness, to forgive those who have wronged us, to support the weak and aid the poor, etc.

But do you know that one of our duties as Christians is to rejoice in God our Savior? It is not possible to truly rejoice if you are doing it out of mere obligation. It is not merely saying the words “Praise God” through gritted teeth. God wants us to live rejoicing, not to be down-in-the-mouth or complaining, or depressed.

What would you think of a child who is adopted by wealthy parents, who have made him a part of their family and given him his needs (though not always his desires) and an eventual inheritance, and yet he is always depressed and complaining and never seems to be thankful or even to pay attention to what the parents have done? What if you were the parent?

What is rejoicing? It is to be glad, or happy, to take joy or delight in something, or someone. It is more than contentment or satisfaction. Contentment is mostly passive, but rejoicing is a positive and active attitude, something you do. Furthermore, it is something that we can choose to do, even when we are in a bad situation. Mt. 5:10-12 – we are to rejoice when persecuted for righteousness’ sake. The persecution is certainly not “fun”, but we can rejoice because we will have a reward in heaven.

God wants and expects us to rejoice in this life (now, not just when we get to heaven)

1 Thess. 5:16-18 – “**Rejoice** evermore. **Pray** without ceasing. In every thing **give thanks**: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.” So you are crying out for God to show you his will? Here it is: Rejoice, pray, and be thankful. If you will start here, he will make the details of his plan plain when the time is right. As a matter of fact, sometimes you won’t know his plan until it is past. (“Oh, that’s why this happened to me!”)

Dt. 28:45-47 – This chapter gives the blessings and curses of the law. One of the reasons the curses would come upon them is here - “Because thou **servedst not the Lord thy God with joyfulness**, and with **gladness of heart**, for the abundance of all things”. God wants to bless us, but if we walk in idolatry and unbelief and disobedience, and do not serve him with joyful and glad hearts, none of the intended blessings will come to us.

Dt. 12:5-7 – When they came into the promised land, God would designate a place (Jerusalem) to come and make bring their tithes, sacrifices, thank-offerings, vows, and firstborn. “And there shall ye **eat before the Lord** your God, and ye shall rejoice **in all that ye put your hand unto**, ye and your households, wherein the Lord thy God hath blessed thee.” Their offerings were supposed to be brought with rejoicing, not begrudgingly.

Ps. 5:11-12 – “But let all those that put their trust in thee **rejoice**; let them ever **shout for joy**, because thou defendest them: let them also that love thy name **be joyful** in thee, For thou, Lord, wilt bless the righteous: with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield.”

Ps. 32:11 – “**Be glad** in the Lord, and **rejoice**, ye righteous: and **shout for joy**, all ye that are upright in heart.”

Ps. 33:1 – “**Rejoice** in the Lord, O ye righteous: for **praise** is comely for the upright.”

Ps. 119:111 – “Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for **they are the rejoicing of my heart.**”

Zeph. 3:14 – “**Sing**, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; **be glad** and **rejoice with all the heart**, O daughter of Jerusalem.”

Phl. 4:4 – “**Rejoice** in the Lord always: and again I say, **Rejoice.**”

Ecclesiastes tells us in several places that the gift of God is for us to eat, and drink, and to enjoy good in our labor. Work should be satisfying, and we should be able to enjoy eating and drinking from the fruits of that labor, as an act of thankfulness to God. We serve God in our jobs, and he wants us to do it with a good attitude.

Col. 3:17 – “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, **giving thanks** to God and the Father by him.”

Col. 3:23-24 – “And whatsoever ye do, **do it heartily**, as to the Lord, and not unto men: Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.”

So what are some of the ways we rejoice?

Be glad...Shout for joy...Sing...Praise...Eat before the Lord...Take God’s testimonies as your heritage...Rejoice with all the heart...Serve God with joy...Clap your hands...Dance before the Lord...Remember God’s faithfulness...Tell it to the heathen...Sing in the Spirit and with the understanding...Be thankful...

Likely questions: Is rejoicing a feeling or a choice? How can God expect us to rejoice when things are going badly? Is it a lie, or hypocrisy, to rejoice in trials?

All these questions are related, and have much the same answers.

Rejoicing involves emotion, but there are times when we need to choose to rejoice regardless of our feelings. If we do rejoice as a deliberate act of our will, very often the feelings will come into line. But we should not consider these “feelings” as the goal. Our purpose should not be to “feel good”, but to express our faith that God is a good and merciful Father, and that he also is sovereign and all-powerful. While it may appear to us that things are “out of control”, we must rest in the fact that nothing takes God by surprise, and that all things are working to bring about his ultimate and wise will. We are not denying the reality of grief or pain or evil, but simply recognizing that there is a greater and more eternal reality, that is the goodness and sovereign pleasure of God. To rejoice is to consciously put our trust in him and acknowledge that his will is better than anything we could possibly plan or desire.

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