

The Pursuit of Happiness

SERMON

by

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TEXT: Ephesians 5:3-14

PROP: By the grace of God his people are no longer darkness but light and in order to properly express our gratitude to God we must strive for goodness, righteousness and truth and we must always be trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.

Ephesians 5:1-14 (ESV)

¹ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. ³ But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. ⁴ Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. ⁵ For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. ⁷ Therefore do not become partners with them; ⁸ for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), ¹⁰ and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. (Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord-KJV) ¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. ¹³ But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, ¹⁴ for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

Some years ago, in his commencement address at Grove City College senator Rick Santorum spoke on the pursuit of happiness. He began by reminding us of the view held by most people in our country that it doesn't really matter what you believe or what you do as long as you are happy. He went on to urge the new graduates to be good, pointing out that no one can be truly happy if

they are doing evil, if they are breaking the law of God. We will benefit ourselves and our nation much more, he said, if we pursue goodness instead of seeking to make ourselves happy with pleasure.

I want to consider the pursuit of happiness. It is not wrong to pursue happiness if we do so on God's terms. Indeed our personal happiness must not be our chief end which is rather to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. As Paul puts it, we are to imitate God as beloved Children and the practice of godliness will enable us to live and to die happily just as the apostle Paul notes,

1 Timothy 4:8 (ESV)

⁸ for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

Speaking of the comfort of belonging to Christ, the *Heidelberg Catechism* asks,

Question 1: What is thy only comfort in life and death?

Answer 1: That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ; who, with his precious blood, has fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, that all things must be subservient to my salvation, and therefore, by his Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me sincerely willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto him.

Question 2: How many things are necessary for you to know, that you, enjoying this comfort, may live and die happily?

Answer 2: Three; the first, how great my sins and miseries are; the second, how I may be delivered from all my sins and miseries; the third, how I shall express my gratitude to God for such deliverance.

Summarizing what the Bible teaches the Heidelberg Catechism informs us that we belong to Jesus because he redeemed us with his own blood and this brings to us the ultimate happiness, namely, fellowship with God in life and life in the presence of God for eternity. Happiness in this life, however, is a matter of

degree in all of us. The degree of happiness we personally enjoy depends on how well we understand the three questions raised by the *Heidelberg Catechism*.

According to the comic strip *Peanuts*, happiness to Charlie Brown was a warm puppy. To others it may be food, shelter and clothing or freedom from tyranny or a new car or a big screen TV, etc, and the *Declaration of Independence* terms the **pursuit of happiness** an inalienable right. John Adams stated that the "happiness of society is the end (main task) of government." This happiness, however, is not happiness on human terms. We have no right to pursue a hedonist's happiness (Playboy Hugh Hefner, "If it feels good do it") or a homosexual's happiness. The happiness we have the right to pursue is God's happiness.

For example, Mat 5:3-11, ""**Blessed** are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 "**Blessed** are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. 5 "**Blessed** are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. 6 "**Blessed** are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. 7 "**Blessed** are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. 8 "**Blessed** are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. 9 "**Blessed** are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. 10 "**Blessed** are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 "**Blessed** are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me."

The word "blessed" translates makarios (mak-ar'-ee-os; supremely blest; fortunate, well off:--blessed, **happy**).

I. To be happy, I must know how great my sins and miseries are.

How can we ever be truly happy if we do not know the enormity of our offense against God? If we take the view of the *New Age* movement that we are all basically good and that to be happy what we need to do is to raise our self-esteem we will never know the happiness contemplated by the Bible. Though we may raise our self-esteem we retain the inherent guilt of sin like a dead body strapped to our back and cannot be happy. Can transcendental meditation or hypnosis remove the body of sin with which we are all beset; of course not. Paul wrote in Romans 7:24, "*Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the*

body of this death?" His answer is Romans 8:1 "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

James Hitchcock, in his essay "What Went Wrong in the Fifties," asserts that even in the midst of the churches popularity boom after World War II, a "spiritual dry rot" had set in. Christian belief was dissolving into a placid broth of feeling positive about others. "Guideposts" became the churches devotional reading. The post war world was wholesome and sunny; neighbors were generous and kind; there seemed nothing to repent about. Original Sin appeared to be a quaint doctrine, unnecessarily pessimistic. And this has been the gospel of all of the mainline churches that are now in serious decline. We cannot be happy if we do not know the heinousness of our sin.

(Presbyterian Layman, Vol 27, Number 1, Jan/Feb 1994) "The pursuit of happiness for some in the PCUSA has been to attempt a re-imagining of God. National staff and committee members from the Presbyterian Church (USA) gathered with leaders of other World Council of Churches denominations in Minneapolis last November for a feminist convocation called Re-Imagining 1993. Declaring their allegiance to the goddess "Sophia," participants catapulted their rhetoric well beyond commonplace themes of women's equality. Instead, they heralded a more radical agenda: to promote a new religion with a new god." This may sound ludicrous and we may be tempted to dismiss Sophia worship as a passing fad but this movement continues to be influential in all of the mainline denominations and is said to be the vanguard of feminist theology and is the most prominent trend on seminary campuses today.

We can never be happy and we can never be good, for that matter, if we are living in heathen darkness. We read, "*But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.*" (Ephesians 5:3-6, ESV)

Our sins and miseries are great in three ways according to Paul. They are very significant because all who are not the Lord's people are given to sinful things, and because no immoral person has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God and because the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. This hardly leads to happiness. We either belong to our faithful Savior Jesus Christ or we belong to Satan. We are either reckoned as saints because the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us by grace, or we are enemies of God and this is true for every human society.

No one who does not know the enormity of his sin and misery will ever turn from it unto the true and living God. Therefore no one apart from belonging to Christ will ever be happy. Though they may have the facade of prosperity and happiness they must live with inner guilt darkened understanding. How dreadful to be hardened in sin, to be reprobate but how happy is the one who recognizes his sinful condition and comes to Christ for grace.

II. To be happy, I must know how to be delivered from my sins and miseries.

Jesus provides to his people the only relief from the guilt of sin. *“And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”* (John 17:3, ESV) There is no other deliverance from the guilt of sin but saving knowledge of the true God and his Christ. No psychotherapy, no favorable position of the stars, no behavioral modification drugs, no meditation or yoga can ever remove the burden of sin. Our only hope is in the Lord Jesus Christ and his righteous active obedience to God as he bore our sins on the cross.

Here is what we were before Christ delivered us. *“Therefore do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.”* (Ephesians 5:7-8, ESV) *“Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret.”* (Ephesians 5:11-12, ESV)

Here is the result of conversion and deliverance, *“for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light”* (Ephesians 5:8, ESV) *“But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for*

anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."" (Ephesians 5:13-14, ESV)

Isaiah 26:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead.

Isaiah 51:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ Wake yourself, wake yourself, stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl, the cup of staggering.

Isaiah 52:1 (ESV)

¹ Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion; put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city; for there shall no more come into you the uncircumcised and the unclean.

Isaiah 60:1 (ESV)

¹ Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

How is it that the dead will live, that corpses will rise? Where do the beautiful garments come from with which the saints clothe themselves? How is it that the unclean cannot come into the city of God? It is because our light has come. These things are true because the glory of YAHWEH has risen upon us. Indeed God has raised us from the dead and delivered us by his grace. The spiritually dead people cannot be happy. They know nothing of the surpassing riches of the grace of God in his kindness toward us in Christ (Eph 2:8ff). They have not been saved (delivered) through faith. They are not the workmanship of God created in Christ Jesus for good works.

How am I delivered from the guilt of my sin? Only through saving faith in Christ. *"And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."* (John 17:3, ESV)

III. To be happy, I must know how to express my gratitude to God for deliverance.

The third requirement for happiness is that we properly express our gratitude to God for his deliverance from sin. Paul teaches us, *“for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.”* (Ephesians 5:8-10, ESV)

One’s self is not in view here. It cannot be "I can handle it"; "I can make it happen"; "I am me; I am enough". It cannot be as it was put by Frank Sinatra in the song he made popular, *“For what is a man, what has he got? If not himself, then he has naught. To say the things he truly feels; And not the words of one who kneels. The record shows I took the blows—And did it my way!*

Any ability we have to imitate the holiness of God as beloved children is the direct result of conversion, of being light in the Lord. The shackles of our mind have been removed and we begin to know what it is to please the Lord. Therefore, the prophet urges us to, *“Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”* By the grace of God his people are no longer darkness but light and in order to properly express our gratitude to God we must strive for goodness, righteousness and truth and we must always be trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. In this manner we will pursue true happiness.