***You can Cause Loss of Rewards for Others
RO177-01***

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We are studying Romans 14:13-23. Our subject is "Christian Consideration," and this is segment number two.

Human beings, like God, are volitional creatures whose choices differ greatly among themselves. People do not all prefer doing things the same way. As a matter of fact, for people to be doing things in a lock-step, uniform way, it is necessary for some external pressure to be placed upon them, such as is done in a communist society. In the Christian community of believers, the apostle Paul has been teaching us, in Romans 14, that believers are free to follow their own individual preferences in non-moral and non-doctrinal issues.

**Weaker Christians**

Paul, therefore, in Romans 14:13, has exhorted Christians not to criticize or condemn each other for their personal choices in these non-essential areas. Paul advises each Christian to be concerned instead with himself not doing something that could cause another believer to sin, or to be ruined spiritually. Do not bug about what other Christians do that isn't your style. Be concerned that you do not cause a spiritual injury to other believers. Do not encourage another Christian, however, to violate his own conscience, even if his taboo is unscriptural. You should not do something to encourage a person to ignore his own sense of righteousness. The strong Christian, in private, does not have to follow these misguided taboos of the weak brother. But while he is in the presence of this person, he respects his scruples. Christian love restrains us then from causing a brother in Christ to become spiritually disillusioned, or to become indifferent toward godly conduct, because he seems to think that we don't care about it.

Paul illustrates his point again with this issue of ceremonially clean and unclean foods. Paul knows, from the Lord Jesus Christ directly, that in the church age there is no longer any category of clean and unclean foods as there was under the Mosaic Law.

But if some spiritually immature Christian feels in conscience that there are some unclean foods, then he should not eat those foods, even though you feel perfectly free to do so. Now it is true that some foods are not good to eat for health reasons, and therefore, it is wise to go easy on them: red meat; cheese; sugar; salt; butter; cream; eggs; bacon; pork; and, chicken skin. Chicken skin should not be left on the chicken when you cook it. It impregnates the meat with horrible quantities of cholesterol fat. And you shouldn't eat it if it has been left on during the cooking process.

Now these are all scientifically known health procedures. If you want to lower your cholesterol level, go easy on this category of foods. But a Christian, nevertheless, is free to eat them as he pleases. It is a matter between himself and God. It is not a religious issue. It is a health issue.

**Violating your own Conscience**

Now if a Christian feels it is wrong for him to eat certain foods for religious reasons, then it would be sin for him to do that, no matter what other believers may feel free to do about that matter. The issue is that violating your own conscience, in time, causes you to become indifferent to doing what is right now. Now your conscience may need to be re-taught and realigned to what is really God's regulations. But the principle of ignoring your conscience sears your conscience in time, if you ignore it, and causes you to be willing to do what is wrong at some point that God, in fact, condemns. The spiritually strong Christian is to be sensitive to the concerns of the spiritually weak in matters of right conduct.

So, today, Paul brings us to Romans 14:15, and deals with the subject of spiritual devastation. Here he deals with the issue of grieving another Christian. He says, "But if." This word "if" looks like this is the Greek Bible: "ei." That is a Greek particle. It introduces a conditional sentence, and it is the first-class condition that should be translated as "since," because it is a true condition: "Since your brother be grieved with your food." It is a true fact that some Christians, here in the conditions of New Testament times, were grieved by the food that other Christians were eating. Some of this was because this food had previously been offered to an idol in worship. That offended them. Some was because they were out of Jewish heritage, and there were certain foods that were on the unclean list that the gentiles felt free to eat, and gentile Christians were still eating those foods, and it caused an offense to the weaker Christian.

**Grief**

So, the "if" means since this condition actually does exist: "If your brother" is referring to someone who is a Christian, a fellow believer. But here, by the context, is referring to the Christian who is spiritually immature – he's weak" If your brother be grieved." The Greek word looks like this: "lupeo." And this word means "a personal emotional distress." You do something that causes a personal emotional distress to a fellow Christian. It connotes here a painful wounding of his conscience over what he considers to be a moral issue. It is in the present tense, which means that he has this constant feeling. It is passive. This means that he doesn't wound himself. It is what *you* do that causes him to be wounded. It is indicative mood – a statement of fact.

This grief has a spiritually destructive effect on the weak Christian, and that's the problem. The weak is grieved by feeling that he must do what the strong Christian feels free to do, but which actually offends him. And that's the problem. When a person is a weak Christian, he is sensitive about the fact that he is immature. He doesn't know a great deal. It bothers him to do something. He sees a strong Christian doing it. So, he says, "Oh, well, I'll do it." But he does not do it in good conscience. Therefore, he has in fact entered a realm of sin with himself.

Here, specifically, Paul says, "This brother is being grieved over food." The Greek word is "broma". It refers to the diet that the strong Christian feels free to follow. He is eating things that upset the weak Christian. The weak Christian may be offended by the fact that the strong Christian eats these unclean foods, or foods that had been once offered in worship to an idol.

So, Paul says, "If you do this, are you not walking in a certain way?" That is, don't you, in fact, treat this brother in a way that you should not be treating him? That is, you are no longer treating him according to love. The word "love" is the Greek word "agape." The word "agape" is mental attitude love. It is not emotional love. It does not have an emotional connotation. It has to do with mental attitude of goodwill – of freedom, from bitterness toward this person. So, a spirit of genuine concern for this week of brother's spiritual welfare is what is connoted here. This weak brother will feel free to imitate what you, as a strong Christian, do on some matter, and in the process, violates his conscience. This causes great distress for the weak Christian, who thereby may feel that he is disloyal to Jesus Christ.

The weak person may, by doing this, become acclimated to ignoring what he feels is right, and do what he thinks other people feel is right. He is violating his own religious convictions. That gives him a guilt complex which causes him remorse, and results in his loss of personal peace and joy.

So, the weak Christian is encouraged to do with the strong Christian would do. But he does it at the breakdown of his own controls and relationships to the Lord. So, love does not push a weak Christian to do what he feels is wrong, even though you may feel it is perfectly right to do so. So, since your brother will be greeted with your eating certain kinds of food, are you not failing to treat him in mental attitude goodwill love?

**Causing Spiritual Ruin**

Then there is the admonition against causing spiritual ruin. Paul says, "Don't destroy him." The Greek word is this word "apollumi." The word here means "ruin." It connotes a spiritual loss for a Christian. It is the negative particle: "Don't do this." And it is in the imperative mood. It is a command from God. Paul says, "Don't cause spiritual ruin to your brother." The strong Christian is not to cause the weak Christian to do something which results in spiritual injury. It will result in his loss of temporal fellowship. It will result, thereby, his loss of personal rewards.

In Matthew 18:14, this word is used, to give us an illustration of what the Holy Spirit means by this concept of "destroy:" "Even so, it is not the will of your Father Who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish." Here Jesus is dealing with how older Christians treat children. And the point that the Lord makes here is that these children should not be treated in such a way as to cause spiritual injury to them. By the context, we know that this is not injury in terms of loss of salvation, but injury spiritually to this child. So, it uses the same Greek word. Jesus says, "Don't 'apollumi' those little children." What does he mean by that? He means don't cause them spiritual ruin. The Father is concerned for the spiritual development of each believer, because the ultimate goal is rewards for service and joy in the Lord.

This whole context deals with not hurting Christians in their spiritual development. You see that in verses 6, 10, and 12-13 – taking care of other believers for their welfare.

This word is also used in 1 Corinthians 8:11: "And through your Knowledge, shall your weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?" And here again, the word "perish" is not referring to loss of salvation, but it is referring to this person's spiritual ruin.

Also, here is another use of this same word "apollumi" in a very sobering context. In 2 John 8, the Holy Spirit says, "Look to yourselves (you Christians), that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward." Concern yourself that you do not "apollumi" (lose those things) which we have wrought. The things that John has done for them is teach them the basic guidelines of doctrine, so that they understand how God works, and how to be related to Him successfully through God the Holy Spirit. And this word in 2 John 8 points out to us that you can injure another believer spiritually in such a way, by your conduct, that offends him or misguides him, because of your indifference toward him, that will result in his losing temporal fellowship, and entering a status of carnality, and thereby begin to live in a period of loss of personal rewards, because he is not producing divine good works.

**You Can Cause Loss of Rewards for Others**

That is serious business. It's going to be a grim thing to stand in heaven someday, and look across at a believer, and realize, as you stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ, and rewards are passed out, that he is suffering a loss because of something that you did in living before him. You caused him to stumble spiritually, and that resulted in an eternal loss for him.

So, this business of being concerned for not grieving, and not destroying a fellow Christian, is very serious indeed. And here, Paul says, "To destroy him, of all things, for such a thing as food. This very person, in behalf of whom," he says, "Christ died," referring here to the physical death of Jesus Christ, and referring to His personal sacrifice for the sins of the world upon the cross.

**The Death of Christ for the Sins of the World**

This word looks like this. It's an important word that I like to call to your attention. The Greek word is "apothnesko." It refers to the death of Christ for the sins of the world. And it is in what we call the aorist tense. The aorist tense in the Greek language tells us that here's something that happens once for all. Everywhere the Bible talks about salvation, and everywhere the Bible talks about God's provision for your personal salvation, it's always a once-for-all transaction. You never lose your place in the family of God once you've been born into it. It is a personal action by Jesus Christ alone. Therefore, it was done right.

So, the Lord Jesus Christ so loved the weak Christian that He died on the cross to pay the penalty of death for the sins of this weak believer. So, Jesus Christ Himself is interested in the spiritual well-being of the weak Christian to the point of giving Himself in death.

So Paul says, "This person for whom Christ did that much – is it really too much to ask you, as a mature strong Christian, to exercise enough mental attitude, goodwill love toward this week believer, so as not to do something that hurts him spiritually? You, as a strong Christian, should be willing to forgo some of your grace freedoms for this Christian's well-being?" Eating food here was the example that caused a spiritual injury to the Christian, and Paul says, "It really is not worth it."

So, if you are with a Jewish believer, and you're out eating with them, don't order pork chops. Do that when you're by yourself, if you like to eat pork. Don't sit there and offend him, because it will offend them throughout that whole meal. It will distress him to no end. Idol meet in front of a converted gentile caused them to stumble, because they were offended by what they had come out of. They did not like to see Christians dealing with this that had been used in worship of the idols.

So, Paul's point, in verse 15, is: don't cause spiritual injury to your weaker brother in Christ. That's the bottom line. It's not worth it. Remember what Christ was willing to do for this person."

Now Paul's example must be applied in each of our situations as per the moment of time in which we are dealing with people, because people have different hang ups, and you must be sensitive to the situation at the moment. But the general principle is to see to it that you do not cause any unnecessary distress to them spiritually.

Now it is true that some Christians are so legalistic that you can hardly deal with them and not offend them. I mean, if you walk out to look at your car on Sunday in the driveway, it offends them, because they think of Sunday as a holy non-active day, and so on. But even in that case, you do the best you can. You make a balance. And when you are in their presence, you act accordingly. When you are out of their presence, you can be free to exercise your full freedom and liberty in Christ.

**The Kingdom of God**

Now in Romans 14:16-17, Paul reinforces what he has said by talking about the Kingdom of God – the nature of the Kingdom of God. He says in verse 16: "Let not then your good be evil-spoken of." The good that he is speaking of here is described by this Greek word "agathos." This word gives us a clue to what he is talking about here, because this is the word for "good" in the Bible. There are different words for "good," but this is the word that refers to something that is morally right, and therefore beneficial. All of the moral principles of the Word of God are beneficial to an individual. When you break the moral principles, you lose the benefit. Our society says that it doesn't make any difference, but they are wrong. Breaking the moral principles causes a personal loss. And here this word is referring to something that is morally right, and therefore, it is beneficial.

**The Age of the Law**

By this context, it is referring specifically to what has been the point of discussion; that is, the liberty that a Christian has in Christ. In the Old Testament, people were burdened with an enormous number of regulations and guidelines: 613 of them. This is how they had to live. This is how they had to walk before God. And all of these were symbols of something that was going to come through Christ down the line.

**The Age of Grace**

Now the Christian comes into the age of grace. He is in the body of Christ. He is part of Jesus Christ Himself. Christ is in him, and he is in Christ. This is a totally new relationship, and at the heart of that relationship is personal freedom – personal freedom in the finest, most complete sense that any human being has ever experienced.

Now this freedom is coming under attack. This is part of the good that God gives to those who love Him, and who are called into His purpose – personal freedom. And it is talking here specifically about the liberty of a strong Christian. This is freedom from all the Mosaic Law ceremonial system – the system for living and for worshiping. This is the termination of distinction between clean and unclean foods, so that you can choose to eat whatever you wish. Christians are free to use what God has created, provided that they use it in a spirit of thanksgiving to Him for it. The Christian is free from observing holy days. There are no more fasts for us to observe. There are no more religious ceremonies. There's nothing but perfect freedom and walking in the grace of God.

Paul says, "Don't permit this good thing of Christian freedom, that all of you now enjoy, to be something that other people will blaspheme. The Greek word is "blasphemeo." "Blasphemeo" means "to speak reproachfully of something" or "to revile it." It means to blaspheme in the sense of giving something a bad name. Here it refers specifically to causing others to speak evil of Christian liberty in Christ during the church age.

Now I know that many of you, sooner or later, have had the experience of other Christians, in legalistic contexts of life, being critical of you, and attacking you because of your freedom in Christ – your willingness to be free of all the restraints of the legalistic system, and for you to live as a person under grace. And if you do this in a wrong way, they will criticize you. The truth of the matter is that, even if you do it in the right way, and with graciousness, and with kindness, and with understanding, you can expect, from the legalistic Christian, criticism for your Christian liberty. And what he is doing is blaspheming the very liberty that Christ died to give us.

The Bible says, "Don't do this. Don't live in such a way that you really give people a legitimate opportunity to give a bad name to Christian liberty." This word is in the present tense, which means that no time should you do this. It is in the passive voice, which means that you do this to this good quality of Christian liberty by your actions. And, interestingly enough, this is imperative mood. It is a divine command. There is no option here. The Bible is very explicit. Don't do anything that causes Christian freedom to be discredited, and to get a bad name. Do not let what, for you as a strong Christian, is a good thing from God, to become something to speak evil of by others. Do not use your personal liberty which you have secured by salvation through grace to do what is wrong.

**Don't Let Liberty Become License**

That's the problem that we all face. This is the concern we have. We have freedoms in Christ. The issue is: do not permit your freedom to become license. Liberty becomes license. And that problem we all struggle with every day of our lives. It will result in the condemnation of Christian freedom by others. That, in turn, discredits God. Don't use your freedom, in fact, to convince a weaker Christian to do the things that he feels are wrong for him. The moment you find that some Christian has a reservation about doing something that you, in your heart, say, "Oh, there's nothing wrong with that." And there really isn't. But the moment he indicates concern or reticence, you back off. Just don't push him. Don't do it. It is a very serious crime against that individual to force him, or to encourage him, to violate his sense of right and wrong. To violate his conscience, will make an indifferent toward other right things. And it will give them a guilt complex.

So, a selfish insistence on exercising one's Christian liberty may tear down and ruin a weaker Christian spiritually, whereas love will build him up. The misuse of Christian liberty by the strong Christian results in the slandering of freedom in Christ, and in dishonor of the grace of God which has provided that liberty. So, if a person thinks something is wrong, even if it isn't, he shouldn't do it, and you shouldn't encourage him to do so. Causing a weak Christian to violate his conscience will, as we have shown you, result in his loss of reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ. So, do not let your conduct as a mature Christian become a bone of contention with the immature believers.

Then in verse 17, in describing further the nature of the Kingdom of God, Paul proceeds to give us greater details: "For." And this would indicates that he's going to give now a strong reason for not causing harm to the weaker brother. This is a caution against stubborn indulgence in your liberty. He says, "For the Kingdom of God." The Greek word is the "basileia." The "basileia" is specifically the Kingdom of God here. And the Kingdom of God has different significance in the Bible in different places. Here the term "Kingdom of God" refers basically to the realm of salvation and to the Christian life. It's the area in which God is the sovereign ruler. It's the area in which God's will is the final law. It is the rule of God in the family of God. The Kingdom of God deals with the relationship of man to God. It does not deal here specifically with the relationship of man to man.

You must get that distinction. When he says, "The kingdom of God," he means the relationship in salvation (coming into eternal life through salvation) and the Christian life. And what the Christian life is called to do is a matter of dealing with man to God, not man to man. How God qualifies a law center for eternal life in heaven, and provides him with a Christian way of life on earth is what Paul is speaking of. It does not consist of man providing better social conditions on earth for other men.

**The Social Gospel**

You will find that the social gospel that was so prominent in the 1920s and 1930s, when the great battles were being fought in the major denominations, has not died. The social gospel is coming back with a vengeance. We forget that until we meet somebody who is in the ministry, and they tell us the gospel is not all that stuff of John 3:16. Do you know what the gospel is? Do you know God is trying to do? Salvation is giving people food for their stomachs, fella. It's giving them good housing. It's getting them off the streets. Salvation is giving them economic equality. And it's all these social ills that are considered salvation. This now is what churches and Christians are supposed to do.

But the Kingdom of God is not the social gospel of equality. It is not government welfare. It is not justice. It is not medical care. It's not housing for the homeless. It is not peace. It is not a good environment. It is not law and order. It is not education. It is not jobs. All of those things are important, but that is not what the gospel is about. This idea here that the kingdom of God is man tinkering with social evils that he can repair is a misguided hope, because the problem is that you cannot repair the sin nature which causes these damages in society. You cannot bring moral, social, and economic righteousness to the world which rejects Jesus Christ.

There will come a time when there will be a triumph for righteousness; for peace; and, for joy in human society. But that awaits the return of Christ in His millennial kingdom.

**Liberation Theology**

In the Latin American countries of Central and South America, this concept of the social justice has become a wildfire that's burning everything in its way. It is a theology that is akin to communism. And it actually has joined with Marxism. And it's called liberation theology. And what they preach is freedom through social justice. And I stress to you that when the Bible uses the term "the Kingdom of God" here, it is not referring to something that man could do for man. It is talking about what God can do for man. And out of what God does for man, man then becomes capable of doing something for man.

**Christian Fellowship**

Specifically here, when the apostle Paul speaks of the sovereign rule and the authority of God in human society and in human experience, it is not food. This time the word is the "brosis." Therefore, it is not like the word we had before, which was "broma," which is food. This is "brosis," and this is actually eating. That's how it should be translated. The Kingdom of God does not consist of eating. A Christian does not become spiritual by means of his diet. The gospel is not getting food to hungry people. God Himself does not judge you on the basis of whether you have fish or beef in your stomach. The Christian life and Christian fellowship is not eating.

This puts a devastating blow to a lot of church programs. They run suppers together for eating. They call it "Coffee and." Every time they meet, they call it "Coffee and" something. And this is a big thing. If they couldn't eat, they don't know what they would do with themselves. Their whole church program would go down the tube. That's their program – gathering together to eat.

The Word of God says, "The Christian life is not based on what you eat." Paul says, "Furthermore, it's not based upon what you drink ("hosos")." This word is indeed "drinking" now. So, the Christian life is not based upon what you drink. You do not become spiritual by not drinking certain beverages. Muslims do not drink alcohol, to their credit, but they are not Christians, nor are they spiritual. They're not going to heaven just because they don't booze it up. God does not deal in His kingdom in terms of what you eat and what you drink. God does not care what you drink, provided it does not harm you or others.

**Logistical Grace**

So, the Kingdom of God does not consist of these external acts and rituals. It is not based on matters of eating and drinking, but on spiritual values. Jesus tried to stress to His disciples in Matthew 6:31-33, when He said, "Therefore, be not anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or with what shall we be clothed?'" Now what Jesus is saying is that these are the basic essentials of life. This is what you must have. You do have to have something to eat; to drink; and, to be clothed with: "For after all these things to the gentile seek." That's the epitome of their lives: "For your Heavenly Father knows that you have need of these things." The Father knows that you cannot survive without these essential provisions. What's the principle? "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. This is what we refer to as logistical grace. God, the great Quartermaster, knows what we need. He has the logistical means to provide us with what we need to live to survive and to serve Him. So, external observances are not the issue. It is certain internal qualities that are the things that characterize the Kingdom of God.

**Righteousness – Justification**

So, Paul says, "It's not these externals – your drinking and eating, but." Then interestingly, the Holy Spirit leads him to use the strong word for "but" in the Greek language. This is *the* exception – a big exception. What is the nature? Number one is righteousness. The Greek word is "dikaiosune." This refers to absolute righteousness which is secured by faith in Christ as one's personal Savior. This is justification. This is what the apostle Paul referred to in Romans 3:21: "But now the righteousness (the absolute righteousness, a part of God, apart from the Law) is manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the prophets." This is the righteousness that you must have to enter heaven. Without absolute righteousness, you cannot go to heaven. If you have absolute righteousness, you are then, in the sight of God, as good as Jesus Christ. And that's what it takes to go to heaven.

**Sanctification**

However, it does also connote your personal sanctification – your experience of righteousness; that is, your dealing with people with integrity. The genuine believer is himself a citizen of heaven, and, by nature, he yearns for righteousness.

**Peace**

The second thing that characterizes the kingdom of God is peace, which is the Greek word "eirene." "Eirene" refers to peace with God which results from the fact that you possess absolute righteousness. If you have absolute righteousness, you are justified before God. If you are justified, peace floods your soul. Romans 5:1: "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." The reason many people walk down an aisle at the end of the service in a so-called invitation, and never come to peace between themselves and God, is because they have put that act of walking down the aisle as the basis of securing peace with God, and you'll never get it that way. Peace is the result of a quiet admission that you're wrong; that God is right; that you have changed your mind; and, that you accept Christ as person Savior. And you do that quietly in the congregation, in your heart, without any public fanfare, in order not to contaminate it, and confuse you with any human doing.

Many a person has been kept out of heaven by being invited to walk down a church aisle. It's a great travesty, and it is a pity that it is still done in an enlightened age that knows what the Scriptures teach. It does give you big membership, and that's the point.

**Reconciliation**

Peace with God is the Christian being reconciled with God. So, he's at peace with his soul about his eternal destiny. When we say "reconciled," we mean that you are now in tune with God's holiness. All of you had to be careful to reconcile your clocks last night with the new change in time. If you did not reconcile your clock, you will be out of sync with what is going on in terms of the church service. That is what the word "reconciliation" means. It means "adjustment to a standard." Now once you know that you are adjusted to the standard of a holy God, boy, you take a deep breath and relax. That is peace in the soul. And it enables you then to be at peace with your neighbor as well. For the wicked, there is no peace.

I like the way the prophet Isaiah puts that in Isaiah 57:20-21. Isaiah says, "But the wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. 'There is no peace,' says my Lord, 'to the wicked.'" And if you've ever walked along the beach of an ocean, you will understand that analogy – that out of the ocean comes regurgitating all of the junk, and all of the filth, and all of the dirt, and all of the oil spills, and everything that is offensive, and it gets washed up on the beach eventually. And he says, "This is how unsaved people are. They're constantly regurgitating all of the filth and the evil that the sin nature can produce." And it's because there's a turmoil down inside them. They have no peace with God.

Peace with God, of course, includes being in the inner circle of temporal fellowship, because your sins have been confessed. No ritual in the world can possibly secure for you this peace with God. Philippians 4:7 says, "And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." There is no other way.

Furthermore, Christians who feed in the peaceful green pastures of Bible doctrine are able to go out to serve in the angelic warfare effectively. It is peace which is our legacy from Jesus Himself. In John 14:27, as He approached His death, He said to His disciples, "Peace, I leave with you. My peace I give unto you, not as the world gives, I give unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." So, this kind of peace, which characterizes the Kingdom of God, means that you can stand in the midst of great turmoil, and yet you are at peace with the Lord.

**Joy**

There is a final characteristic, and that is joy. It looks like this in the Greek Bible. It's the word "chara." Absolute righteousness results in personal peace, then it produces joy in the believer. The happiest people in the world are not those for whom everything is going well in life. The happiest people in the world are those who have absolute righteousness, which has given them internal peace in their souls with God, and therefore they are at joy no matter what happens in life. There is no happiness in the heart of the unsaved person no matter what religious rituals he observes. They never get happy.

**God is Happy**

Please remember that God is happy. God is always happy. God is never unhappy. And it is His intention to share His happiness all the time with those who are in his kingdom, in his family. In Psalm 16:11, this principle is set forth for us. The psalmist says, "You will show me the path of life. In Your presence is fullness of joy. At your right hand, there are pleasures for ever more."

Psalm 32:11: "Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, you righteous, and shout for joy, all you that are upright in heart."

Psalm 43:4: "Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy. Yea, upon the harp will I praise You, O God my God." Those who are related to God in a genuine eternal relationship are the people who are happy.

The basis of all this joy, of course, is that chain reaction. First you have absolute righteousness, then you have peace with God, and out of it evolves your personal joy. When the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world, the angels told the shepherds that what was happening was going to produce for them and for mankind great happiness.

In Romans 5:2-3, the apostle Paul says, "By whom also, we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God, and not so only, but we glory in tribulations, also knowing that tribulation work with patience," and so on. He gives that chain reaction: happiness in the midst of any crisis.

Ultimately, the thing that makes a person happy is his knowledge of Bible doctrine. In John 15:11, Jesus tried to make that clear, when He said, "These things have I spoken unto you (biblical instruction – doctrinal principles) that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." If you want to be a happy person, then come to church Sunday morning and Sunday evening, and get the authoritative instruction in the Word of God that feeds your soul in the green pastures of doctrine, so that you can indeed go in and go out of that enclosure with capacity to do God's work, and not be a fake.

The order of these three virtues, by the way, is essential. You cannot rearrange these. If you want joy, you have to start up here with absolute righteousness. If you want peace, you have to have absolute righteousness first. Then you will have peace. If you want joy, you have to have absolute righteousness and peace. Then the result will be joy in your soul. There can be no reversal of these virtues.

So, being in the kingdom of God is more than being honest; being peaceful; and, being cheerful. All that can be produced by the sin nature. It is absolute righteousness that makes us acceptable to God. It is peace that provides concord between God and our souls. And it is joy in the happiness of our salvation, secured forever by the grace of God. Peace in the Holy Spirit Paul concludes. And the phrase "in the Holy Spirit," in verse 17, actually refers to all three. God, the Father produces our absolute righteousness. God the Son gives us the peace. And it is God the Holy Spirit that then makes us happy Christians.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1988

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