

Happiness or Holiness

Do we have to choose one or the other?

People are excusing every type of wrongdoing on the grounds that they are “*just trying to secure a little happiness.*”

A young woman before she consents to become a man’s partner will ask “*will this man make me happy?*”

The letter columns of papers and magazines are wet with the self-pitying tears of people seeking to “*preserve their happiness.*”

Any selfish desire for happiness is as sinful as any other selfish desire.

This attitude of selfishly seeking personal happiness is the hedonistic philosophy of Ancient Greece that preached that the major good in life was seeking personal pleasure.

The effect this desire had on others’ lives did **not** feature in their thinking.

When this misunderstanding of the purpose of life is applied to our society all nobility of character is destroyed and it produces selfish weaklings who are easily seduced by each whim of society.

Yet this way of thinking and living is a very popular creed adopted by the majority of people.

Asking the question “*Are we born to be happy?*” does **not** occur to many.

Nor do many question if we have the moral right to be happy.

The only question addressed is “*How can I get the most happiness out of life?*”

The theme of all the popular books, plays and films is that personal happiness is the legitimate end to the dramatic struggle of life.

I suggest that this hectic scramble after personal happiness is an evil attitude of mind as certainly as the scramble after wealth, fame or worldly success.

This misunderstanding is rooted in not knowing our own true moral condition.

When we really know ourselves by comparing ourselves with our Creator we then see we have **no right** to be happy.

Just a glimpse of our true nature will bring total disillusionment to our claim for personal happiness.

The doctrine of our right to personal happiness is anti-God and anti-Christ, and the wide acceptance by society tells us a lot about the morality of the same society.

This effect of modern hedonism [seeking of personal pleasures as the major reason for life] can influence the people of God.

Too often the gospel message presented by churches is given as a means to personal happiness, peace of mind or personal security, and nothing more.

This approach to the “*gospel message*” is to present God’s Word as a media to *relax* people and for them to use it as if it were a drug.

How wrong this approach to the “*gospel message*” is will be discovered easily by the simple act of reading and meditating on the message Jesus brought and the apostles preached.

The emphasis is **not** on happiness but on Holiness.

God is more concerned with the state of our heart than the state of our feelings.

Happiness is of the flesh, joy is of the spirit, the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 5:22-23 [NIV] *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”*

Joy is next to and follows love in the list of fruits that a life subject to and living within the will of The Holy Spirit will bring us.

Galatians 5:24-26 [NIV] *“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.”*

The childish clamour after personal happiness can become a real snare to spiritual growth.

We may even fall into the spiritual snare of cultivating a religious “joy” without a corresponding righteous life.

Galatians 5:22-26 [Message Bible] *“It is obvious what kind of life develops out of trying to get your own way all the time: repetitive, loveless, cheap sex; a stinking accumulation of mental and emotional garbage; frenzied and joyless grabs for happiness; trinket gods; magic-show religion; paranoid loneliness; cut-throat competition; **all-consuming-yet-never-satisfied wants**; a brutal temper; an impotence to love or be loved; divided homes and divided lives; small-minded and lopsided pursuits; the vicious habit of depersonalising everyone into a rival; uncontrolled and uncontrollable addictions; ugly parodies of community. I could go on.*

“This isn’t the first time I have warned you, you know. If you use your freedom this way, you will not inherit God’s kingdom.

“But what happens when we live God’s way? He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard, things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely.

*“Legalism is helpless in bringing this about; it only gets in the way. **Among those who belong to Christ, everything connected with getting our own way and mindlessly responding to what everyone else calls necessities is killed off for good, crucified.***

“Since this is the kind of life we have chosen, the life of the Spirit, let us make sure that we do not just hold it as an idea in our heads or a sentiment in our hearts, but work out its implications in every detail of our lives. That means we will not compare ourselves with each other as if one of us were better and another worse. We have far more interesting things to do with our lives. Each of us is an original.”

Where then should all our energies be expended?

John 15:1-11 [NIV] *“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. **No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.** ”I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I*

*in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. **I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.**"*

Seek to know and do the Will of God and leave the matter of joy in our lives to Jesus and the working of The Holy Spirit in us.

Go to our Creator on our knees and dare to ask Him never to give us more happiness in life than holiness.

Dare to ask God to make us Holy whether that makes us happy or not.

Be assured that in the end as we develop within ourselves the Love of God, by our being led by The Holy Spirit, joy will follow that unselfish love for God and other people.

A joy that springs out of a more intimate fellowship with God, is joy that is elevated far above the selfish desire of the flesh to be happy.

Only the pursuit of holiness will bring us lasting eternal joy.

Where do we find in God's Handbook For Life, the Christian Bible, guidelines to eternal joy as taught by Jesus Christ?

Matthew 5:3 [NIV] *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."*

"Blessed" the Greek word is *"makarios"* a word that was used in classical Greek specially to describe the life of their gods.

In Christianity it refers to the divine and godlike joy.

The meaning of the word *"makarios"* can best be seen by one particular usage of it.

The Greeks called the island of Cyprus *"hē Makaria"* meaning *"the happy isle"*. They did this because they believed that Cyprus was so lovely, so rich and fertile an island that anyone living there did not need to go beyond its coastline to find a perfectly happy life.

"makarios" describes a joy which has its secret within itself.

A joy which is serene and untouchable and self-contained completely independent of all the chances and changes in life.

John 16:22 [NIV] *"... no-one can take away your joy."*

Christ was encouraging His disciples with that statement.

Galatians 5:22 [NIV] *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,"*

The Greek word used here is *"chara"* expressing a *"calm inner delight"* and is the result of the active indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The study and application of the list of attitudes to life that Jesus taught in **Matthew 5:3-12** will bring to us both holiness and eternal joy.

You don't have to choose one or the other.