

God's Plan for Real Joy

Most Americans struggle with understanding the difference between biblical joy and human fun. When asked how to get joy, most people will start listing hobbies, activities and various things that make them feel fun-filled. But a problem quickly arises – I have known a number of people who have time, money, things and activities but are very low on the biblical joy scale. They do have fun, but sense little deep fulfillment. Basically, they try to substitute fun things for deep commitment. I have known them and you have too!

God has a much deeper plan. It is a plan that leads to singing in a dark prison (Acts 16:25). It is a plan that sees self-denial and even suffering as a road to genuine rejoicing in Jesus. In the fourth chapter of Peter's first epistle, he encourages us to understand a vital reality:

Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. (1 Peter 4:1, 2).

Did you catch it? Living for the will of God and denying human passions includes being armed with an ability to suffer "in the flesh" as one of our weapons to cease from sin. Peter goes further in verses 12-14:

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

Wow, that's challenging! **"...to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing...."** So many today, even religious people, tend to see the church as a social club with a religious theme. Fun and games? Yes! Suffering? Not so much!

But notice the deep message of the actual passage – true rejoicing, biblical rejoicing, comes in spite of suffering! Suffering from what? From being like Jesus. It comes from being separate from the world (2 Cor. 6:17); from blessing those who persecute you (Rom. 12:14); from rejoicing in the midst of persecution (Matt. 5:11,12). True rejoicing, biblical rejoicing, comes no matter what! Share Jesus and His truth that sets us free from sin (John 8:32) and much of the world will hate you! But, **"...to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing...."** That is true, biblical joy!

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