

## The Duty of Happiness

1. Thess. 5:16

### Introduction

1. "Be happy-- that's an order!"
2. This is a free translation of our text today.
3. 1 Thessalonians 5:16 is neither a plea nor a suggestion; it is a commandment, an order.
4. Christians are commanded to be happy.
5. The idea of happiness being a duty-- a responsibility rather than a reward-- may seem strange to you, for most people think that happiness is something of an innate talent or else a gift that a few rare people receive completely apart from any effort on their part.
6. This is not the Christian view of happiness.
7. According to the New Testament:
  - (1) Happiness is within the reach of every Christian
  - (2) Happiness is the duty of every Christian. It is not a matter of pre-destination or disposition; it is a matter of determination.
    - (a) Abraham Lincoln said that people are about as happy as they make up their minds to be.
8. With the idea that happiness is a duty, let's look at the text and some neighboring verses to see:
  - (1) The meaning of happiness
  - (2) The necessity of happiness
  - (3) The secret of happiness

### I. The Meaning of Happiness (V. 16)

1. The word rejoice means to be exuberantly, abundantly, overtly happy.
2. In other words we are to feel happy and let it show.
3. And it will show-- in our faces.
4. When I was a boy in Vernon, my mother and dad and I used to go down and park on Main Street Saturday night and watch the people walk by.
5. They still do that in small towns in Texas.
6. It was at this time that I became a people-watcher, and it is still one of the most fascinating things in the world to me to watch people.
7. One of the things that stands out most vividly as I think of some of the places we have been--Chicago, New York, Washington, Miami, San Francisco-- is the interesting people we saw.
8. Ann and I and R. H. and Betty Dilday spent one whole evening in the lobby of the Statler Hilton Hotel in Chicago just watching people.
9. In New York, I remember noticing:
  - (1) How surprisingly clean and happy the children of Chinatown were
  - (2) How miserable and hostile the people of the Bowery were
  - (3) I had a field day on Times Square on Saturday night!
10. I like to look at people and try to figure them out--what they are like, what they do for a living, what kind of families they have, what they think of things.
11. It is amazing what you can tell about a person from his face.
12. Sternness shows, and suffering-- cordiality, pride, timidity.

13. And happiness shows, or the lack of it.
14. This is the point of this verse.
15. Since what we feel in our hearts shows so clearly on our faces, Christians must strive for a deep, abiding joy of life.
16. They must not be grumpy, scowling, critical.
17. When a person is critical of everything and everybody, you can mark it down that that person is miserable on the inside.
18. The Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius in his Meditations said, "To the jaundiced, honey tastes bitter."
19. If a person has spiritual indigestion, it will show in his face.
20. Christians must be happy and let it show by a spring in the step, a gleam in the eye, a smile on the face, and a lilt in the voice.
21. And it is to be a perpetual attitude-- "Rejoice evermore."
22. In the Greek text the adverb is placed before the verb for further emphasis, and it means always show that you are happy.
23. You say, "But this is hard to do!"
24. Sure it is.
25. There are days when we feel like we should have "stayed in bed": the weather is bad, circumstances are wrong, the future looks uncertain.
26. But even on these days, we must reach way down into our spiritual reserves and come up with happy hearts and faces
27. It is hard to be cheerful all the time.
28. That is why it is commanded rather than simply suggested.
29. Rejoicing is something we must work at.

## II. The Necessity for Happiness (V. 14)

1. Why is it so imperative for Christians to be so happy?
2. Because we cannot do our work for the Lord without this attitude.
3. Verses 14-15 outline some of our work for Jesus--warn, comfort, set an example.
4. You cannot do anything for Jesus without a happy face.
5. Happiness that shows is necessary for the:
  - (1) Preacher
  - (2) Singer
  - (3) Teacher
  - (4) Visitor
  - (5) Usher
  - (6) Witness

## III. The Secret of Happiness (verses 17-18)

1. These two verses tell us the secret of happiness.
2. In order to "always rejoice" we must:
  - (1) Pray perpetually (17)
    - a. This does not mean to stay on our knees all the time.
    - b. But it does mean to stay in contact with God all the time, asking him to help us stay on top of life rather than having life stay on top of us.
    - c. He is delighted to give this kind of help and strength--if it is for the sake of his work.
    - d. Seek happiness for selfish purposes, and you will never have it.
    - e. Seek it for the sake of serving Christ, and God will flood you with it.

(2) Count your blessings (18)

- a. What does the Christian have to be happy about?
- b. His blessings are too numerous to say.
  - (a) An abundant life on this earth and the assurance of an eternal life with God later.
  - (b) The resources to turn defeats into victories (cf. Romans 8:28). Brooks Hayes served several terms in Congress, but was defeated a few years ago because of his moderate racial views. The morning after his defeat, his wife served him Wheaties for breakfast, and he said, "Honey, I can't eat this." She said, "Why not?" He replied, "Because this is the breakfast of champions."
  - (c) The providential care of God. At the Indian Leadership Conference at which I spoke, it was my privilege to get acquainted with Dr. John Dowdy, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Guthrie, Oklahoma. We were roommates.

One night Dr. Dowdy gave his testimony about how he had become a Baptist. He said that his father and father-in-law were both outstanding Methodist preachers, and when he was grown he to a Methodist school and became a Methodist pastor. He said that he made an intensive study of the different religions of the world and of the different denominations of America. He said that as he studied, he found himself moving more and more toward Baptist position. Finally he became convinced that immersion was the scriptural method of baptism, and he told his wife one Saturday morning that he felt that he must become a Baptist.

The problem was that at the time, he was the pastor of the First Methodist Church in Sulphur, Oklahoma! Mrs. Dowdy had made the study with him and agreed to do whatever he felt that he should do.

On Sunday morning he read his letter of resignation to the church and told them that that night he was going to be baptized in the First Baptist Church. This was April 2, 1934.

He said that the Baptist Church was so full that night, he and his wife could hardly get in.

After becoming a Baptist, he was immediately confronted with some problems. He was living in the Methodist parsonage that was furnished. He and his wife moved into a hotel on Monday. He said that he only had \$50, and the bank where he might have borrowed some money has just closed.

On Tuesday the Baptist pastor asked him to go to a Workers' Conference in Ada with him. He said that he had never heard of a Workers' Conference, but he surely did not have anything else to do, so he went.

The song leader did not show up that morning, so he led the singing. The pianist did not come that afternoon, so he played the piano.

At this Workers' Conference he was invited to begin a revival at Idabel the next Sunday. He had invitations to preach revivals until mid-summer when he was called to the Fair View Baptist Church near Shawnee.

He finished his last year of college in O. B. U. and has been at work for Jesus in Baptist ranks ever since. He was the

associate executive secretary of Kentucky for a number of years, a professor in the Kansas City Seminary for a while, and was for twelve years the president of Southwestern College in Bolivar, Missouri.

The point of this story is that God will take care of those who follow his leadership, and if this does not bring a surge of joy to the heart and a smile of hope to the face, I do not know what it would take.

(d) Every Christian has blessings to count. An old woman was giving her testimony for Christ in a prayer meeting. She said, "I've only got two teeth left, but thank the Lord, they meet."

Conclusion

1. Our best prospects are Satan's dissatisfied customers.
2. Our best advertisement is the joy we know in Jesus.

*Handwritten notes in blue ink on the left margin, including the word "Blessings" and other illegible scribbles.*