

# What Makes Love Happy

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## **Text:**

I Corinthians 12

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

## **Introduction:**

We are making our way slowly and carefully through Paul's definition of love in I Corinthians 13: 4-8. We are taking the time to carefully examine each of the fifteen verbs that he uses to describe how love acts. We have examined love's two principal characteristics; it is patient and kind, and we have looked at the seven things that love doesn't do. Now we are going to consider love's joy. In one short verse we are told that love does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. You can tell a lot about a person by the things which make him happy. Our joy reveals the condition of our heart. A heart in tune with the heart of God will take joy in the things that give joy to God and be grieved by the things that grieve the heart of God. Since love is, as we have seen, a divine gift that reflects the very nature of God, it can take pleasure in nothing that is contrary to God. Rejoicing for the right reasons is a sure sign that the love of God is being perfected in us.

To help us feel the impact of this verse as we should, I want first to look at what it means by the words "wrongdoing", and "truth", and then to look at some biblical examples of this principle in action.

## I. Wrongdoing and Truth

The clearest translation of the word that the ESV translates “wrongdoing” and the KJV translates “iniquity” would be “unrighteousness”. It is formed in exactly the same way that the word “unrighteousness” is formed in English by adding a privative prefix to a positive noun. Righteousness in the Bible is that which conforms to the character of God. “God is Light and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). Sin, or unrighteousness, is that which does not conform to the holy character of God. This is the reason that when Jesus, who is the “Light that lights every man by his coming into the world” (John 1:9) came into the world he was rejected, and became the source of condemnation for those who rejected him. He says in John 3:19-21:

And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

Notice how, in this passage, truth and wickedness are contrasted. Jesus, who is the light, that is God-incarnate, hence, righteousness incarnate, comes into the world, but men do not rejoice at his coming. In fact, the majority rejects him, and wants nothing to do with him. Why? Because, as Jesus says here, their works are evil. Evil men do not rejoice in the truth, but rejoice in unrighteousness. Therefore, instead of coming to the Light which reveals their wickedness and brings salvation from it, they flee from it lest their deeds should be revealed for what they are. The person who loves and does the truth, on the other hand loves the Light, Christ. He comes to him he rejoices in him. This is the reason that in the Gospels, from the time Christ is first born, the characteristic reaction of all those who recognize him is joy.

So when Paul says that love “rejoices in the truth”, he is not thinking of the truth as an abstraction, but as the concrete reality that has been revealed in Jesus Christ. He sums up his understanding of the truth in Ephesians 4:21 where he says simply: “the truth is in Jesus”. This truth, when it is embraced, produces righteous behavior. This is the reason the Scriptures do not speak of just knowing the truth or believing the truth but of doing the truth.

On the other hand, all that is contrary to this truth that has been revealed in Jesus Christ is unrighteousness. It is contrary to God and to his kingdom. It is darkness and destruction and could never be a source of joy for anyone who has embraced the gospel, who has come to the Light, who has become a follower of Jesus Christ.

## II. Biblical Examples

In order to implant this picture of love's joy in our hearts let us look at some biblical examples both negative and positive. First we will look at a couple of negative examples of the wicked rejoicing at unrighteousness, and then we will see some positive examples of love rejoicing in the truth.

For a first example consider these verses from Psalm 10:1-7:

Why standest thou afar off, O LORD? *why* hidest thou *thyself* in times of trouble? The wicked in *his* pride doth persecute the poor: let them be taken in the devices that they have imagined. For the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire, and blesseth the covetous, *whom* the LORD abhorreth. The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek *after God*: *God is* not in all his thoughts. His ways are always grievous; thy judgments *are* far above out of his sight: *as for* all his enemies, he puffeth at them. He hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved: for *I shall* never *be* in adversity. His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud: under his tongue *is* mischief and vanity.

This passage illustrates precisely what Paul is saying in Romans 1:32, where after describing sinful humans in vivid terms mostly drawn from the Old Testament he concludes his description with these words: "Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them."

This principle is confirmed in our own time by common topics of conversation and the subjects of entertainment. The things that people do, the things that they discuss in their leisure time, the books they read, the movies they watch all tend to confirm that hearts devoid of divine love rejoice in iniquity. This is the reason Paul tells believers in Romans 12:9 to "abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good".

For a second example of "rejoicing in wrongdoing" consider this passage from Luke's account of the betrayal of Jesus:

"And the chief priests and scribes sought how they might kill him; for they feared the people. Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve. And he went his way, and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray him unto them. And they were glad, and covenanted to give him money" (Luke 22:2-5).

The officials who were conspiring against Jesus were on the verge of committing history's most evil deed, and when they find a co-conspirator in Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus' disciples, they

rejoice. Their hearts devoid of grace and divine goodness are filled with joy at the prospect of extinguishing the light that has revealed the corruptness of their hearts. It is with delight that they seal their heinous deal with Judas.

Let us now look at a couple of examples of rejoicing in the truth. When Paul founded the church in Thessalonica, he was forced to leave after having spent only a very short time with them. Worried that lack of teaching and encouragement for these new believers might have stunted their progress in the faith and their growth in righteousness and love, he sends Timothy to check on them. Timothy brings back a good report and in response Paul writes the letter that we call I Thessalonians. In that letter he writes:

For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain. But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you-- for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith. For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord. For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith? (I Thessalonians 3:5-10).

For our final example consider the Apostle John. He has been rightly called the "Apostle of Love". Perhaps as no one else before or since he understood the love of God manifested in Jesus Christ and the joy that that love brings when it is experienced and lived out. It is John who records Jesus' new commandment: "love one another as I have loved you". It is that commandment that summarizes Christian live and action for John. The story is told that he spoke his last words as a very old man, when unable to walk he was carried into the assembly, and there seated in the midst of his beloved brothers and sisters in Christ he repeated three times "love one another". So what was the deepest joy of the Apostle of Love? He tells us twice; once in his second letter and again in the third: "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth". "Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices in the truth."

