

Rejoice Always?

by Bryan Gibson

“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4). No matter the circumstances, the faithful Christian will always have reasons to rejoice. But, we don’t have to rejoice over everything that happens, especially when it involves the sin of another person. “Love...does not rejoice in iniquity...” (1 Corinthians 13:6). Nothing should make us sadder than to see people living in sin.

Apparently, some in the church at Corinth had not learned this lesson. A man in the church there was having sex with his father’s wife, and instead of mourning about it, they were “puffed up” (1 Corinthians 5:1-2). Shame on them!

Jonah had a little trouble with this, too. The city of Nineveh repented at his preaching, but that didn’t make Jonah the least bit happy. In fact, “it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry” (Jonah 4:1). What would have made Jonah happy was for them to remain in sin and be punished by God. Shame on him!

And shame on us, too, when we rejoice in iniquity. Ever found pleasure in telling about someone’s affair, brush with the law, drinking problem, etc.—maybe because it made us feel a little better about ourselves? Ever found pleasure in running down someone else’s children because it made our children look better? Ever been envious of those who live in sin, and the fun they’re having? Ever bragged on our children for things they shouldn’t have been doing in the first place? Ever bragged on our own sins, maybe how we “told someone off”, or about how much we drank, or how we “whipped” somebody? How can we find any “pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thessalonians 2:12), whether our own or someone else’s, when it separates us from God (Isaiah 59:1-2), and leads to eternal punishment (Romans 2:5-10; 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9)?

“Love...rejoices in the truth” (1 Corinthians 13:6)—that’s the second part of the passage we quoted earlier, and thankfully, we have some wonderful examples of people who demonstrated this quality. When Paul wrote his first letter to the church at Corinth, he rebuked them for a number of sins. Evidently, this letter had its desired effect, at least in some areas, because here’s what he wrote in the second letter: “Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance” (2 Corinthians 7:9). When Paul learned that the brethren in Thessalonica were still holding strong, he wrote, “For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord. For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God” (1 Thessalonians 3:8-9). And finally, we have this wonderful statement from John: “For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (3 John 1:3-4). Nothing should make us sadder than to see people living in sin, and nothing should make us happier than to see people teaching and practicing the truth.