



BETHEL
PRESBYTERIAN

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 19 Issue 42

October 25, 2020

Sympathy and the Christian

Romans 12:15

In view of recent events — specifically the untimely death of John Hall — I thought it best to spend time this week considering sympathy and the Christian from Romans 12:15.

Paul has just dealt with the great doctrinal truths that are so precious to our Christian faith (Romans 1-11). In Romans 12-15, he turns to application whereby he addresses many commands pertinent to the practical day-to-day living of the Christian. Our text is one such command. It contains the two extremes of Christian experience: times of rejoicing and times of weeping. And with it, we are immediately confronted by the truth that part of our living on

this earth will include rejoicing and weeping- both of which require the same action on the part of the Christian: Sympathy toward the Body of Christ!

And so, when one of our brothers or sisters is rejoicing, how should we respond as members of the body? And when one of our brothers and sisters is weeping, how should we respond as members of the body? This text gives us the answer, “Weep with Those who Weep.”

“Weep” κλαίω (*klaiō*); this refers to sorrow, pain, and grief of heart. It does not require tears, yet it always involves sorrow, regret, and grief. In the Greek world, it was used to refer to “weeping on account of fate.” And yet in the Bible, when this word is used in a context which is encouraged, it refers to a “weeping over the various conditions which this present state of sin and misery produce.”

See, when God created the world it not only as “good”; it was “very good” (Genesis 1:31)! There was no suffering, pain, sorrow, mourning, misery, or sin! Yet all this changed when Adam sinned! At that moment all of mankind was plunged into the estate of sin and misery where suffering, pain, sorrow are all prevalent! As such, to weep over the painful and unnatural results of sin is quite appropriate. Thus, we read:

- Paul wept over the fact that there are enemies of the cross of Christ, who as such would spend eternity in hell, Philippians 3:18.
- Christ wept over the blindness of Jerusalem and the physical ramifications that this blindness would produce. Luke 19:41-42.
- Paul wept over the hardness of the Corinthians’ heart and the resulting pain that his ministry of repentance would produce. 2 Corinthians 2:1-4.

Christ approved of...

- The weeping of Martha and Mary over the loss of their brother. John 11:33.
- The widow’s weeping. Luke 7:13.
- The prostitute’s weeping. Luke 7:38.

This is so important because of the “macho” attitude that can be found in our culture today that views “weeping” as a weakness. And yet, it is not! Far from a weakness, when it is done properly, it reflects a maturation on the part of the one weeping. Don’t Miss It: Biblical weeping has three elements to it:

1. It is an acknowledgment and acceptance of God and His rule (2 Kings 20:3ff; 22:18-19; Judges 15:18; Hosea 12:4; Psalms 126:5-6).
2. It is a declaration that what has occurred is unnatural (in our original state, God didn’t create us to die, suffer pain, endure hardships, etc... Cf. 2 Corinthians 5:3-4) and...
3. It is an action of faith, trust, and longing for God’s ultimate solution for our sin and misery: Our Final Redemption in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:2)!

This is why it is “better to go to a house of mourning than a house of feasting” (Ecclesiastes 7:2). In fact, Christ commended those who wept with a Godward look saying this:

Luke 6:21, “Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.”

Contrast this to worldly weeping.

1 Thessalonians 4:13, “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope.”

There is a weeping which is unbiblical. It is any weeping without the understanding that what has occurred is

1. Intrinsically Bad (not just bad for John’s family and friends) and that
2. God has provided the solution for our state of sin and misery through the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, unbiblical weeping is to weep “without hope”- the knowledge, longing, and affirmation of God’s answer!

And so, the Bible encourages weeping over the various conditions which this present state of sin and misery produce! And yet, it goes beyond this. Notice the text again.

Romans 12:15, “weep with those who weep.”

With this we are commanded to join ourselves in and with any brother or sister who weeps over this present state of sin and misery. Thus, Paul gives the command to be men and women of sympathy. So, when we see or know of a brother or sister who is weeping over this present state of sin and misery, this text demands that we weep with them!

Family of God, the most unnatural thing recently occurred! A man whom we both knew and loved, a father, and our friend- on account of the state of sin and misery in which we live- underwent the unnatural rending of his soul from his body! God did NOT create us to die! Death is a result of sin! Thus, it is NOT ONLY proper and right to weep, BUT it is biblical! And how biblically ought we to weep?

With Hope, 1 Thessalonians 4:13.

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians:

1 Thessalonians 4:13, “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope.”

In this text, to “weep with hope” is to weep with the assurance that we one day will be reunited with them. (1 Thessalonians 4:14-18)!

With Purity, 2 Peter 3:11.

Speaking NOT just of the death of a person, BUT the death of this world, Peter wrote this:

2 Peter 3:11, "Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness."

Realize that had Adam never sinned AND you committed the sin you find yourself at times laughing at, shrugging off, rationalizing, or commending, ALL the evil, pain, suffering, and sorrow that we should rightfully grieve and mourn would be with us!

Thus, to weep on account of this present state of sin and misery, and yet to participate willingly in sin (or to derive delight from it) is hypocrisy. True, biblical weeping will result in a longing for a life which is free from practical sin!

With Rebellion, Revelation 22:20.

Again, speaking of the destruction of this world and the glorious coming of the final age where everything will be righted, John wrote this:

Revelation 22:20, "He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming quickly.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."

This may seem like a rather innocuous statement, BUT it is fraught with rebellion. For Christ to come is:

- To transform this world from its present misery and corruption into the Paradise of God (cf. 2 Peter 3:10-13)!
- To render judgment for all the evil, wickedness, and rebellion of man who hate God, His people, and so His worship (Matthew 25:41-46).
- To destroy once and for all the "kingdoms of the world" (Revelation 11:15) and most notably Satan's evil reign and rule (Revelation 20:11-15)!

That is the call to "weep." Notice the second call here when it comes to sympathy and the Christian.

"Rejoice with Those who Rejoice," v. 15a.

"Rejoice: χαίρω (*chairō*); the word means to rejoice or be glad. In Scripture, "rejoicing" is nothing less than expressed joy.

Philippians 2:17-18, "But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice

and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. And you too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.”

As such, it is an activity only of the child of God.

Romans 14:17, “For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

Accordingly, the basis for all rejoicing is the cross, and the love relationship God has established between the Christian and Himself there.

1 Peter 1:8, “And though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.”

Thus, when we realize that the God of this world has set His eternal love upon us- has:

- Taken us from the domain of darkness.
- Given us a name.
- Given us an inheritance.
- Sent forth His Spirit to comfort us and aid us.
- Given us a future and a hope.
- Gone on record saying that He will protect and defend us.

And all this for such undeserving, wretched sinners like you and me, the only appropriate response is one of “rejoicing with joy inexpressible and full of glory”!

And so “rejoicing” is an activity which occurs when the child of God fully appreciates the favorable relationship which has been established between himself and God. Now this does NOT mean that the only thing that is appropriate to rejoice over is when others become Christians. RATHER, it ought to occur whenever God’s kingdom work occurs and therefore God’s kingdom advances! When this occurs, what ought we to do?

Romans 12:15, “Rejoice with those who rejoice.”

With this we are commanded to join ourselves in and with any and all who rejoice over God and His kingdom! Now as easy as this may sound, it is rather difficult! Chrysostom wrote of this:

[This] requires more of a high Christian temper, to rejoice with them that do rejoice, than to weep with them that weep... [This] requires a very noble soul, so as not only to keep from envying, but even to feel pleasure with the person who is in esteem (Barclay, 1975, p. Romans 12:15)

Thus, Paul gives the command to be men and women of sympathy. So, when we see or know

of a brother or sister who is rejoicing over God and His kingdom, this text demands that we rejoice with them!

- The question we ask is, “Who could rejoice at a time like this?” Answer: John Hall!
- Do you realize that John has received his diploma? He graduated FROM a life lived in the estate of sin and misery INTO glory! One moment he was occupied with the “sin and misery” of life...
 - The Moral climate of the US.
 - The struggles of a broken life.
 - The worries of this world.
 - Physical ailments.
 - The struggle to walk with God consistently.
 - And so many more!
- And the next moment, he was placed in the company of the elect, the children of God from all ages past, to add his voice to the majestic chorus which cries, “To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever!” (Revelation 5:13b)
- He received a diploma which reads, “Well done, good and faithful [servant]... enter into the joy of your master” (Matthew 25:21)!
- His church membership was transferred to “the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven” (Hebrews 12:23)!
- He found himself loving God with a love untainted by sin!

When we meditate on this and much of our sorrow will turn into joy!

Brothers and sisters, one of our very own, our brother, John Hall, is rejoicing! Just recently he sat here in this auditorium worshipping with us. Yet now, at this moment, he is praising God face to face! And do you know what John’s first words were when he woke up in glory? Perhaps it was:

Isaiah 25:9, “And it will be said in that day, ‘Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited that He might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation.’”

If he could speak to us one more time, what now do you suppose he would tell us:

- Those of us who are struggling with anger?
- Those of us who are struggling with “Why?”
- Those of us who have been overcome with grief, pain, or even regret?
- I have no doubt that he would say something like...

YES, the estate of sin and misery in which all of you live and labor is horrible! Rebel against the sin! Grow in your dislike of it! Long for heaven! Long for God to come quickly to vindicate His

name! But GOD IS GOOD! And I am full of a joy now which is indescribable. SO, JOIN YOUR HEART TOGETHER WITH MINE AND REJOICE WITH ME!”

References

Barclay, W. (1975). *The Letter to the Romans (The Daily Study Bible Series)*. Louisville: Westminster Press.