

Happiness

Joe Slater

This nation's founders wrote in the Declaration of Independence that we all are created equal and endowed by our creator with certain rights including life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Flawed people that they were, they didn't live up to their own words, but the words are, nevertheless, true.

Scripture uses the word "happiness" in the same way the founders did. People today may think of superficial happiness like a child opening birthday presents. But when the Queen of Sheba told Solomon, "*Happy are your young men, and happy are these your servants who stand continually before you and hear your wisdom,*" (1 Kings 10:8), she didn't mean they were on a constant emotional high. Rather, they had opportunities to improve their lives that others didn't have.

Significantly, the founders didn't say God gave us the right to **be** happy, but to **pursue** happiness. God doesn't owe you happiness even in the Biblical sense of that word, but you are free to pursue it. He certainly doesn't owe you superficial happiness! That doesn't mean emotional happiness is bad. But don't fall for the idea that whatever behavior satisfies your fleshly desires must be ok because "God wants me to be happy!"

Yes, God really does want you to be happy. But the happiness He wants for you doesn't equate to superficial satisfaction of the flesh. He wants something infinitely superior for you. Look at the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 – "Blessed (happy) are . . ." Read through the Psalms and Proverbs, seeing from those inspired writers how happiness (blessedness) is to be found.

It's the start of a new year. Think of Biblical happiness when I take this opportunity to wish you a "Happy New Year"!

Finding Wisdom

"Happy is the man who finds wisdom and the man that gets understanding" (Proverbs 4:13).

Proverbs often depicts wisdom as a gracious woman. God possessed her before creation (Proverbs 8:22). Proverbs 9:1-6 personifies her as one who invites mankind to her feast. She will bring honor, grace, and beauty to the one who loves her and does not forsake her (Proverbs 4:6).

How do you get wisdom? Is it by learning everything you are taught in school? Is it by listening to documentaries? Do you have to read books and listen to lectures? Should you read how everyone solves problems on Facebook? While all these may teach you some things that will help you in your walk, you will still not have the wisdom you need to help you live a godly life.

Here are some things to do to get wisdom:

Ask God for it. He has promised that if we lack wisdom, we should ask Him for it, and we will receive it (James 1:5). Trust God to give you what you need to know when you study His word. Commit to studying the Bible every day. It will enlighten you and help you grow spiritually.

Watch out for the Tempter. He has a way of making what is evil seem right. Flee from him if your path starts to turn from God's path. Lean on God for strength and guidance.

Be mindful of your seeking God's wisdom. Pause daily to examine your actions to see if you are growing spiritually and showing the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, and self-control). Let God's word lead you as you strive to live for Him.

--Donna Wittlif (Ft. Worth, TX)

Baptism and Salvation

God has placed numerous things between us and salvation. Is baptism one of them? Let's see what the Bible says about the matter.

When Jesus issued the Great Commission, He said, "*Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned*" (Mark 16:15–16, ESV). Did Jesus place baptism before or after salvation? Baptism, along with belief, comes before salvation.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter's listeners interrupted his sermon with a question. They asked, "*Brethren, what shall we do?*" (Acts 2:37). Peter answered, "*Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*" (v. 38). Did the inspired apostle place baptism before or after forgiveness of sins? Baptism, along with repentance, comes before forgiveness of sins.

Baptism is further described by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans, where he asked, "*Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life*" (6:3–4). Does newness of life precede or follow baptism into Christ? Newness of life follows baptism.

Finally, in Galatians 3:27, Paul wrote, "*For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.*" If they were "baptized into Christ", where were they before their baptism? They must have been outside of Christ. But, if every spiritual blessing is "in Christ" (Eph. 1:3), how many spiritual blessings are found outside of Him? So, if baptism (preceded by faith and repentance), brings us into Christ, can we be saved without it? Baptism is essential to our salvation.

--Glen Elliott (Greenbriar, AR)