

Lighten Up!

Galatians 5: 22-23 “*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*” & Mt. 7: 12: “*So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.*”

We all like being around people who are generally upbeat, don't we? I mean, if you had your choice of being with someone who had a smile or someone who looked like he was weaned on sour lemons, who would you most likely pick?

I'd pick the smiley guy almost every time, and here's why...Grumpy Christian, is an oxymoron on the same level as “congressional budget cuts.” It's hard for me to understand how someone who claims to be walking with God could be grumpy for any length of time.

Now let me be quick to say that I am not talking about sadness. I am not talking about genuine **SORROW**. And I am not talking about some **FAKE** happiness. Things happen, things go wrong, and we are faced with heartache and hurt.

I'm talking about a basic attitude – how we carry ourselves. I want to focus on the everyday attitude we carry with us. Let me ask you a question. How would others characterize your attitude... Do they see you living a life of joy, peace, and rest, or do they see someone who looks like they have no hope for today, much less for eternity?

Which attitude do you think will be more likely to attract someone to the gospel?

Let me share three areas, and the first one is...

A. **The Joy**. By joy, I don't mean “happiness”, because happiness is dependent on circumstances. Heartburn from eating a pizza too fast can make you unhappy, right? Joy is an inward attitude that has God as its **OBJECT** and its **SOURCE**. It's much deeper than happiness, and can be present even in the midst of pain. Why? Because the **focus of joy** is not the **pain** or the **circumstance**, but **God**. Let's take a look at **three areas of joy**.

A. **Joy in the Lord**. First, as I just mentioned, joy has God as its object and its source. If you can focus on Him, then it is easy to have joy in Him.

“The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song.” Ps. 28:7

Just taking the time to think of all He has done for you in securing your salvation and in offering you a full and abundant life will go a long way to experiencing that joy. Take some time to look over His wonderful promises in Scripture that you and I who don't deserve it can live lives in close relationship with Him.

He has promised to be active in your life at all times. The great, awesome, mighty God of all creation is also all-loving. There is joy in the Lord. **Next we look at...**

B. Joy in our salvation. It's my opinion that once you really get a handle on the depths from which He saved you, you can't go very long with a sour attitude. Christ's death and resurrection give us hope. We can rejoice that His salvation is complete. Take joy in that! Next, we take a look at...

C. Joy in living. This is just kind of a basic outlook that says I am glad to be alive. This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us be glad and rejoice in it! I love that verse. But like you, I have a hard time rejoicing some days, esp. if I know that something stressful is going to happen.

An elderly man was leaving McDonalds the other day and, I said, “Have a good day!” He looked back at me and said, “When you're my age, they're ALL good.” This guy was willing to find the good in life rather than focus on the negative.

Walk around like you have something to live for now, and eternity, and it will draw others not only to YOU, but will give you the **opportunity** to draw them to Jesus. Closely tied to the joy is ...

II. The Fruit. The focus of this next part is the fruit of the Spirit. You probably already have this memorized, but allow me to read Galatians 5: 22-23 *“**But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law**”*

The fruits of the Spirit are the **measure**, if you will, **of your walk with God and the impact you are allowing Him to have in your life.** If you are not exhibiting the fruits of the Spirit, you are not walking as Jesus would have you walk. And your relationship with Him is **less** than it should be. Let's focus on four of these fruits:

First, we look at... **LOVE** – Jn 13: 34-35 *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

There's a chorus that was real popular in the 70's and early 80's. It was called, **"They Will Know We Are Christians By Our Love."** Remember that one? Why is love so hard for some Christians to practice?

My guess is that they are afraid of getting burned by people because they have been hurt in the past; or they just have never developed in this area. Either way, it is not good, and it needs to be developed.

Remember that we reflect Christ in how we love not only other Christians, but those outside the Church for whom Jesus died. And don't ever get into the thought that we don't need to love someone if they don't deserve it. Did Jesus give His salvation to you because you deserved it? You know the answer... Treat others the same way.

Next, let's look at... **Patience**. Some of you are saying, "Okay, but get a move on!" Patience is one of those fruits of the Spirit that seems to be in short supply in the Church. As long as things are going just your way, it's fine. But let something go wrong, or let someone step on your toes, unintentionally or not, and watch out.

I admit that I need work in this area. If I am running late to something, I get impatient with whoever it is that is impeding my progress... This is not good.

When we display our impatience, how do you think this reflects on us and our relationship with Christ? Not very well. Remember, God is patient with you, so you need to be patient with others.

The last two fruits we will look at this morning are... **Kindness** and **Gentleness**. Is there really any need to talk about these very much? It seems to me that it should be fairly obvious that we should be kind and gentle to others.

If you disagree with someone about something, do you approach them in a sweet spirit, or do you plot for the time you can really let them have it – in Christian love, of course. Some Christians just can't wait to give someone "what they deserve."

You are familiar with the old saying, ***“You get more flies with honey than you do with vinegar.”*** Practice kindness and gentleness, and just see how people flock to be around you. It works – believe me.

The Church of Jesus Christ needs to shine in the world as people who are loving, patient, kind, and gentle. Why is it that certain cults seem to grow in spite of the spread of the gospel around the world?

One of the major reasons is that most of the people getting involved with cults are not getting involved because of the doctrine or teaching of the group. **They join because they are loved and accepted. Not looked down on.**

How much more should we, who worship the true God of Scripture, display these attributes, especially since they are enabled in us by God Himself? I want you to think about it.

III. The Practice. I would like to give just a few practical suggestions for displaying these fruits of the Spirit as we go about living:

A. **At Work.** When you are at work, how do you treat your employers? With respect, or disparagement? Do you complain about co-workers, employers, or employees behind their back to others at the job, or do you take the high road. Being loving, patient, kind, and gentle, and in doing so you will gain the respect of just about everyone there.

B. **At Home.** I’d like to think we have this figured out as it relates to our families, but that is not always the case. Extend the fruits of the Spirit to your family, and watch the dividends pour in. If you are unable to do that, then take advantage of the thousands of resources available from Christian authors to help you. It won’t always be easy, but I guarantee it will pay off.

C. **At Play.** One way to summarize this is to look at the words of Jesus in Mt. 7:12 : ***“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”***

If I want others to love me, I need to show love. If I want others to be patient with me, I need to be patient with them. And if I want others to show me kindness and gentleness, maybe I should show it to them.”

The love that God showered on you needs to be reflected in everything we do. God is loving, patient, kind, and gentle; And He has given us every reason to be joyous, so leave here today, determined to **LIGHTEN UP!** Remember that **Grumpy** is one of the **Seven Dwarves**, **not a Fruit of the Spirit!**

Before we go, I want you to know that Christ came to earth for you, He didn't just come so we could have a holiday to celebrate. He came to bring you to heaven. But He had to die to do it. You see, the Bible says that there is no one righteous, not one. We are all sinners. It also says that we deserve hell for our sins, and no amount of good deeds or religious activity will change that.

But Jesus died to pay the penalty our sins deserve, and not only did He cover our sins with His blood, He opened the way for you and me to go to heaven when we die. If you aren't sure God would allow you into heaven, then I have wonderful news. Because of Jesus, you can know right now.

It's as simple as ABC: Admit you are a sinner. Believe Jesus died for you and rose from the dead to bring you to heaven. Call on Him to forgive you, and to give you eternal life in heaven. The Bible says that all who call on the Lord will be saved.

Don't delay another day. Get this settled today, and go home resting in the fact that you will spend eternity in heaven..

Let's pray.