

Fanning it into Flame
Sunday, March 20, 2011
Hope and Joy

The Apostle Paul writes in **Colossians 1:3-5a** *"We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴ because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints-- ⁵ the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven..."* I want to key in on this last sentence and highlight the fact that faith and love spring from the hope we have. Hope is not wishful thinking. The Biblical use of the term defines the reality of what was promised. It is not, "I hope this happens," rather, "Our rock solid hope is that God brings to pass what he says." It is real and it is stored up for us in Heaven. Our faith is in the promise that if we ask Christ to forgive us of our sins and come into our heart we are saved. Faith is believing that the message is true and the message is the hope that has been offered. The result is that we receive the Spirit of God and are born again. His nature, which is love, is now resident in our heart and becomes the defining characteristic of what it means to be a Christian. Jesus said that you would know who his disciples were by the love they had for one another. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13 that the greatest of the big three: Faith, Hope, and Love, was love. That's because it defines the heart of it all. God is love!

Sometimes people get hung up on trying to please God through self-effort and look for ways to win his favor. All he wants is for us to truly walk in relationship with him through Christ our Lord and find that our acceptance is in our union with him and not in what we do. Then the things we do come out of the essence of who we are in him. We will bear fruit and will be pleasing to him because it is in our new nature. That's where the joy comes from. While happiness is a characteristic of joy, it is not what defines it. Things can make you happy, but things can't give you joy. I was happy when I got my new saxophone for Christmas as a kid. Joy, however, is really a spiritual state of well being that comes from God. David declares this in Psalm 16:11 *You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.* Then in Psalm 19:7,8 he adds another dimension in receiving joy: *The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.* ⁸ *The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.* Joy is an important theme to David. Psalm 27: 3ff: *Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident.* ⁴ *One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.* ⁵ *For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock.* ⁶ *Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at his tabernacle will I sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the LORD.* Notice that he likens his shouts of joy as a sacrifice or an offering to the Lord. In Psalm 45:7 he elevates his subject, no doubt a prophetic declaration of Christ, with the impartation of an anointing with the **oil of joy**. In Psalm 51 David repents for his adulterous affair with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband and cries out to God to restore his relationship with him. ¹⁰ *Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.* ¹¹ **Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.** ¹² **Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.** ¹³ *Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you.* Notice that David did not feel that he had lost his salvation. He had not lost the Holy Spirit, but he did lose his joy. Then he said that when God did this he would let his life count in touching others.

Nehemiah told the Israelites that returned from captivity that **"the joy of the LORD is your strength."** Jesus said in John 15:11 *I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.* Then in chapter 16:22-24 he told them: *So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.* ²³ *In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.* ²⁴ *Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.* He goes on to say in John 17:13 that what he had told them was to produce the full measure of **his joy**. The writer to the Hebrews instructs us in verse 2: ² *Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.* Jesus was filled with joy because of who he was, what he was accomplishing, and his right obedient relationship with Father.

Paul reveals in Galatians 5:22-23 that joy is part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Just as a healthy or good apple tree bears good apples, a right relationship with the Lord produces fruit in our lives. ²² *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.* Finally (for the sake of this brief study), Peter reveals in his 1st letter and chapter 1:8,9: *Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹ for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.* It means that you cannot even put into words the depth of the joy that comes as a result of being saved. If you are lacking joy in your life, ramp up your love for God by meditating on his Word, his glory and goodness, all that he has done for you, all that he wants to do for you, and his great love that was demonstrated in sending his only begotten son to die for our sins. Joy will follow!