

Joy in God

by Charles Finney

The sermon emphasizes the importance of having a state of mind that is characterized by true knowledge of God, perfect confidence in God's natural and moral attributes, and perfect sympathy with God in all his works and ways, in order to experience peace of mind and salvation.

Scripture: Habakkuk 3:17

Topics: "Joy in God", "Confidence in God's Sovereignty"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the profound joy that comes from a deep understanding and relationship with God, as illustrated by the prophet Habakkuk's declaration of joy despite dire circumstances. He explains that true joy in God is rooted in perfect confidence, sympathy with God's will, and recognizing Him as the all-sufficient portion of the soul. Finney argues that this state of mind is essential for peace, salvation, and usefulness in the world, as it allows believers to rejoice in God's sovereignty regardless of their circumstances. He warns against the dangers of seeking happiness in external factors rather than in God Himself, urging believers to cultivate a heart that rejoices in God's character and will. Ultimately, Finney calls for a transformative knowledge of God that leads to unshakeable joy and peace.

Transcript

"Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."--Hab. 3:17, 18.

I. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN THE STATE OF MIND WHICH THE PROPHET DESCRIBES.

II. THIS STATE IS INDISPENSABLE TO PEACE OF MIND AND TO SALVATION.

I. What is implied in this state of mind.

1. The true knowledge of God. The prophet would not have said what he did, except he had known God as He really is--a being in every way worthy of confidence and unfailing trust.

2. Perfect confidence in God, in his natural and moral attributes, his natural perfection and his moral character. Observe, he says, even though all temporal mercies are withheld and fail, he will yet rejoice in God. Though calamity of the severest kind should fall upon him and all around him, yet he will confide in God fully, and with the utmost assurance. God should be to him a source of joy, deep, constant,

never-failing, notwithstanding he should in his just indignation do all those things.

3. Perfect sympathy with God. His language is consistent with no other state than one of complete and universal sympathy with God, in all his works and ways. Not merely does he have confidence in God as just and righteous, but the prophet joyfully, and with his whole soul, enters into the spirit which God cherishes towards all objects, views them with the same eye, acquiesces most entirely in the glorious manifestations of his indignation against sin, and rejoices with a full heart, even in the midst of the judgments of his hand. God is regarded as equally good in his judgments and his mercies; to be rejoiced in as much, when in holy indignation He chastises a rebellious nation, as when in mercy He pours blessings upon the penitent and obedient; to be adored with supreme and unspeakable love, in all the wonders of his work, in his fearful visitations of merited punishment, no less than when in his grace, He causes the fountains of plenty to be opened, and streams of prosperity to flow to every quarter of the land.

And this state implies more than mere submission, in the commonly received religious use of that term. The prophet did not barely tolerate God's dealings in his providence; his language means not simply, that he would not find fault, that he would not murmur or complain, that he would tolerate God so far as not to go into overt rebellion against Him. But what does he say? 'I will rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of my salvation.' He goes the whole length of full and overflowing joy, and extatic rejoicing.

God, though He delights not in the death of a sinner, but desires rather his return to life and happiness, and salvation, yet renders the righteous retribution which the good of universal being demands; not in the spirit of revenge and malice, but from a holy and unalterable regard to the dictates of impartial benevolence; and in all this display of his judgment, He is everlastingly and unchangeably at peace with Himself, and forever rejoices in the consummation of right, and the maintenance of eternal justice, in accordance with, and subservient to the great end of universal good. In this work of his, God does, and cannot but rejoice, for his name is Love. So the righteous prophet also, rejoiced in sympathy with God, and in complete conformity of heart to the same great end.

4. God is regarded as the all-sufficient portion of the soul. Though all else should fail, still his joy would be overflowing, perennial. No circumstances whatever, could have any power to damp the flame of love, no wind to parch the soil and dry the current of holy joy in the soul.

This state of mind is such, that the soul cannot be deprived of its portion, while God lives and reigns, while He holds the throne and sways the sceptre of infinite love. The mind cannot be despoiled of good, of happiness, and joy, of an all-satisfying portion, while God endures; and though all besides give way and disappear, God remains, and the soul is full.

5. Universal and joyful acquiescence in all God's will. An intelligent mind, in being able to adopt the language of the prophet, must be, like the blest above, in harmony with the divine will.

II. This state is indispensable to peace of mind and to salvation.

1. Without this state of mind, the providence of God will continually distress and disturb. Unless you can see calamity and judgments come upon men for their sins, and behold them with joy and peace, you cannot be happy, for these things are, and must be constantly taking place. Men must be able to rejoice in God, let Him do what He will. They must be able to confide in his wisdom and love, and feel assured that He can make no mistake, that He is doing all for the best. Unless they can thus confide, they cannot be happy in God and rejoice in Him; for God must often visit the world with severe judgments.

2. Indispensable to prevent being disturbed by Satan. God must of course, do many things mysterious to his creatures. He is working on a vast scale, consistent with his infinite nature. Much must be unexplained and inexplicable to creatures finite in duration and knowledge. In many cases, doubtless, it would be impossible so to lay before a finite mind, the whole scheme of things, as to make him see the reason for the divine conduct. Now if men cannot feel that He is good at any rate, and however appearances may be, then they cannot rest in Him, and be at peace; and Satan will take advantage of all such mysteries, and thence draw things to disturb the mind's repose, to throw it off its balance, and send it headlong down the declivity of infidelity, or if not that, yet greatly to harass and vex the soul's peace and communion with God. Ah, Satan will say, how came God to make man as He did, liable to suffer the extremest misery without possibility of escape; nay more, when He knew certainly that such would be the result? How can God be good, and yet permit the world to be as it is, the abode of hate, and war, and suffering inexpressible--to go on as it has these thousands of years, in blood and carnage? Why is a good man cut off in the midst of his days, taken from a field of usefulness, upon his very entrance thereinto, while a vile and profane wretch, doing nought but evil continually, is left to live on in prosperity, a sheer curse to the world? Why is one portion of the human race sunk in deep wretchedness, in the profoundest night of ignorance and vice? Could not God have carried the blessed light of Heaven to their desolate shores if He had chosen so to do? And can He be good in this that He has not done so? Why, Satan whispers, should God send parching heat, when rather drenching rain is needed--and floods of rain, when there should be the warm and genial sun in its mild shining? Why is the holy saint tortured with disease and racked with pain? the faithful martyr bound to the stake? the witness to the truth made to pour out his blood in its defense? Surely the world is sadly out of joint--these are not the dispositions which an all-wise and all-good being would make! Now nothing but the most perfect confidence in God, can prevent us from accusing Him of ignorance or impotence, or downright malevolence. In the midst of so much that must be wholly unaccountable to finite minds, what is needed, but such a confidence as to say, "Let Him do what He will, I will rejoice in Him continually."

3. Nothing but this confidence can secure the soul against that kind of carefulness and anxiety, that restless fear of ill and wrong, which is so destructive of peace, and dishonorable to God. Persons are perplexed and anxious, because God deals so or so with them; they have no confidence in Him, and they cannot be happy till they do have.

4. Nothing short of this can meet the demands of our intelligence. Reason affirms that we ought to have universal and perfect confidence in God, because He is infinitely wise, infinitely powerful, and infinitely good; and there must be a sense of guilt in the soul where this confidence is not exercised, and the peace of the soul must thereby be destroyed. Nothing else, moreover, is consistent with God's commands. A man obeys not God till he comes into that state--till he can say with the prophet, 'Though the fig-tree shall not blossom, and there be no fruit in the vine; though the labor of the olive fail, and the fields yield no meat, the flocks be cut off from the folds, and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, and will joy in the God of my salvation.' He is an unbeliever and a wicked man, who does not thus rejoice, who does not adopt this language as his own with all his heart.

5. It is in this very thing that salvation consists. Nothing short of this is salvation. What is holiness here? What is holiness in Heaven? What is it but the state in which the mind looks over all God's works and exclaims, 'holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of Hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory. Who shall not praise thee O God? Who shall not fear thy name, O king of saints?' No others are saved but those who are thus in sympathy with God. And they are saved no farther than they thus rejoice in Him, and cry 'Whom have I

in Heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.' 'Thou art my rock and my strength, the rock of my salvation and my God.'

REMARKS.

1. This state of mind is indispensable to usefulness. A man cannot be truly useful in the world--cannot do what is needed to be done--cannot make the world holy and happy by his influence, till he is thus. He cannot truly represent God, promote genuine religion, or enforce the claims of piety on man, till he is thus. He may have much zeal, create conviction, produce excitement, but he does not and cannot lead the soul to God. He does not know what true religion is in his own experience, and he cannot tell others what it is, however clear his intellect may be, and sway their minds under the power of truth, for he is a stranger to that honest, hearty, deep-felt conviction of the truth, and that personal consecration, devotion, and experience of the joy flowing therefrom, without which, commonly all efforts are in vain. His life, conversation, conduct, and preaching, will not exemplify true religion without this experience.

2. Any thing short of this in a professor of religion, is a gross stumbling block. What! profess religion, declare God to be the all-sufficient and never-failing portion of the soul--profess to rely implicitly on Him, and trust in Him always and forever, and yet practically show the same anxiety and carefulness, the same distress and perturbation, the same uneasy, restless disquietude, that other people have? Is not that a stumbling block? Would it have been honorable to God, had the prophet gone on to complain, and lament the loss of comforts--to cry out, What shall I do? I am undone! if he had refused to be in sympathy with God, to justify Him in all his doings, and love Him, and rejoice in Him through all? And does it not dishonor God, for professedly pious men now to distrust his goodness, and murmur at his justice? Is it not a stumbling block to those who look on and see their inconsistency?

3. Many seem to be reconciled to nothing else in God, but his mercy, and that without regard to the conditions of its exercise, as though that could be mercy, which should be put forth inconsistent with holiness, as if mere fondness, the obeying the impulses of blind sensibility, could be mercy at all. They are moved to joy and praise only by the compassion of God, and are comforted by nothing but a view of his mercy and compassion. They are pained by any other apprehension of God's character, by any other view of his dealings with his creatures. Instead of rejoicing in God, in the great, and glorious, and harmonious whole, which makes up the perfection of his character, they can see Him only in one light, that of compassion and grace. Had the prophet been so, could he have said what he did? Every sustenance of life cut off, the world starving around him, and desolation and desert wastes stretching over the land--how could he rejoice, if he had had complacency only in mercy and compassion?

This class of persons seem to have no other idea of religion, than a sort of good natured fondness, a sort of easy disposition, so as not to be angry at sin or sinners, but to exercise a mere blind indiscriminate compassion for sinners, and a disposition to treat all, impenitent and penitent, with the same lenity, and in just the same way. These men neither know, nor worship the true God; the Bible is a stumbling block to them, and Satan keeps them constantly in a worry and fret, by pressing on them, these points of God's character. Much of the Old Testament--the dealings of God with the heathen--the prayers of David in the Psalms for vengeance--these seem to be the spirit of hate and malice; they will not comprehend that a God of love can inflict the penalty of a righteous law, and yet they cannot shut their eyes to the undeniable fact that He does visit the sinner with utter destruction.

4. Holy beings, from the very nature of holiness, rejoice none the less in God because He rules the earth in judgment, and because He visits the world with calamity--love Him none the less--confide in Him none the less--are no less happy in Him because He sends sinners to hell--they sympathize with Him in all He does, in the promotion of the highest good of the universe; they love Him none the less for his scourgings, for his desolations, for his destruction of men and of nations, than for the pouring out of his Spirit to bring the world to salvation. They know He has the same great end in view in both cases, and they love Him equally in both.

5. Many professors of religion are at heart, Universalists. They are not thoroughly and really with God, in his administration of government. Universalism has its seat in the heart. It is a state of heart, divesting God of his holiness, of his justice, of his prerogative to execute terrible judgments, to send the wicked to hell. These things Universalism cannot love. Their God must not do such things as these. No, surely! Is this true religion? to limit God, to say, do thus or thus; punish not me, my friends, or my race; no matter how rebellious we are, destroy us not; no matter how incorrigible we are; or we cannot love you? This is selfishness, and is regarded by Jehovah as such.

6. See why so many are disturbed by God's providential dealings. Because they have not the confidence in God which belongs to true religion. By judgments they are disturbed, thrown off their pivot, and down they go into rebellious murmurings, or impious infidelity. If any thing goes out of their little channel, contrary to their marked out path, across their finite judgments, all is wrong.

7. Many seem to have no enjoyment in religion any longer than the providence of God seems to favor their particular plans and favorite schemes. Forsooth, God does just as I want Him to do, all my notions are exactly realized, my ship goes before the breeze with all sails set, in beautiful trim, and therefore, God is good and I am happy! Their country is blest, their state is prosperous, their commonwealth is in peace, their family is in prosperity, their circumstances are comfortable, and therefore, God is good, and they are happy! They love God for all this, they rejoice in his love. But let Him thwart them, run across their track, turn upside down their cherished plans, blow to the winds their favorite schemes, and what then? What then? They tolerate God perhaps, perhaps not even that; they by no means rejoice now in their God, they do not now joy in the God of their salvation. Oh, no! They cannot help what God has done, to be sure, He is too strong for them; but suppose they could, what would they do? Now what is the matter? They have no true religion. They thought they had religion. God was so good and kind to them, they thought they loved Him, but it was themselves they loved, and Him only because He was subservient to them. They were pleased to have God for an almighty servant, surely they were; but to have Him on the throne, that was another matter! Their own way they are supremely set on, not on God's way. Instead of rejoicing in God's will, whether or not it is like theirs, God must succumb to them, or they are displeased and grieved.

8. To know God as the all-sufficient portion of the soul, is the highest knowledge. No man knows any thing as he ought to know, till he knows this. Till he knows God thus, he has no knowledge of any avail for happiness. All other is worse than useless without this. How often have I thought upon the quiet and happiness of ignorance. Ignorance, by its very want of knowledge, avoids much restlessness and anxiety. An increase of knowledge in the same unreconciled state of heart, but increases misery and wretchedness. Learning is only a curse, without the knowledge of God as the portion of the soul.

9. The happiness of the true saints is secure, because it depends not on external and contingent circumstances, but on God Himself. They know God, and to know Him is eternal life. As long as God lives and reigns, they know their happiness cannot be disturbed.

President Edward's wife, at one period, thought she could not bear certain things--she thought certain losses would destroy her peace. She thought she could not bear the alienation of her husband's affection, the loss of her reputation among his people, &c. But when her soul came into communion with God, she was delivered from the fears which had distressed her, she was carried so high above all earthly things, they had no power to affect her happiness. Like the glorious sun, which from its height in the heavens looks down on the earth below, and rolls rejoicingly on, unmoved by all that passes among us mortals, so the soul whose trust is in God, rests in exquisite peace on the bosom of exhaustless love, far beyond all sublunary influences and cares. The martyr at the stake, though in the extremest agony of body, is yet, often full, inexpressibly full of glory and joy. Why is this? How can it be? God is the natural and all-sufficient portion of the soul, and it rests in Him.

10. Sinners cannot be happy, from their very state of mind as sinners. If they do not know God, they can find no peace for the sole of their foot; like Noah's dove, forever on the wing and no place for them. And why? There is no place but in God, and when it rests not here, it must remain restless, forever seeking peace and finding none. It is thrown from its pivot--it is naturally impossible for that soul to be happy. It is gnawing upon itself, eating out its own vitals. The soul must return to God, must dwell in God, repose under the shadow of his pavilion, or happiness is out of the question. The home of the soul, is the bosom of God. 'Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations,' is the beautiful and true exclamation of the Psalmist. Till the mind finds its home, its home in God, where can it be quiet? The prophet's soul had reached its home. In this dwelling-place was he rejoicingly secure--without care, without anxiety, without fear; with all joy and glory, in unspeakable blessedness.

11. Those who do not know God thus, do not know God truly.

They have but the outside of religion, the form, the rite, but where is the spirit? Where the filial love, the child-like confidence, the simple unquestioning trust, the artless, heart-felt joy, the soul-absorbing delight in God? Most religion seems to be external--it comes to the temple, it views the building, the splendor, the sacrifices, the gorgeous apparel, the imposing ceremony, it joins blindly in the ritual. But the new and living way, into the holy of holies, opened by the great high priest--that way its foot never trod, that inner glory its eye never rested on. Most have no personal communion with their King, no fellowship with Jesus Christ, or scarcely any; but all is distant, cold, hearsay. They have heard of God by the hearing of the ear, but their eyes never saw Him. Now, the prophet had gone beyond the outward service, in beyond the veil into the holiest of all, even to the presence chamber of the King. In view of all that his eye, in the ken of prophetic vision, saw of judgment and calamity, his soul was calm, nay not calm, but intensely wrought up to the most exquisite joy, and bliss untold. The prophet knew God and knew Him to some purpose.

12. This is the only reasonable state. This, and this only, answers fully, the demands of the intelligence.

13. Sinners can see the necessity of a change of heart. They know this is not their state of mind, every sinner knows perfectly well he does not feel thus towards God; every sinner knows he cannot be happy, except his own way is followed, his own will gratified. He cannot rejoice in God let him do what he will, and yet who does not know that this is universal in heaven? How could he be happy in heaven, were he to go there? He has no sympathy with God, no delight in his will, he would be alone in heaven; the holiness of that pure place, how could it receive him, or be congenial with his selfishness?

14. If this be true, professors can see why they are not saved, nor likely to be saved. They have not that spirit, which is the essential element of a state of salvation.

15. Many seem to rest in conviction. They see their sins. They are in agony. There they rest. The agony, be sure, subsides, but that uneasy state, produced by a sense of present guilt remains, while they should pass through conviction into a state of conscious consecration, conscious forgiveness, and acceptance, and resting their souls joyfully in God. Many expect no such thing, look for, labor for no such thing as continual peace and happiness in God.

16. They who think outward circumstances essential to peace, think so, because they do not know God. If they only were thus and thus, if they only had this and that and that, then they could enjoy religion. If I had some Christian society, if my husband were pious, if I were not so poor, if I enjoyed good health, or were not so severely afflicted, if the Church were only awake and active, if these, and a thousand things were as I wish they were, I could enjoy religion, but as it is, in my circumstances, I cannot rejoice, I am in distress, in solitude, in persecution, in poverty; how can I be glad? How can you? How could the prophet rejoice? He could rejoice by having God for his all-sufficient portion, and his everlasting home. So could you rejoice. If you knew God thus, no suffering, not the most intense, could shake the fabric of your bliss, and throw your soul from its firm resting place, on the everlasting Rock.

17. Why, sinners seek happiness in vain. They seek it where it cannot be found--every where but in God. All sorts of knowledge they strive to attain, but the knowledge of God. In all directions, they push their researches, but towards God. Every thing else they do, but give themselves to God. They seek the world, its pleasures, honors, riches, its fame, its glory--can these be an everlasting portion? They pass away like a dream. Can the soul say--"If all these pass away and disappear, yet is my treasure secure, my happiness unmoved?["] Indeed no, for these were the sources of your joy, and how can you be happy? You will say-- 'Ye have taken away my gods, and what have I more?' So might the Christian's hope be destroyed, if God could be dethroned, and Satan have full rule--then might the Christian say--"All joy is fled from my soul." But while the throne of God stands unshaken, his soul remains safe who has put his trust therein. Can riches make a man happy? Is the richest man in country happy? Nay, he is one of the most miserable men, and he grows more wretched every day. How could he more effectually become the sport of winds and waves, of every vicissitude, than by placing his heart on riches? His houses burn down, his ships founder at sea, his tenants fail to pay their rent, he is at the mercy of every wind that blows. Can he say--"Let every penny of my wealth be burnt up, and still I am happy?" Young man, you are a student, you are talented, ambitious, aspiring--you climb, and climb, and climb, the ladder of promotion, to the summit of greatness. Are you happy? You are only multiplying incalculably the vulnerable points of your soul, and from the very peak of your fame, you will topple and fall, and plunge into the lowest deeps of perdition. O, how mad! Why not come back to God, know God, and be able to say, "He lives, and reigns, and I am happy."

18. The true knowledge of God completely ravishes the soul. Men think they can be satisfied in some object of their choice. This is a mistake with respect to all created things. But with respect to God it is sublimely true! In God is the soul swallowed up, absorbed, hidden, lost, in an ocean of bliss.

No man should stop short of this knowledge. Stop not till you reach this high goal. Professor, stop not till you arrive at this blissful consummation. Be not content till you can rest in God as Habakkuk did. He was no more than in a state of salvation. He was no more than happy. This was not the peculiar privilege of a prophet. And suppose it were then so. What did Christ mean, when he said, "The least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he?" You may be able to say not only this, which the prophet did, but every thing in the same direction, in the strongest possible manner.

19. Wherever you lack this state, you may know you have unbelief. If there is any thing in which you cannot say, 'I rejoice in God,' you are in unbelief, and have no right to stay there a moment.

Most professors know little or nothing of this state of confidence and joy, and therefore represent religion falsely, represent it as a gloomy, sepulchral, death-bed affair, not to be thought of at the same time with joy and gladness.

God deliver us and bring us to this state of joy in Him.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/charles-finney/joy-in-god/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net