

Unbelievers' Joy in the Word?

by Ralph Erskine

The sermon explores the difference between spiritual and carnal joy, highlighting the unique characteristics of godly delight in the Word of God.

Scripture: Psalm 119:97

Topics: "Spiritual Joy", "Godly Sorrow"

Description

Ralph Erskine delves into the important question of whether hypocrites and unbelievers can experience joy in the Word, highlighting the stark contrast between spiritual joy of believers and carnal joy of the wicked. He emphasizes that godly sorrow leads to true joy, while the joy of the wicked ultimately leads to sorrow. Erskine explores the differences in the matter, manner, measure, and end of joy between the godly and the wicked, pointing out that the delight of the godly is rooted in God Himself and leads to a desire for conformity to His law.

Transcript

An Important Question concerning the Joy which Hypocrites may have in the Word.

"May not hypocrites and unbelievers have joy and delight in the word, like these, Isaiah 58:2. and like Herod, that heard the word gladly; and the stony ground hearers, that received the word with joy?"

Answer: Such is the difference between spiritual and carnal joy, that whereas the godly sorrow of the believer is the matter of his joy; insomuch, that he is more glad when his heart will melt for sin, than he would be, though he had all the carnal pleasures in the world. On the other hand, the carnal joy of the wicked is matter of sorrow; yea, in the midst of his laughter his heart is in heaviness.--Again, even the greatest sorrows of the godly are medicinal, therapeutic, and preparative to a later joy; whereas the greatest joys of the wicked are hurtful, pernicious, and preparative to a later sorrow: but godly sorrow works out the poison of sin that would mar their joy.

But more particularly, the difference between the godly and the wicked in their delight, may be viewed in four things, that is to say: the matter, the manner, the measure, and the end of their joy and delight.

1. As for the matter and ground of the godly man's delight, it is God himself; Christ himself, the gospel itself: whereas the matter of the hypocrite's delight is rather his own knowledge of these things; and so his knowledge puffs up.

2. They differ as to the manner of their delight: that of the godly is solid and constant, and proceeding from the special grace of the Spirit; but the delight of the wicked man and hypocrite is unsound, unsolid, and unconstant; proceeding from the common grace of the Spirit, and not from the new nature, but some impression on the old nature; and so his delight is not natural; neither is it the man's element, as we have illustrated above.

3. They differ in the measure of their joy. The delight the believer has in the Lord, and in the word and law of the Lord, is his chief delight; it is his exceeding joy, Psalm 43:4: but the natural man has something that he delights more in; he takes more pleasure in worldly riches and honours; but the godly has more delight in the word than in all manner of worldly enjoyments; "O how I love your law! It is sweeter to me than honey: therefore I love your commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold," Psalm 119:97, 19:10, 119:27. "There be many that say, Who will show us any good? O Lord, lift you up the light of your countenance upon us. Then has you put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and wine increased," Psalm 4:6, 7.

4. They differ in their end and effect. The delight of the godly leads them to desire conformity to the law, inward and outward, while the wicked content themselves at most, with an outward reformation. The difference between them is like that of the two painters, or skilful draughtsmen, who, both together, beholding one and the same picture, very artfully drawn: the one beheld it with admiration; and contented himself with seeing it, and commending it; but endeavoured not himself to make another like it: the other beheld it with a desire of imitation; and so praised it, as to set his skill a-work to make one like it. So it is with the regenerate and the unregenerate man; the regenerate man likes and delights in the word of God, so as he desires and endeavours a conformity to it: but the unregenerate man rests in the contemplation of the word; and remains at rest, though he attains no conformity to it.

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