



THOMAS PARR



"For someone outside of Christ, encountering dark places in life should be a profoundly disturbing experience. Dark things such as temporal judgments, an unclean conscience, and aging are foretastes of doom for unbelievers. For them, every unpleasant thing is just a sample of the Great Unpleasant of the afterlife. But Christians are encouraged to "rejoice in the Lord always" (Phil. 4:4) because they have a basis, even a necessity, for it in Christ. The question is whether we will truly appropriate God's promises by faith and bank on eternal, unseen things" (p. 4).

"Ask yourself if joy is normative in your life or if you are characterized by some other emotion. Has another emotion, perhaps even a good one, displaced joy? That should not be. Serious-minded Christians could be militant against sin yet be so grim that they are joyless. That's not a good advertisement for Christianity. Worse, it seems a betrayal of the gospel that promotes boundless joy, even in the dark places of a sin-cursed world and a crooked generation" (p. 8).

"Joy is a confession of faith that is not merely intellectual but tangibly emotional and experiential. A large part of the Christian life is getting to the point where our emotions reflect objective truth, and joy does this powerfully. Choosing joy is like placing a magnifying glass over beautiful things rather than ugly things and insisting not only on looking at the good but getting excited about it. Joy says God's gospel is the Big Thing and deserves our attention, and this is true even if the earth falls apart (Ps. 46:2). A person who seeks biblical joy is indignant at attempts to take the magnifying glass off of Christ and place it somewhere else" (p. 11).



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"When I exercise, I enjoy beautiful things more. After a brisk walk, I look at the blue sky, a forest landscape, or sunshine on a splash of yellow leaves, and I can see them better and more clearly. The sun seems brighter, the yellow seems more yellow, and I am aware that I notice each leaf on the trees. Just so, when our eye of faith is exercised, spiritual realities become clearer, and we enjoy them more. Our hearts are then drawn to God and Christ and heaven with real longing and passion. Biblical joy comes from a clear view of the Christian faith, from a good grasp of doctrine. I've often felt that a key to life is simply taking the time to enjoy biblical truth the way we enjoy a beautiful landscape. Just as we feast our physical eye on beauty, we must feast our spiritual eye on biblical doctrine, which has its own beauty (pp. 79-89).

"Without the Spirit, acts of "obedience" are the gesticulations of the fallen nature going through religious motions yet unaware of its own vileness and inability (Eph. 2:1). But when the Spirit renews people, they are purified and are given a new nature, which is characterized as loving God and wanting to serve Him (Deut. 30:6; Ezek. 36:27; 2 Cor. 5:17)" (p. 87).

"Do you offer up your obedience as acceptable to God through Christ? Do you consciously say to God, "Lord, I did this good thing, but I know my work is imperfect and sinful, just as I am imperfect and sinful. Accept what I did because of my high priest, Jesus Christ. Thank you that He sanctifies my efforts, as only He can!" This is crucial to living a Christian life, rather than just a moralistic one" (p. 88).

"Nothing gives a sense of safety and contentment more than knowing you have a well-stocked larder filled with the best foodstuffs for the long winter months ahead. Replenishment gives you a sense of cheerful satisfaction, the opposite of the unsettled fear of a shortage. God's incomprehensibility inspires joy, for we can always expect to find more in God. He is a never-ending source of pleasure, interest, beauty, health, and life. Such contentment admits people's inherent hunger and need but exults in God's abundant supply to meet those needs" (pp. 99-100).



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"Paul was patient with sinners because he was aware of how God had shown patience to him. This response is short-circuited when we do not feel sinful, for then we stop marveling at God's forgiveness. Paul said he is the chief of sinners, and he did so late in his life! This sense of your own unworthiness reminds you not to view other people's sin from a lofty vantage. Remembering your own sin—and God's amazing grace to you despite it—prompts you to lump yourself in with other sinners rather than exalt yourself over them" (pp. 110-111).

"Recently I was sitting with an elderly person who was talking about looking forward to heaven. We both agreed that heaven was going to be really great, but he was having a hard time thinking beyond the general idea that heaven will be way better than life is now. My heart went out to him as he fought his dementia, and I wanted to help him gain more encouragement from thoughts of heaven. I considered for a moment, and it came to me: 'A good way to think of heaven is to think of all the negatives in this life, the things that make it miserable, and to remember that heaven will be the opposite of those things. Any painful thing can become a reflection on glory to come.' His eyes brightened, and he jabbed an excited finger at me as he said, 'Yeah!' We then proceeded to reflect together, in essence canceling out miserable things with thoughts of heaven: no more illness, weakness, pain, unmet needs, sorrow, loss, uncertainty about the future, long-delayed gratification, confusion, temptation, or sin" (pp. 127-128).

"There is a profound seriousness to life in this world. Life is ticking away, and people are storing up wrath for the day of judgment even as they pretend such a day will never come. Biblical joy arises only from a good look at the gravity of a fallen world and our own tragic contribution to it. It arises by believing that God can bring good out of things, even for me, and He has done so through the cross. Any other joy is flippant, short-lived, and doomed to turn to wailing and gnashing of teeth. Joy that doesn't flow from conviction of sin and repentance is insupportable" (133).



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"It is said of Christ, "With His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all" (Heb. 9:12). Not that Christ brought literal blood into heaven; His blood was like the key unlocking heaven so He could enter it as our forerunner. His acceptance there, where evil cannot come, is the ultimate proof of the perfection of His sacrifice. His dwelling at God's right hand eternally declares that He has propitiated God's wrath against elect sinners. Christ's presence exudes sweet peace in heaven like a fragrance. He is 'sweet peace enthroned with smiles' (Henry Vaughan)" (p.158).