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The Way to Happiness

Have you been seeking for happiness and missed the mark? Have you blamed circumstances, business and social acquaintances, or perhaps everything and everyone but yourself for never having been able to capture that elusive something called happiness? It may be that the reason for failure in your quest lies deeper than merely people and places. It may be deep down in your own heart. Listen!

The word "sinner" as found early in the Bible (Genesis 13:13) comes from the Hebrew word "chata" means to "miss the mark" or "to step wrong" (Clarke's Commentary, Vol.1, p.99). In the Greek the meaning is the same. So a sinner is one who is ever aiming at happiness but is constantly missing his mark.

Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, learned to his bitter disappointment that happiness was not to be found in the multitude of riches he possessed. Solomon tried wisdom (Ecclesiastes 1:13). He tried riches (1Kings 10:21-27). He tried the riotous living of this world (Ecclesiastes 2:3, 8). But in all this he missed the mark. "In much wisdom is much grief," he lamented (Ecclesiastes 1:18). His riches failed to purchase for him the peace and the happiness he desired (Proverbs 11:28). His benevolence mocked him (Ecclesiastes 2:11). His good times brought only remorse (Proverbs 20:1; 23:29, 30). Solomon realized in the end that he had "stepped wrong" and that, as a sinner, he had missed the mark. He found at long last that the way of true happiness is the way of God.

Have you sought happiness apart from Christ? Do you realize that your present course will bring you neither happiness in this life nor eternal life in the world to come? Do you long for something better?

If so, then you have taken the first step in the right direction. Dissatisfaction with your present way of life is the first step heavenward. You must feel your need. If you do not, then let me point you to Christ, the One Altogether Lovely, the Sinless One, the One whose life was filled with unselfish service for others. His life had none of the faults and mistakes that mar these lives of ours. See Him in His tireless ministry for those about Him. See Him heal the sick, raise the dead, restore the fallen.

Finally, follow Him through those closing days of agony as He is heartlessly dragged from one mock trial to another. See Him reviled, but not reviling. See Him beaten and mocked, yet without retaliating. See Him at last nailed upon an instrument of deathly torture, and say, "It was for me He bore it all!"

As you compare your selfish life with His selfless ministry and measure your life of sin with His spotless character, do not your so-called good traits pale into insignificance? Do you not feel a surge of unworthiness flooding that heart of yours?

What next must you do? At this stage there is nothing you can do. Jesus must do it all for you. That is the blessed part of it. The debt you owe is too staggering for you ever to hope to pay it all. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Jesus steps in and says, "Son (daughter), I paid that price upon the cross of Calvary. If you will accept this way of escape by faith, you need not die."

By faith we accept His way, not because of any wave of emotionalism that sweeps over us but because He has promised. We come in all our sinfulness acknowledging our need of help from God. We confess our sins, and He forgives and accepts us as sons and daughters of the Highest. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1John 1:9).

Thus by the confession of every sin we may stand justified before Heaven, cleansed "from all unrighteousness" as though we had never fallen.

But this must be a real experience that comes from the heart. There can be no sham, no patching up the old life in self-wrought reformation. Christ accepts nothing but wholehearted surrender. You must give yourself entirely to Him who gave Himself for you upon Calvary.

Some years ago scientists were studying the habits and customs of ancient cliff dwellers in the western part of the United States. In the course of their research they discovered the unique method of spring housecleaning these primitive people employed. It consisted merely of whitewashing over the blackened interiors of their hillside dwellings. The whitewash had been generously applied with no attempt to remove the dirt and the soot. When the scientists carried out their research, they found a layer of black grime and then a layer of whitewash that had been applied to cover it up, and so on, accounting for any number of housecleaning jobs.

This is painfully similar to some spiritual housecleaning. The professed Christian tries to cover a black, unregenerate heart of sinfulness with a whitewashed veneer. Scratch the white a little with a few tests or temptations, and the superficiality soon becomes apparent. This is not God's plan for His blood-bought children. He desires a deeper, genuine work of grace to be accomplished in each child of His.

Take Jacob, for instance. His very name indicated his deceitful nature. He was, as his name implied, "a supplanter." How many times in the history of Jacob's experience that deceitful nature asserted itself! And then one night by the Brook Jabbok Jacob met God face-to-face. Through many long hours he wrestled with his heavenly Adversary for a victory that brought with it a new name - Israel, or "one who prevails with God." With Jacob it was not a question of just patching up the old life - whitewashing over the black sins of the past. Jacob, the old deceiver, was gone; in his place was Israel, a man who prevailed with God.

About seventeen hundred years later, Jesus emphasized the need for a new-birth experience as He spoke with Nicodemus one night. Jesus unfolded to this honest-hearted member of the Sanhedrin one of the most sublime truths of the gospel.

"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is

born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again" (John 3:5-7).

The Revised Standard Version renders this last verse, "You must be born anew," and Moffatt's Translation reads, "You must all be born from above," thus indicating clearly that the experience of which Jesus is here speaking is one that has its origin in heaven and is not some outward transformation that the individual can accomplish in his own strength.

Being born again is something entirely different from just patching up the old life and whitewashing over last year's sins. The work of regeneration is more than skin-deep. Listen to these words of Paul: "Therefore if any be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

This same phrase "all things are become new" is echoed in Revelation 21:5, which speaks of God's restoring the earth to its original sinless perfection. It requires the same creative power of God to re-create the earth new as it did for Him to speak the world into existence originally. It requires the same creative word of God to take a sinner from the bewitching influence of evil and make him a new individual, eligible to associate with sinless beings throughout eternity.

Peter tells us how this amazing new birth experience is accomplished. He says, "Being born again....by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever (1 Peter 1:23).

When the Word gets into a man's life, it just naturally changes things. Those old sins cannot remain in a heart and life permeated with the Word of God. When the Spirit gets hold of a man, the old life changes. The prophet Ezekiel explains why this is true: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them" (Ezekiel 36:26, 27).

God goes right to the very source of life - the heart. In bringing about the new birth, He says the first thing we need is a new heart. If our hearts are evil, we can never hope to get along by an outward correctness of behavior. Sooner or later the poisoned water at the spring's source will contaminate the life and render it unfit for heaven.

You will notice in the passage we have just read from Ezekiel that over and over God repeats, "I will" do this and "I will" do that for you. Being born again is something we are helpless to bring about ourselves. God must do it for us. We cannot of ourselves work reformation in the wellsprings of an unregenerate heart.

The Lord says He will give us a new heart (Ezekiel 36:26), a new name (Isaiah 62:2), a new tongue (Mark 16:17), and a new song (Psalm 40:3).

If you would like a very practical test to apply to your own experience, take your Bible and turn to Ephesians 4 and read verses 24 to 32. and you will soon be able to ascertain whether or not you have been born again.

A Frenchman who for some years had resided in England finally renounced his French citizenship and pledged allegiance to the English sovereign as a British subject. A few

days after the transaction he met a friend, who approached him jocularly, "Well, I suppose you are an Englishman now, but I don't see any difference in you!"

"Ah, but there is a difference," the former Frenchman said with emotion. "Yesterday Waterloo was a crushing defeat, but today it is a glorious victory!"

So those who have experienced the change in their nature have changed from the old life of defeat at the hands of Satan to the new life of victory through the Lord Jesus Christ.

And here comes the goal at last toward which we have been striving: happiness, full and complete, in Jesus Christ. Sins forgiven, victories won, at peace with God and man, joy in this world, and life eternal - why shouldn't we be happy?

All this Christ offers to you. Won't you open your heart's door and let Him come in to flood your life with true happiness - now?