Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness
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Life and liberty, two concerns of the founding fathers are only to be found in Christ. What about the pursuit of happiness?

LIFE, LIBERTY . . .

We are deeply grateful to God and the early leaders of our country that we were provided with the three important privileges of “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of happiness.” How do we go about obtaining these goals?

Jesus said that “…God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)

Jesus said the words He speaks are spirit and life. (John 6:63)

He also told His followers that He is the light of the world, and whoever follows Him “shall have the light of life.” (John 8:12)

The apostle Paul wrote that, “To be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.” (Rom. 8:6)

We read of “the glorious liberty of the children of God.” in Rom. 8:28, and in 2 Corinthians 3:17 we find where to obtain this: “Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”

The Galatians were encouraged to, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” (Gal. 5:1)

So we see that life and liberty are the inheritance of the child of God. It is what God has promised those who surrender their lives in trust to Him. What about the last part of our title: “The pursuit of happiness”?

It is not difficult to find examples of the pursuit of happiness. People all around us are pursuing happiness in every way imaginable. Millions of dollars and thousands of hours are spent in the pursuit of happiness. Yet, it seems that pursuing happiness does not guarantee that it will be found. People have spent most of their lives in the pursuit of happiness, yet, they are often the most miserable people the world has known.
Is “the pursuit of happiness,” like life and liberty, also something that the Bible tells us is the result of being part of the family of God?

The word “life” is found in the New Testament 171 times. “Liberty” is found 18 times. “Pursuit of happiness” however, cannot be found even once. In fact, doing a search using other key words to find the concept of Christian’s pursuit of happiness, I failed to find one reference. However, I did make some discoveries as to why.

The word “pleasure” is found 18 times. In most of the cases, it is referring to God’s pleasure: “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” (Phil. 2:13) It seems that God’s pleasure is mostly what Christians of this time were interested in!

Most of the rest of the occurrences refer to the pleasures of the wicked: “But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.” 1 Tim. 5:6 (Here it seems the pursuit of happiness brings death rather than life.)

In the only cases it is referring to Christian’s pleasure, it is not the pursuit of pleasure, but tells about what the apostle Paul takes pleasure in: “Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.” (2 Cor. 12:10)

This gives a little bit of a glimpse into the Bible’s teaching on pleasure and happiness. The pursuit of happiness becomes a thing of the past as we partake of the true happiness - not in grasping for illusive “fun”, but in single-hearted service to God. Anything done or suffered for the sake of Christ yields more real pleasure than that which is pursued in an effort to find pleasure.

The Psychology of Happiness

The “pursuit of happiness” to me is a phrase that has a sad ring to it. It tells of a grasping for something that is not yet obtained. Happiness is not found by grasping after it.

Happiness is the birthright of those born into the family of God. Therefore, the pursuit of happiness is made unnecessary for the Christian. I would encourage the reader to look up the word “happy” in a concordance and see how happiness comes to the child of God, without even having pursued it. We give just two examples here:
“If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them” (John 13:17). “But and if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye…” (1 Peter 3:14).

This is the real happiness, and this comes without being sought. This happiness is based upon fulfillment. The King James Version also often uses the term “blessed” to mean the same thing. (It is translated from the same Greek word) The Christian has done God’s will, and therefore he is fulfilled, blessed, or happy.

“Fun” is at the other end of the spectrum. Happiness is an emotion, and “fun” is used as an attempt to obtain the emotion of happiness. The pursuit of and the feeling of “fun” is based on unfulfillment.

In many cases, it is actually the lack of fulfillment that causes the addictiveness of fun. Because the expectations of “fun” are never quite met to the extent hoped for, there is an ever increasing desire for more and greater “fun.” This is why people enjoy mystery stories, and why amusement parks make such effective use of the excitement of suspense in their rides, etc. It is the unfulfilled expectations—the excitement of expectation rather than fulfillment which gives fun its pull. In rock music it is the offbeat of syncopation that keeps the listener’s expectation from being fulfilled and makes it addictive. It is “fun” because it produces the expectation of being fulfilled, yet never meets that expectation.

**INNOCENT FUN?**

Becoming a Christian is, in effect the turning over of the ultimate preference of our heart from serving self to serving God. Consequently, “fun”, that is, the seeking of pleasure for oneself as an end of itself is a breach in our commitment to God and becomes almost repulsive.

Let us seriously consider “innocent fun”:

The moral character of everything that we do is dependent upon the reason it is done, and we can know in our hearts what that motive is.

The Gospel will teach us the moral character of our fun: “Therefore, whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” Does our desire for fun spring from our love of God and our neighbor? Is it all done “to the glory of God?”

It is clear that fun just to gratify a carnal desire for amusement is not innocent. It is a breach in our commitment to God.
This certainly does not mean that anything enjoyable is bad. Far from it. Rather, we are looking at the motive behind what we do. Asceticism is not our goal. If we need a diversion for our health or to better serve our Lord, we are not entering it for the purpose of “having fun.” If we want to do something with our children, because it is educational, or to build our relationships with them, again it is the motive that determines whether we are doing good or bad; whether we are in the service of God, or serving ourselves.

Sin or righteousness are determined, not primarily by the act that is done, but by whether it is done in service to God or for the gratification of selfish interests. Whatever we do each day, we are doing in service to God or in selfishness. We are free agents and as such we choose each day whom we will serve.

“The pleasures of the world are deceitful; they promise more than they give. They trouble us in seeking them, they do not satisfy us when possessing them, and they make us despair in losing them.” -Madame De Lambert.

-Glenn M. Wenger

**Materialism** is a preoccupation with material rather than spiritual things.

**Hedonism** is the doctrine that pleasure or happiness is the sole or chief good in life.

**Asceticism** is the doctrine that enjoyment of life and material things is evil.

The Christian church has historically been somewhat confused and embarrassed by extremely differing views as to our enjoyment of life and its pleasures, and too often we see Christians trying to find some kind of balance between materialism, hedonism and asceticism.

How much fun can we have? How much can we enjoy the material things of this life before we are being hedonists or materialists? The Bible isn’t very specific on this—or is it? Are we on our own or are there guiding principles in the Word of God?

“Happiness in this world, when it comes, comes incidently. Make it an object of pursuit, and it leads us a wild-goose chase, and is never attained. Follow some other object, and very possibly we may find that we have caught happiness without dreaming of it.” -Hawthorne

“Real happiness is cheap enough, yet how dearly we pay for its counterfeit!” -Hosea Ballou