

32963 Article ~ 8-4-09

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### *Just Joy*

Writer C. S. Lewis was one of the most widely-read and influential Christian writers of all time. In one of his writings, Lewis tells of a schoolboy who was asked what he thought God was like. The boy answered that as far as he could make out, "God is the kind of person who is always snooping around to see if people are enjoying themselves so he can put a stop to it."

A lot of people share similar notions about the nature and character of God. They believe that God is some kind of cosmic killjoy, most pleased when his followers are properly sedate and stern. In fact, our own denomination was birthed in the Puritan/Pilgrim movement which was influential at the founding of our nation. An old joke says that the definition of a Puritan is anyone who fears that someone, somewhere, might be happy. So we understand: the concept that God is frequently disapproving of us is a potent one.

What is your image of God? Do you share these notions of God's preference for our stoic silence and our grimness? While there is every reason to expect that God does indeed disapprove of wrong-doing, there is no real reason to presume that human joy and happiness are inherently wrong! In fact, we Christians recall that the birth of Jesus was accompanied by angel songs that declared, "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy!" There is no doom and gloom in that! The music which burst forth from the heavens that night was not a dirge but an anthem of celebration.

Theologian Charles Templeton once said that Christ's birth was "not the funeral of good times, so let us be done with this idea that religion is dolorous and that when it enters the front door fun and laughter go out the back." We think Mr. Templeton hit the nail on the head!

Consider that when Jesus was asked which were the greatest commandments, he perused the ten "Thou shalt nots" and suggested two "Thou shalt": Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and thy neighbor as thyself. This, we would suggest, is the basis for a full and joyous, God-blessed life. It is the formula for a life enriched by love and expressive of love.

Being a person of faith, in our view, is not just a matter of worrying about our own souls, and then sitting primly, piously, and patiently on the sidelines of life. Rather, being faithful means letting love fill our souls to overflowing. And when that love bubbles out of us, we just may be unable to control ourselves. The joy will overflow, too!