THE HAPPIEST IN THIS WORLD HAVE A LIFE OF LOVE TO CHRIST

I Peter 1:8.

Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.¹

The Apostle had occasion to mention the trials and sorrows that the Christians he wrote to were the subjects of, which he observes to be manifold, in the 6th verse: “Now for a season, if need be, or because God sees ye have need of it, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.” In the 7th verse, he tells upon what account God saw that they had need of these afflictions and temptations: and that was “that the trial of their faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise, and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”

And in our text, the Apostle takes notice,

1. Of that in them that abundantly counterbalanced the troubles they underwent: and that was the love they had to Christ, and the joy they had in him. They so loved Christ, and had so great joy in him, that it made their afflictions seem but light; they were thereby wonderfully supported under them, and had abundant compensation for them. Though they, because they were Christians, had afflictions and persecution that the rest of the world had not; so at the same time, they had also that inward sweetness, love and joy in Christ which much more distinguished them from the rest of the world than their trials.

2. The Apostle takes notice of a remarkable circumstance of this their love and joy in Christ: and that is, that it was in him whom they had not seen. It is not a usual thing with respect to earthly objects of love, that the heart is enamored with a person that has not been seen, so as to have a strong
affection, and very feeling delight and complacency in them. A person may highly approve of the good qualifications that he only hears to be in another; but 'tis not a usual thing that the heart is captivated with love, and carried out with delight, in a person unseen.

It was not with these Christians that the Apostle wrote to, as it was with some others, and as it was with the Apostle himself, that had seen the Lord with their bodily eyes, and had conversed with him in the flesh; but however, with respect to their love to him, and joy in him, it was the same with what those disciples experienced that had seen the Lord.

3. The Apostle takes notice, what it was that supplied the room of sight in them: and that was faith. Though they had not seen him, yet they believed, and therefore loved and rejoiced. Though they had not seen him with bodily eyes, yet they saw him with an eye of faith; they had the reality of his existence and his excellencies and his love set before the eye of their souls, and beheld by an eye of faith. And therefore, though they had not seen, and did not now see him with bodily eyes, their hearts were enflamed with love to him and delight in him.

4. And lastly, he takes notice of the kind and degree of that joy, which they had in Christ: though not seen, it was "joy unspeakable, and full of glory." There are scarce any other words can give so lively a representation of the manner of a Christian's rejoicing in Christ, at such times as when he has ardent exercises of love to Christ, and a lively faith in him. It most fitly expresses the exquisite sweetness, that refined, pure and holy nature, the serene and undisturbed calmness and brightness of that heavenly peace and joy: it is "joy unspeakable, and full of glory."

DOCTRINE.

They live the happiest life in this world, that live a life of love to Jesus Christ, beholding him with an eye of faith.
I say “in this world,” because though the happiness of the life that the saints live in heaven arises thence, that it is a life of love to Jesus Christ; but there they behold him not any longer by an eye of faith, having a more immediate and perfect vision of him.

The primitive Christians, they lived happier lives than other men, though they were exercised with so manifold temptations. Their joy was of an exceedingly better and more exquisite kind, than the joy of the men of this world.

In order to clear up this doctrine, we shall speak to these three propositions:

I. That the happiness of men consists in love and friendship.

II. That this love and friendship between the saints and Jesus Christ, yields a greater and sweeter happiness than any other.

III. That it is necessary that we should behold Christ with an eye of faith, in order to our having this happiness.

Proposition I. The happiness of men consists in love and friendship. 'Tis peculiar to the Divine Being, to have happiness and satisfaction in himself alone. No being can be independently happy, but is an all-sufficient and an all-comprehending Being; He that is absolutely perfect, and is the infinite fountain of all good. Creatures that are finite and imperfect beings, are not thus self-sufficient. There is no creature has that in himself alone, that will fill the capacity and cravings of his nature; and especially man, who is so feeble and so imperfect creature. While he is alone, he is empty, and never can be happy, except it be in union with some other being.

The union must be with some intelligent being or beings, in order to make an intelligent being happy. There can be no proper union of an intelligent mind with that that is inanimate or without understanding; and if there could be,
they are not of a nature suitable to add to, or to make happy, a being so superior as an intelligent mind.

There is no other way of intelligent minds being united, as to cause happiness in each other, but love. 'Tis that by which two are as it were made one, and they have communion in each other; and the creature, empty in itself, does in any measure fill its capacity by the addition it receives by union with another.

Love and joy are affections of the soul that, in their nature, are very near akin. Love is the agreeableness and harmony of the soul with any object of the understanding; joy is but the exercise of the same principle towards the object as some way present and in possession, or considered as hereafter to be in possession. There can therefore be no happiness without love. And self-love is not able to make so empty a creature as man happy, nor indeed any finite being. The happiness of the angels in heaven, it consists in love and friendship. 'Tis God only is happy in loving and rejoicing in himself: and even the joy that God has in himself, may be conceived of as the joy of union and society, even the infinite joy and happiness in the eternal union and fellowship of the persons of the Trinity. The Father is infinitely beholding and loving himself in his own perfect image, the Son, the Son of God, of the Father. Prov. 8:30, “Then was I by him as one brought up with him, and I was daily his delight.” And the Son had infinite [joy] in the Father, as it follows in the latter part of the verse: “rejoicing always before him.”

It appears also that the happiness of man consists in the enjoyments of love and friendship, that all virtue may be resolved into love. It comprehends the duties of both tables of the Law. The virtue of the mind, is the spring of its happiness.

Happiness consists in the contemplation and enjoyment of some excellent object, or object suitable to the nature of the soul; which object must be some other mind, or else it will not be of a nature suitable for the enjoyment of a
mind, and will not be capable of yielding happiness, because it will be of a much inferior nature to it. And in order to the enjoyment of such an object, viz. of another mind, there must be union. There must be a suitable exercise of our wills towards the object, which is love; and answerable returns, which is by mutual love; and proper expressions of this love in society.

[Prop.] II. Love and friendship towards Jesus yields greatest happiness to the soul of men. When I speak of Christ, I would not be understood as exclusive of the other persons in the Trinity, for they are one: he that sees Christ, sees the Father; and he that loves Christ, he therein loves the Father: for the Father is in the Son, and the Son in the Father. But love and friendship towards Jesus Christ is a spring of the greatest happiness, upon these accounts:

First. There is no beauty or excellency so desirable as that of Jesus Christ. The beauty and excellency of Christ is most absolutely perfect; he has no deformity. It is pure, without spot or blemish, or any such thing; there is no alloy to his glory. It is without any defect in any respect; he has all possible excellency; he has every possible kind. There is nothing that can be conceived of, that could render him any way a suitable object of esteem or desire or complacence, but that he is possessed of it. And he hath it in the utmost possible degree, and so in glorious beauty and excellency transcends all other beings. He excels as the apple tree among the trees of the wood, or as the precious ruby among common stones [Ezek. 28:13]. He is fairer than the sons of men, Ps. 45:2. And the most bright and beautiful of the angels, those pure and spotless beings, they are not to be compared. There are none in heaven that can be compared to the Lord, Ps 89:6. The highest heavens themselves, that light and glorious place, if we compare to the beauty and glory of Christ, looks dull and obscure; the heavens are not pure in his sight. The angels, they may well cover their faces and their feet when they are in his presence. This bright and morning star far outshines all other stars of that firmament; their
light is put out when he appears, as the stars are hid when the sun shines. Christ hath obtained “a more excellent name than the angels,” Heb. 1:4. He is the darling of heavens; the heavens themselves appear glorious by the reflection of his beauty. And the blessed saints above, they are beautiful by being transformed by the sight of his superlative excellency. Christ is so amiable, that it adds a beauty and luster to every one that is near him. Christ infinitely excels all other beings in excellency, because he is the effulgence of God’s glory, and his express image. He is possessed of all divine excellencies. He has divine majesty, wisdom, holiness and grace. And as he is man, he has all the excellencies that the human nature is capable of: his excellencies, they reflect glory one upon another; his greatness and majesty reflects glory on his grace, and his grace on his majesty. And by virtue of his union with the human nature, we see awful majesty, and the most marvelous mildness and meekness, joined in the same person.

Second. The love of Christ towards those that love him is transcendent, and far exceeds the love of all earthly friends. To judge of the greatness of the happiness that a person enjoys in friendship with another, we must consider not only the degree of the excellency of the person loved, but also the degree of his love: for however excellent, yet if there be not mutual love, [there be not friendship]. Now there is no love like the love of Christ, in these following respects:

1. There is no love so free and disinterested as the love of Christ. That is one qualification of love from whence we denominate true love, that it be not mercenary. Now there is no love so remote from it, as the love of Christ; he loves his people freely; he has no interest in the cause; he don’t set his heart upon them because he seeks anything from them, whereby he can be any way advantaged.

2. There is no love so great as the love of Christ to those that love him. His love is stronger than death. Believers, they are very near and dear to
Christ. If we look to his love of benevolence, there is none to be compared with, whether we judge of it by Christ’s declarations of it, or by the expressions of it in what he did and suffered for us, or by the fruits of it to believers in the gifts they receive from him. Or, if we look at Christ’s love of complacency, Christ represents himself as having his heart ravished with the beauty of the souls of believers, Cant. 4:8. Christ takes greater delight in that beauty of holiness, which he puts upon believers, than men do in any beauty of a fellow creature.

3. His love is the most constant. Whom he loves, he loves to the end, John 13:1. The love of all earthly friends is changeable; it is many ways liable to coolings, [to] cool and abate. Change of judgment, long absences or misunderstandings, or failings in conduct and behavior, the occasional appearances of weakness or corruption, or solicitations of a rival, may, and very often do, bring earthly friendships to an end.

And a jealousy of this, is very commonly a thing that attends the most ardent love of earthly lovers. But he that is a lover of Christ, can have no occasion for fears and jealousies of the inconstancy of Christ’s love. There is no incident whatsoever that will cool his love towards his people; the delight of the saints in Jesus Christ need not to be impeded by any such thing.

Third. There are the strongest evidences, and most endearing expressions of Christ’s love, to them that live [a] life of love to him, besides Christ’s abundant declarations of his love. He has given the most convincing evidences in his deed, as well as Word. We can think of no greater evidence of the truth and strength of love, than suffering. Only giving where there is no loss, nor anything of the nature of suffering in the giver, is not so great an evidence, as suffering. And is especially the suffering to such extremity as Christ did, a great testimony of love; and more so still, if we consider the dignity and excellency of Christ’s person. The sufferings of Christ were no less than death itself, and not only the death of the body but those inward agonies that were
of the same kind with eternal death. There never was any earthly friend that ever gave such a testimony of love; and the expressions of the love of Christ, in the benefits he bestows upon those that love him, are above all others endearing. There is the taking of them into so near a relation to himself, espousing their souls to him; his becoming their head, and making them his members; his putting his own beauty upon them, making them partakers of his nature; rescuing of them from the power of Satan, their cruel enemy; giving of them the most glorious light; taking up his abode in their hearts by his Holy Spirit, in so sweet and powerful a manner drawing their hearts to him, and making them willing in the day of his power, and in the endearing promises which he gives them. They that live in the enjoyment of such expressions of the love of so excellent and glorious a friend, do doubtless live the happiest life in the world.

Fourth. They that live a life of love to Christ, they have the truest grounds to hope for the most perfect enjoyment of their Friend, and that without any end. Love desires the greatest possible nearness, and most intimate communion. And however the saints in this life are kept at a distance from Christ—their enjoyment of him is greatly interrupted by and impeded [by] sin and the body—yet there are in the covenant of grace the greatest possible assurances given of the most intimate, perfect and uninterrupted enjoyment hereafter: they shall be with Christ where he is, that they may behold his glory; they shall sit with Christ in his throne [Rev. 3:21]; they shall walk with Christ in white [Rev. 7:9]; they [shall] drink of the river of water of life that flows from the throne of the Lamb [Rev. 22:1]; they shall enter with Christ into his banqueting house [Cant. 2:4].

They shall more perfectly be acquainted with Christ, and behold his heavenly glory and receive the most glorious testimonies of his love, and they themselves be every way fitted for his enjoyment. They shall be like him; they shall be made perfect in holiness; their souls shall be as a bride adorned for
her husband.

And there's will be no fear of any separation. The enjoyment will be eternal. There will no such thought^ five come into the heart in the midst of all, that I must one day be separated from the dear object of my love by death.

Such hopes as those which they have in the Word of God the safe foundation for, renders a life of love to Christ happy above all others.

III. That it is necessary that Christ should be beheld with an eye of faith, in order to our having this happiness. We never can enjoy such happiness in an object that is no way seen. Christ, as to his bodily presence, is far above all heavens, immensely beyond the reach of our bodily eyes; and therefore, if we are happy in him, we must behold him with a spiritual eye, or by an eye of faith.

First. 'Tis by faith that the being and presence of Christ is realized. There is no such thing as being happy, and full of unspeakable joy, in the love of only an imaginary object, whose existence we don't realize. And in and as to the being happy in his friendship, we must not only have an opinion that he exists, but we must see it and be convinced of it, and having a realizing sense of it. If we only guess at his existence, we can never have our hearts so possessed with his love, and so filled with joy in him. And it is not only necessary that we should realize his being in heaven, but we must realize his being spiritually present here on earth: that he sees us, and knows us, and takes notice of us. It must be realized that we have to do with him, otherwise there can be no joy of any communion, there can be no spiritual conversation carried on; there can be no conversation with a being that is not conceived as present, and concerned with us. We can't be happy in conversing with a person that is kept out of sight, whose presence with us we cannot have.

Second. 'Tis by faith that the beauty and amiableness of Christ is seen. His beauties are spiritual, and therefore can be beheld only with a spiritual eye. 'Tis by the Spirit of God, working faith in us, that “we behold the glory
of Christ, and are changed into the same image from glory to glory” [II Cor. 3:18]. Whatever excellency there is in Christ, it can no way be the foundation of our love and joy in him, only as we behold it; and a mere rational opinion that he is excellent, is not sufficient to kindle this flame in the hearts: but we must have an intuitive knowledge of it.

If we hear never so excellent a description of a person that we never saw, that won’t be sufficient to enflame the heart with love. One glimpse with the eye will do more than all the descriptions in the world. But the beauty of Christ is beheld with the eye of faith.

Third. 'Tis by faith that the love of Christ is realized. We can no otherwise know that he is the friend of those that love him. It is by that that we believe the declarations of his love in his Word. 'Tis by that that we believe those testimonies that he has given of his love. 'Tis by faith that we know that he suffered such extreme things from love to us and shed his blood, made his soul an offering for us. 'Tis by faith that we look upon the bounties we receive as testimonies of his love, and are sensible that they are from him, and flow from his free benignity and kindness.

'Tis by faith that we realize the complacence that Christ hath in us for that beauty which he hath put upon us. 'Tis by faith that we realize his acceptance of our love.

Fourth. Faith is the source of that hope of future, perfect and eternal enjoyment of Christ. 'Tis by faith only that we in some measure anticipate future joys. 'Tis by faith only that things future are made present. Heb. 11:1, "Faith [. . .] is the evidence of things not seen." 'Tis by faith that we know that there is way made for our being brought to that future enjoyment, that the justice and honor of God is not against it, that satisfaction is made, and that heaven is purchased by a sufficient price. 'Tis by faith that we believe the promises of Christ, whereby he assures of a future enjoyment of [him]. 'Tis by faith that we understand the constancy of Christ’s love, and so are delivered
from all fears or jealousies of a cessation or abatement of his love. 'Tis by faith that we understand our own preservation and perseverance, so that no death shall ever dissolve the union between Christ and our souls. Thus the joys of this life of friendship with Christ, is the joy of faith. Faith and love join together to raise in us that joy that is unspeakable, and full of glory; and one can do nothing towards our happiness without that other, as indeed we cannot subsist without that other.ī

APPLICATION.

[Use] I. Hence we learn one great excellency of a Christian life, that it is its own reward. The Christian life is indeed a painful and laborious life, and a life of self-denial. It is therefore compared to a race, and warfare. We had need always to be standing upon our watch, to be always exerting our utmost strength. 'Tis a life whereby the corrupt inclinations of the heart are all crossed, and all inordinate pleasures are denied. They that live that life, they take up the cross daily. 'Tis a life wherein we are to expect tribulations, and especially it is so at some times. And yet we learn by the doctrine that it is the happiest life in the world, besides that honor and blessedness which is the future reward which God hath promised. There is a great reward even in the very practice of the duties and self-denial of this life, as it is the exercise of faith and love towards the Lord Jesus Christ. Ps. 19:9-11, “The judgments of the Lord are more to be desired than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than the honey and the honeycomb. In keeping of them there is great reward.” 'Tis worth the while to live a Christian life, for the sake of the tendency that it has to our inward peace and joy.

[First] Objection. Here if it be objected, that some of the saints meet with abundance of darkness and spiritual trouble besides outward troubles, so that they seem to live a very melancholy life.

Answer. That that is not from any defect in the nature of Christianity,
but from their imperfection in it. 'Tis no argument that it is not the nature and tendency of a life of love to and faith in Christ, to bring darkness and trouble, than' above all other things to make the life happy. But 'tis an argument of our defect. Those troubles arise from something else, and not from those principles of faith and love to Christ, but from opposite principles that take the advantage of the imperfection and weakness of those principles in the heart, to exert themselves and cause darkness in the mind. There is sin, or temptations, or error, that impedes the exercise of those principles, which are a spring of joy and comfort; the streams are suppressed by opposite principles.

Their having so much darkness ought not to be to the discredit of a life of love and faith, seeing that this darkness arises, not from their having those principles, but from their having of them in so imperfect a degree, and for want of the due exercises of that principle they have.

Second Obj. The Apostle says, I Cor. 15:19, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." How then can it be its own reward?

Answ. The pleasure of a life of faith and love here, is much from hope. The expectation of an end in a short time would damp all the pleasure; and the greater the love was, the greater the sense of excellency, the more stinging would be the consideration of an end.

In those times, i.e. the times of the early church, they met with extraordinary troubles.

Use II of Exhortation, to leave a vain pursuit of happiness in other things, and seek it here. The world of mankind is in the pursuit of happiness; they are all restlessly inquiring after it; the generality of them seek in things wherein it is not to be found. Though they don't yet find it--they meet with disappointment hitherto--yet they still entertain hopes that they shall overtake it. But earthly things, however tempting they appear, however fair an outside they have, if we seek happiness in them, we shall surely be
disappointed. They only are happy whose hearts have left the world, and whose life is hid with Christ in God; to them has God given wisdom to choose the good part. The water of life is in Christ alone. Is. 55, the first three verses, “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.”

Ye that have met with losses in your outward substance, disappointments in your business, yea, that a little while ago were big with hopes of happiness in some earthly object, and now have your soul sunk with the disappointment; ye that set your hearts upon dear friends, that you are now mourning at the loss of: consider this, that you have been mistaken; you have looked for happiness from a wrong quarter.

By this doctrine, you may be directed where you may find a sweeter, more unmixed, more uninterrupted, more durable happiness. Be exhorted to seek happiness here.

Here I shall propose several things to you:

First. Not to entertain prejudices against this life as though it were not a happy life, till you have tasted and seen. No wonder then, those whose nature is averse to this life, who have an enmity against Jesus Christ and a loathing of holiness, which is his greatest beauty, and a distaste of those enjoyments that are the objects of the Christian’s hopes, can’t make it seem to themselves that a life of faith and love towards the Lord Jesus Christ, is a sweet and joyful life. But ‘tis not from any defect in this life, but from the depravity of your own nature. You may have your nature so changed, nevertheless, that the same things [that] may seem above all things delightful
to you, may be above all things loathsome. You are under no advantages to judge of the happiness of those that live this life by what you see in them, because you don’t see the marks of that kind of mirth that others indulge. You are ready to look upon them as a melancholy and scornful kind of persons. But their happiness is such as a stranger intermeddles not with. Prov. 14:10, “A stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy.”

*Second.* Consider, that if ever you enjoy any good in your fixed and eternal state, it must be this kind of happiness, even the happiness of a life of love and friendship towards Christ.

If ever you are happy, or if ever you have any comfort or pleasure at all after a few years are past, it must be of this kind. Your pleasure and joy must consist in the holy exercises of love to God and Christ, in beholding their divine and spiritual glory, in receiving testimonies of their favor, and in mutually returning expressions of your love and admiration in praise.

It behooves you, therefore, now to strive after a relish for those enjoyments. If you obtain not a relish of ‘em here in this world, it is certain you never will enjoy them in another world. You won’t be crowded into heaven against your will. And if you should be thrust in there with the same taste and the same appetites that now reign in you, and as destitute of a relish of heavenly enjoyments as now you are, it would be impossible that you should be happy.

If you are concerned, therefore, for your comfort or pleasure in your fixed and everlasting state, as well as in this momentary and transitory, it concerns you earnestly to seek a change of your nature. You’ll find no Mahometan paradise in another world. You won’t find heaven furnished with fuel for your lusts.

You’ll never in another world have the pleasure of having a great deal of money in your chests, or of possessing a great deal of land, or of pleasing your taste with meats or drinks, or of impure gratifications of your fleshly
appetite. And if you spend your time here in pursuing such a happiness and inflaming your desires after them, it will but be for the making of you more miserable in hereafter, when you shall be forever cut off from all such enjoyments.

You do hope to go to heaven when you die: I conclude that there are scarce any here present but what entertain such a hope. You hope you shall be well out in another world. You intend to be happy in your eternal state, and what is it that you propose to be happy in there? Do you hope to spend your days in feasting, eating the fat and drinking the sweet? Do you hope to find heaven a place for frolicking, for chambering and wantonness? Or do you hope to have the pleasure of being accounted a great more richer than many of your neighbors, and being in reputation for having more wit than others, or of being in some good office, some place of honor or profit, and being a person of greater influence than others? Or is the pleasure that you let upon the seeing a fine beautiful place, and having pleasant music in heaven? If you have any tolerable notion of Christianity, you cannot have such expectations, or be so deluded as to think that the happiness of heaven consists in these things. How great therefore is your folly, and the inconsistence of your practice with your hopes, that you spend all your time in pursuing after such kind of enjoyments, neglecting those that are of that kind wherein the happiness of heaven does indeed consist.

Third. Though you have never tasted how great the happiness that results from faith and love towards Christ is, yet this may convince you, viz. that it has been very often found by experience that these will support men, and make them joyful in the greatest torments, the approaches of death—first, natural death—that that will more than counterbalance the greatest earthly torments, we may conclude, is greater and sweeter than any earthly pleasure, and so is the greatest happiness of life. Though you have no relish of those kind of pleasures, and have no notion how a man can have much joy in believing on and
loving the Lord Jesus Christ, yet if you should see a man burning at the stake or roasting alive upon a gridiron, with an undaunted cheerful countenance, cheerfully singing, and having all the marks and signs of unconcernedness at his present torments, and of joy and gladness of heart from the exercise of love to Christ, and the sense he had of his excellency and love: surely that would be enough to convince you that he had some extraordinary comforts and delighting sensations, or views inwardly in his heart, though you could have no notion what it was. But thus it has been in multitudes of instances, in several different ages of the church; there is nothing in history that we have more particular and better attested accounts of. The Christian church in times of persecution has been full of such instances of poor, weak, feeble men and women that have, through their experience of the wonderful sweetness of the joy of love and faith which God has given them, gloriously triumphed over all earthly evils, over poverty, disgrace and the artful cruelty of men, over temporal death in its most grim and terrible forms. The apostle Paul says concerning himself, in II Cor. 6:4, etc., that though he was “in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings,” yet that he was always rejoicing, [as] in the 10th verse. And Stephen, in the near approaches of death, his heart was so filled with joy unspeakable, and full of glory, that they saw his face as it had been the face of an angel, Acts 6:15: there was that appearance of holy and gladness in his countenance. And this was but a specimen of what there have [been] hundreds of instances of since.

Earthly enjoyments will not support a man under such affliction. They will none of ‘em make a man’s heart so full of joy in the midst of torments. If a man be under the suffering of extreme pains and tortures, if you bring never so much gold and silver and jewels, and lay before him, it won’t support him. If you clothe him with the most sumptuous robes, that won’t give a joyful heart and cheerful countenance; if you set before him the sweetest dainties, prepared
with the most exquisite art to please the appetite, that will not support him.

If a man be never so rich, and has never so great a plenty of earthly goods, yet only the pain of an ailing tooth or finger, if it be constant, is enough to take away the comfort of it all. If he has no hopes of having intermissions of ease, as long as he lives, he had better be a peasant in a cottage now at ease, than upon a royal throne with that pain. How much greater, then, must spiritual delights and joys be that gives songs in a cottage, in a dungeon and in the flames?

So that if you won’t believe the Word of God, which declares that the happiness of men consists in these things; if you won’t believe the word of all the godly that have experience, yet believe those fools, which are a certain evidence of it, and such as is not liable to dissimulation.

First. Consider that God, who hath taught us this doctrine, doubtless knew what will make us most happy. God hath made all things. The human nature is his workmanship throughout: he hath made our souls, and hath given us our faculty of perception, and capacity of enjoyment. ’Tis by him that we are so made, that we are capable of enjoying pleasure. He hath made our bodies, and hath given us our senses, hath furnished us with our sensitive organs, and he fully knows every secret spring in our whole frame. And surely he knows what is best for us, what is most suitable to our nature, most agreeable to the human soul, and what sort of enjoyment will be the sweetest to it, what is capable of yielding of us the most exquisite satisfaction. It would be strange if God, that made us, should be mistaken about our make and constitution, so as not to know what is best for us. ’Tis strange if he, that gave us a capacity of enjoying anything, should not know what would yield us the most sweetness. God doubtless knew, when he made us, and when he made earthly things for us, how great pleasure they were capable of yielding us by our senses, or by our imaginations; but yet God hath declared that our happiness consists in something else. God in his Word nowhere says, “Blessed is the man that has a
good estate, Blessed is the man that is advanced to honor, Blessed is the man that lives in sensual pleasure”; but, “Blessed is the man whose delight is in the law of the Lord,” Ps. 1:1-2; and “Blessed is the man whom God chooses, and causes to approach unto him, that he may dwell in his courts,” Ps. 65:4; and, “Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit,” Jer. 17:7-8; and “Blessed are the pure in heart,” and “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” in the beginning of Matthew’s Gospel.

Now, why can’t you believe God, rather than your own fancies? Men are very ignorant of themselves; they don’t know what will make them most happy. Sometimes they pursue one thing, and then they repent and pursue another. But is it not better to follow God’s direction, who infallibly knows the path to true blessedness?

[Second.] Here I would direct the exhortation especially to young people to seek happiness in a life of love to Jesus Christ. Those that are in youth, as their appetites are stronger, so their expectations of happiness are higher. By this doctrine, you are directed where to seek for and obtain the best pleasures. Be persuaded, therefore, early to enter into an alliance and friendship with Christ; give him your hearts; let him have the bloom of your youth, and the possession of your best affections forever: for all other things are his rivals, that woo and allure your senses.

Let him have your heart now, while you are young, that must have it forever, if you are not eternally miserable. You have doubtless been ready to be devising means for your being happy here in this world, and have been ready to entertain your minds with imaginations and hopes of a great deal of pleasure and comfort, in one thing or other, that you hope hereafter to obtain. But such pleasing imaginations will only lay a foundation for greater sorrow in the
disappointment, if you are not directed right in your pursuits and expectations.

It is a matter of great consequence, that you should be well directed in your first setting out in the world, in your pursuit after happiness. If you should happen to take a wrong path, you would have the mortification of finding yourself disappointed, and having all the way to travel back again, or else to be finally lost in a wilderness of woe and misery, instead of arriving at the land of blessedness.

If you go on while you are young in seeking happiness in other things, wherein it is not to be found, it will lay you under a vast disadvantage for ever obtaining it, as long as you live. Your mind, after a while, will be strongly prepossessed with principles and habits contrary to the true way to blessedness. You’ll be likely to get into some bad practice or other, whereby God will be greatly provoked, and your own soul wounded. Satan will have you greatly entangled in his snares. There will be a great deal of work made for repentance, and it will be ten to one whether ever you will be reclaimed, and get into the true path to happiness as long as you live.

Let Christ have your heart, therefore, while it is yet tender. Let him have your first love. You that are now coming onto the stage of the world, ‘tis he that best deserves it, and has done most to win it. Let it be your first love, to enter into an everlasting friendship with Christ that never shall be broken.

Take heed that you never indulge any flame, that is inconsistent with this pure flame of love to Christ. Take heed to keep yourselves, and pray God to keep you, so that you mayn’t by any temptation be drawn into any impure practices. You that are not yet corrupted, give your hearts to Christ, that he may keep you, that you never may be corrupted by any such impurity.

Let Christ have your hearts early, for while you neglect Christ, you neglect your own chief good, and all that time is lost time while you don’t
enjoy the true good. Besides, if you neglect it now, you'll be in danger of missing of it forever: for you know not how soon your opportunity may be gone. You may die and go out of this state of trial, and yet your seeking happiness will be in vain, though you seek it as silver, and search for it as for hid treasures.

By your early seeking of this happiness, you will be much more likely to obtain it. There is special encouragement given in the Word of God to early seekers. Prov. 8:17, “Those that seek me early shall find me.” Those that seek Christ only, they generally find much easier work on’t than old sinners, that have long stood it out against the call of the gospel.

[Obj.] Some young people are ready to object, that if they should then early devote themselves to religion, that they should lose their youth, which is their best time for the enjoyments of their pleasures: they should miss of those pleasures that other young people enjoy; they must live by strict rules, and must live a mortified, self-denying life; and they are ready to think it would be better for 'em to stay till their youth is past, before they betake themselves to such a manner of living.

To this I answer,

1. That you lose nothing by it now in youth, but on the contrary, will greatly gain if you miss of the unlawful pleasure. You'll miss of that that is but very little worth, of those enjoyments that are debasing to your nature. And if you obtain those comforts that arise from a life of friendship with Christ, you will have those that will be far better in their stead, that are more substantial, more satisfying, that are not debasing but dignifying to your nature, that are far more worthy that the bloom of your life and prime of your days should be devoted to them.

If you spend your youth in acts of faith and love towards Christ, you'll spend your youth far more pleasantly than those that spend it in carnal mirth, and in pursuit of fleeting vanities. You won't begrutch 'em these pleasures,
but will rather see cause to pity them, and to bless God that he has given you joys that they know nothing of. You will probably be no loser as to comfort in temporal things. Temporal things, enjoyed in that manner and measure which God allows, are much better than when they are stolen, and enjoyed in a manner contrary to reason and virtue. Unlawful delights, besides the dreadful consequences of 'em, they have many things with them: there is the sting of conscience and fear of wrath; there is the curse of God that goes with them as well as follows them; they have, many ways, a tendency to the ruin of the outward interest of men.

2. Thereby you'll lay a foundation for peace and comfort in old age, and in the days of darkness. It is surely your prudence to consult your comfort, not only while in youth. If you spend the days of your youth in vanity and sin, you lay a foundation for a regret and sorrow afterwards. With what comfort can you reflect upon your youth so misspent? You will find that it will be as rottenness in your bones. When your youth is spent and your youthful pleasures gone, what comfort can you be like to have, when you have not other enjoyments to solace your heart with, and when you reflect and consider that you have nothing remaining of your former pleasures, but only abundance of guilt that you have thereby contracted, a long account in God’s book standing against you?

3. And lastly, it will be a foundation for pleasures forevermore, when both youth and old age will be gone. If you should spend your youth in sin, it might be too late. But if you early get into an alliance and friendship with Christ, how comfortable must it be to think, that besides your present enjoyment of the discoveries of Christ’s glory, etc., you have a foundation laid for good and happiness throughout the whole of your existence. And how much a wiser choice will you make than other young people, who choose the laughter of fools, that is as the crackling of thorns under a pot—though it makes a noise and a blaze, soon goes out, and nothing is left but ashes—while you choose that which renders you happy here, and lays a sure foundation for
your being blessed forevermore.
Notes

1 Reprehensing notation on top of MS p. 1: “st Ind. July. 1757.”

2 MS: “much.”

3 MS: “that.”

4 MS: “they.”

5 MS: “thought will.”


7 MS: “those.”

8 MS: “principles.”

9 I.e. depend, anticipate.

10 MS: “&.”

11 MS: “of getting rid.”

12 MS: “that.”

13 MS: “you are.”