

TRILOGY: THE SEARCH FOR CHRISTMAS JOY
"Part II - The DOOR To Christmas Joy"
(Luke 2:8-14)

Intoduction: (To show the need . . .)

Many who attend Church who know the Bible's nativity accounts do not have the "great joy" the angels announced in Luke 2:10

(1) A Fall of 1994 newsletter of the United Church of Christ, "The Witness" had as its leading story this caption: "Leading Lesbian Writes UCC Sex Education Curriculum." This matter among many others has been the source of deep division in the UCC, a source of great **unhappiness** among those who know Luke 2:10 well.

(2) The same unhappiness affects Pentecostals. In a January 23, 1993 report by the Torrington Register-Citizen, a story ran on how "Pentecostals face schism over holiness standards." The division centers over whether or not Pentecostals may be permitted to go to movie theaters, dances, swim together with those of the opposite gender, whether women may cut their hair and use make-up, or if believers can get involved in sports and other amusements. Pentecostals can be **unhappy** though they know Luke 2:10 well.

(3) Baptists are not immune, either! In Midwestern Baptist College's newsletter, the Midwestern Messenger, staunch Baptist Founder and President of the college, Dr. Tom Malone wrote an article on "Why Independent Baptist Churches are Dying?" He complained that they weren't "winning souls", that church pastors weren't asking people to come to the front of the church in an "altar call" to receive Christ, and that pastors needed to spend less time trying to exegete and teach the Bible and more time "winning souls." Independent **Baptists** experience **unhappiness** though they know Luke 2:10 well!

(4) Church people in **our** area can experience unhappiness although they know about the Luke 2:10 angelic announcement of joy and peace! (a) Last Sunday someone shared with me of an area **Bible Study**, meeting with a pastor, in which pastor proceeded to explain why he felt one should only treat these accounts as **myth**! This was unsettling to a believer who was at the study! (b) But even within our body, I have received expressions of deep unhappiness about needs or problems in the Church plant or its decor or the Church's ministry. This year, I have counted over 10 differing concerns!

Great joy and peace -- where do even CHURCH people who know about CHRIST go to GET this great joy and peace?

(We turn to the sermon "need" section . . .)

Need: "I know that the JOY of Christmas has to do with Christ, but that has me stumped! I've been in church for years, I know the Christmas story well, I've even trusted in Christ, but I'm STILL missing out on a LIFE of JOY -- WHY?!"

I. When the angels announced the news of great joy regarding Christ's birth, they stated that God's peace through Him would come ONLY to those upon whom God's FAVOR RESTS!

A. The King James Version reads that the angels said that God's "good will" would be "toward men", implying a **general** blessing, Luke 2:14.

B. However, the NIV more accurately renders the text to mean "peace to men **on whom** his [God's] *favor rests*" for the following reasons:

1. The KJV reading of "good will" comes from the **nominative**, *eudokia* which is grammatically good in the **Greek** language. The **genitive** form, *eudokias*, the manuscript reading honored by the NIV, is grammatically awkward in the Greek, indicating the harder, genitive *eudokias* reading to be the one more likely to be **changed** by copyists, and is thus be the more **authentic**, Bruce M. Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek N.T., p. 133.
2. The genitive reading, honored by the NIV is supported by the oldest manuscripts of Alexandrian and Western text types, Ibid.
3. In many copies, the letter, sigma (s) at the end of the word was written as a **tiny** lunar "c" above the line like a footnote, and could **easily** have been **accidentally omitted** by the early copyists, Ibid.
4. **Three** readings of Qumran hymns in the Dead Sea Scrolls show that though the genitive *eudokias* was grammatically awkward in the **Greek**, it made for a **good Semitic** phrase, reflecting the use of **Greek** by **Palestinian Jews** [1 QH iv.32f and xi.9 = "the sons of his [God's] good pleasure", and viii.6 = "the elect of his [God's] good pleasure."], Ibid. **Incidentally, contrary to theories in Liberal Theology, this fact also argues for a Palestinian origin for Luke's birth narratives, not a Greek one, for Luke 1-2 is "characterized by Semitizing constructions"**, Ibid.
5. Thus, the NIV reading is more authentic, indicating that God's peace and joy would come on those upon whom His **favor rests**!

II. Well, to discover what it takes for God's FAVOR to REST upon a human being, bringing him joy and peace, we examine Scripture!

- A. The **cause** of man's unhappiness is **sin**, 1 Jn. 3:4; Rom. 3:23; 6:23.
- B. God set up an animal sacrificial system for Israel whereby believers could sustain fellowship with God via the **death** of **animals**, Leviticus.
- C. However, the death of animals could **not atone** for sins, thereby leaving all of man's sins on a spiritual "credit" account, Romans 3:25b.
- D. Accordingly, **when** God the Son prepared to enter the world by being conceived in Mary's womb, He conversed with the Father. He noted how the Father took **no satisfaction** from the substitutionary death of sacrificial animals to appease His wrath against man's sin. Thus, Christ reported that God had prepared for **Him** a **human body** (through Mary) to be used as a **satisfactory** sacrifice for sin, Hebrews 10:4-7.
- E. Thus, Jesus was **born** to **die** as a substitutionary atonement to appease the wrath of God against man's sins, 1 John 2:2; 1 Peter 2:24.
- F. **This atonement is applied BY GRACE from God when one believes on Christ for salvation from sin, John 3:16.**
- G. Yet, many who **have believed still** may lack God's peace, showing that they do not **experience** His favor, Rom. 7:21-24! Here is why: As God's blessings apply **ONLY** by His **unmerited** favor to man **through** Christ, Eph. 2:8-9, **all** blessings **following justification, as based** on that **justified position IN Christ must continually FLOW** via **divine unmerited favor IN Him**, 2 Peter 1:2-3 with Eph. 2:10.

Application: *If we lack God's Christmas joy and peace, somewhere we are acting APART from God's GRACE to us THROUGH Christ and "doing our own thing." We must check our (1) salvation status (Jn. 3:16), our (2) spiritual fellowship status (1 Jn. 1 :9; Gal. 5:16-23; 1 Jn. 2:2-3) and whether we are operating in ANY way independent of His UNMERITED favor provisions given to us in Christ, Heb. 4:1.*

Lesson: *The DOOR to Christmas joy and peace is God's UNMERITED FAVOR, from beginning to end: (1) one first BECOMES God's child by believing in Christ as Savior from SIN, Jn. 1:1-13; 3:3, 16. (2) Then, he must LIVE by God's UNMERITED FAVOR in (a) finding cleansing from sins that obstruct fellowship with God, and that through confessing them (1 Jn. 1:9), and then (b) depending on God's indwelling Holy Spirit for behavior control (Gal. 5:16-23) to (c) obey Scripture for blessing, 1 Jn. 2:2-3. (d) Of necessity, this includes the whole gamut of resources offered in divine GRACE, such as using God's spiritual God-given ability (gift) to serve Him versus "doing our own thing" (1 Pet. 4:10 vs. Jn. 21:21-22). It also means FOLLOWING God instead of charting our own "wish list" of goals in life (Jer. 45:3, 5a; Heb. 13:5-6), and doing things God's WAY and in HIS METHODS and POWER, John 15:5-6.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the lesson . . .)

The Saturday Men's Breakfast Bible Study, using the book, "Experiencing God" has an excellent illustration in it on using God's grace in effective service and meaning in the Christian life.

Claude King, the book's author reports on his effort to fulfill a mandate given to him by Faith Baptist Church to evangelize a college campus. Following the suggestion of the denominational student ministries department, he tried to start Bible studies in the dorms.

Over two years later, nothing had happened. There were no Bible studies among the students. The ministry simply did **NOT** go!

Convinced that somehow everything was all wrong, and reading in Scripture about evangelization being God's work by grace, Claude took his student helpers aside and said, ". . . look to see what **God** is doing" on the campus, and "**join** Him." That was on a Sunday.

On **Wednesday** following, one of the student helpers reported, "Oh, Pastor, a girl who has been in classes with me for two years came to me after class today. She said, 'I think you might be a Christian. I need to talk to you.' . . . We went to the cafeteria to talk. She said, 'Eleven of us girls have been studying the Bible, and none of us are Christians. Do you know somebody who can lead us in a Bible study?'"

Claude King reports that this contact began their first study group, and it expanded into **three** study groups in the **women's** dorms and **two** in the **men's** dorms. **What Claude King and his Christian student helpers had been UNABLE to accomplish in TWO YEARS of self-directed effort, GOD had done in THREE DAYS through GRACE!**

The DOOR to complete joy and peace in our lives is through avoiding the TRAP of self-merit, self-direction and self-empowering effort, and simply to DEPEND on GOD in GRACE for His blessings to flow to us through Christ. Then, as the angels said that first Christmas Eve, we will have "peace on earth" as people upon whom "God's favor rests"!