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## HAPPINESS

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### **Abstract**

*A Christian is called to live in a consumer oriented world that is governed more by greed and pleasure than principle. Since the end of World War 1 civilized individuals have wanted the return of the "golden twenties" because any trust in God has culturally been replaced with a sense that no one can rely on anyone except themselves. This is a search for happiness that leads nowhere. Christians must be awake and alert to avoid being sidetracked (one word for sin means to fall from the path) into carnal thinking and carnal interests. This article was written in the hopes that believers will take serious their social surroundings and the world they are called to witness in and take steps to keep their witness pure, not alloyed with what at first seems like innocent fun, the amusements of the time. Too many believers have no real understanding of carnality, the deceiver that Eve knew in the garden continues to this day to spin evil into golden strands of fun. We need the Holy Spirit to teach us the difference between righteousness and sin which is what He came to do. Seek the Lord, let Him refill you daily with His Spirit so that your discernment will be sharp and you can enjoy true happiness in Him.*

**Keywords:** Happiness, believer

### **Abstrak**

Seorang Kristen dipanggil untuk hidup dalam dunia yang berorientasi pada konsumen yang lebih diatur oleh keserakahan dan kesenangan daripada prinsip. Sejak akhir Perang Dunia 1, orang-orang beradab menginginkan kembalinya "masa 20-an emas" karena kepercayaan apa pun kepada Tuhan secara budaya telah digantikan dengan perasaan bahwa tidak ada yang bisa mengandalkan siapa pun kecuali diri mereka sendiri. Ini adalah pencarian kebahagiaan yang tidak mengarah ke mana-mana. Orang Kristen harus terjaga dan waspada agar tidak teralihkan (satu kata untuk dosa berarti jatuh dari jalan) ke dalam pemikiran duniawi dan kepentingan duniawi. Artikel ini ditulis dengan harapan bahwa orang percaya akan menganggap serius lingkungan sosial mereka dan dunia tempat mereka dipanggil untuk bersaksi dan mengambil langkah-langkah untuk menjaga kesaksian mereka murni, tidak dicampur dengan apa yang pada awalnya tampak seperti kesenangan yang tidak bersalah, hiburan saat itu. Terlalu banyak orang percaya yang tidak memiliki pemahaman yang nyata tentang kedagingan, penipu yang Hawa kenal di taman terus memutar kejahatan menjadi untaian emas kesenangan hingga hari ini. Kita membutuhkan Roh Kudus untuk mengajar kita perbedaan antara kebenaran dan dosa untuk apa Dia datang. Carilah Tuhan, biarkan Dia mengisi Anda setiap hari dengan Roh-Nya sehingga ketajaman Anda akan tajam dan Anda dapat menikmati kebahagiaan sejati di dalam Dia.

**Kata kunci** kebahagiaan, orang percaya

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## **Introduction**

A Christian is called to live in a consumer oriented world that is governed more by greed and pleasure than principle. Since the end of World War 1 civilized individuals have wanted the return of the “golden twenties” because any trust in God has culturally been replaced with a sense that no one can rely on anyone except themselves. This is a search for happiness that leads nowhere. Christians must be awake and alert to avoid being sidetracked (one word for sin means to fall from the path) into carnal thinking and carnal interests.

This article was written in the hopes that believers will take serious their social surroundings and the world they are called to witness in and take steps to keep their witness pure, not alloyed with what at first seems like innocent fun, the amusements of the time. Too many believers have no real understanding of carnality, the deceiver that Eve knew in the garden continues to this day to spin evil into golden strands of fun.

We need the Holy Spirit to teach us the difference between righteousness and sin which is what He came to do. Seek the Lord, let Him refill you daily with His Spirit so that your discernment will be sharp and you can enjoy true happiness in Him.

In the meditative moment of an afterthought, my latest book having been sent off to the printers, I decided it is time to bring forward a study I had kept simmering on the back burner of my mind. Like my wife’s delicious soup, stimulating and tempting the olfactory senses, I am drawn to a study of what in the current social climate is a worthy pursuit: How to be happy.

## **Literature and Discussion**

Happiness was once a realistic hope, something one could expect if they, for example, lived a morally sound life, faithfully loving their spouse; loving God by being dutifully committed to support the church; and by becoming a significant contributor to the well-being of society in accordance with its laws. But none of this makes any sense anymore if hope disappoints, and that is what happened when the world was thrown into a second world war that came as a consequence of the first one, the war that was supposed to end all wars.

When evidence of a holocaust finally revealed the evil that men in power were capable of doing, the world was brought to a place of despondency so painful that never again would they “trust” governments to lead in their best interest. And, as difficult as it is to say, the church, through years of self-aggrandizement, self-promotion, instead of promoting the Gospel message, spiritually atrophied and was powerless to intervene.

Carter Phipps, an evolutionary, wrote, “The unguarded optimism that once flowed freely ... has finally run dry. Enthusiasm for progress in history seemed as dead as the millions laid to waste on the battlefields of Europe and Asia.... [There came] a mark[ed] lack of belief,

not just in the traditional gods of myth and magic [Phipps is referring to the Christian faith among these] but in the modern deities of technology and progress [science].”<sup>1</sup>

Postmodernism had evolved as a world-weary intellectualism that no longer viewed life in terms of absolutes or universal principles. The baby boomers, who rioted against the Vietnam War, my generation, began effectively to overturn the social values, long held as constants, paving the way for a new way of viewing life. By now, an entire generation, Gen. X, has been educated in the current cultural climate that since WW2 and the Holocaust has questioned allegiance to all law codes. They are re-evaluating what society expects of them in terms of their own quest for happiness. Joe Griffin, Co-Founder of the Human Givens approach to psychotherapy, wrote, “Some postmodernists go so far as to say that all thought is equally relevant (that there are no boundaries, no rules, no hierarchies, no objective reality and all facts are just ‘social constructs’); furthermore, all species are of equal value, and a human being is no more important than an ant.”<sup>2</sup> This was known as ‘deconstructionism.’ Cancel culture is its progeny.

Happiness is now only interpreted by the person living it. There is no golden chalice, no holy grail, that everyone seeks for eternal happiness. Happiness is no longer revealed in a sermon or a class on ethics. They would opine that we decide how we live as long as no one is hurt in the effort. “For this reason, postmodernism is highly skeptical of explanations which claim to be valid for all groups, cultures, traditions, or races, and instead focuses on the relative truths of each person.”<sup>3</sup> Postmodernists are nominalists [the doctrine that universals or general ideas are mere names without any corresponding reality]. When Paul declares “All have sinned” (Romans 3:23), postmodernists cringe in dissent.

The philosopher has given up on believing in absolute principles, timeless ethics, or a moral law God might sign off on. Postmodernism has given up on God. God might exist but He is unsympathetic to their plight, they believe. Postmodernists maintain that God only shames them for alleged deficiencies which the church balloons into something horrifyingly sinful. God, they say, never lifts anyone above these ‘deficiencies.’

### Self-Discovery

Postmodernism was simply admitting an irrefutable and palpable despondency when relying on the church or academia. We must become self-reliant, they contend, if there is to be improvement. Societies that triumph over the evils that would destroy them, they conclude, are self-help societies. Postmodernism is, therefore, the age of self-discovery, finding well-being and happiness in who I am as an individual and what expresses my humanity. Postmodernism finds no outer circle of influence beyond themselves unless it is personally embraced. The day of respected authority figures seems past. There are no absolute or divine laws.

“Comparisons between cultures or individuals are differences in kind not value,”<sup>4</sup> wrote Eric Goldman in his review of *American Reform*. So, a gay couple can be just as happy as a

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<sup>1</sup> Phipps Carter, *Evolutionaries: Unlocking the Spiritual and Cultural Potential of Science's Greatest Idea Paperback* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Joe Griffin and Ivan Tyrrell, *Human Givens: The New Approach to Emotional Health and Clear Thinking* (East Sussex: Human Givens Publishing Ltd., 2013).

<sup>3</sup> “Postmodernism,” <https://www.pbs.org/faithandreason/gengloss/postm-body.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Eric F. Goldman, *Rendezvous with Destiny: A History of Modern American Reform* (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), 97.

“straight” couple. Single parent families are no less beneficial as society’s building blocks than the nuclear family or one husband and one wife. Abortion, in lieu of contraceptive, has no longer any moral component. And all types of sexual relations: Polyandry, polygamy, polygyny, and the casual partnerships and one nighters, are examples of activity now endorsed in the name of seeking a personal happiness. The biblical term is “carnality.”

### **Carnality**

Carnality is primarily a Pauline term to reference fleshly appetites, which, in and of themselves are not bad. It is a shame I needed to undergo hormone therapy for cancer, experiencing the corresponding changes within my body, to realize what carnality really is all about. Carnality is a natural appetite, whether for food or, even, a need for love [a need love as C. S. Lewis recognized].

Appetites can become lustful. Biblically, any natural desire or inclination or any emotion that might become so strong as to require retribution or satisfaction is known in scriptural parlance as lustful which Peter cautioned could challenge a desire to follow Christ (1 Peter 2:11).

But a desire kept in check and mobilized to encourage a work of God within the soul can be a good thing (Luke 22:15). Take, for example, the need for food, which is a carnal need Jesus assured His followers would be met by His Father’s provision (Luke 12:29 - 30) supporting their faith or trust in Him. Paul recognized such need among the impoverished believers in Jerusalem and, to meet this need, he encouraged contributions from God’s people in Rome (Romans 15:27) which the commentary correctly calls “material blessings.” It is not the passion or feeling or emotion or desire that is bad until we no longer control it; it controls us.

Carnality always addresses this life and the physical needs it represents. We might simply say that carnality is connected to our mortality and will never be part of God’s heaven. Paul’s short list observed in Corinthian misbehavior of envy, strife, and division are characteristics of human carnality (1 Corinthians 3:3) or as Paul described it “living as any one else [who does not follow Christ].” Our carnal nature is, according to James, Satan’s front door to our thoughts to tempt us away from God (James 1:14-15). Carnality describes our relationship with our environment, our world; spirituality describes our relationship with God (1 Corinthians 3:1).

### **Consumerism**

Carnality is the progenitor of consumerism. Perhaps, for you, going from a discussion of carnality to consumerism is a bridge too far. But think of it: hormonal responses reenergizing the synapses in the pleasure centers of the brain are the very essence of our carnality and all we need to do is seek the fulfillment of these pleasures in some object [we might add, “of our affection”]. If we are hungry, we buy food to eat (consume). If we seek love, we find someone who will be the object or source of that love. Some say our love is always a need love. If this be true: in the name of love, we objectify the people in our lives. We treat them like “things.” Be honest!

Economics, too, is a study of the imbalance between the supply and the demand for goods, for things. The lockdown during the covid pandemic of 2020 had impacted this balance and therefore the stock market, because we are consumers of amusements, cruises, vacations, electronics and other things which we want. We are persons of pleasure. Consumers are by

nature carnal. Carnality is supported by and justifies consumerism. So, being a consumer is being a human, but one can go too far.

It may not seem obvious on the surface but what best characterizes this age is “consumerism” [the preoccupation with the acquisition of —what I have euphemistically named—“all things shiny.”] Paul astutely recognized that money drives the sum of personal decisions if we have no real interest in God’s counsel. Paul called this a modern form of idol worship. He noted that it is an addictive way of living, as the biblical term for greed denotes: getting more; having more; wanting more....[getting more, having more, etc.] “... a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world,” he asserted (Colossians 3:5, NLT) .

When God no longer played a role in the moral and ethical decisions in society, happiness became a purchasable commodity. Contentment and pleasure could be bought and sold as a form of amusement. The whole concept of living happily in a hostile world became coping with it by getting away from it.

Graham Ward in his introduction to postmodern theology [there is such a thing] observed, “broadly, I would say... that the death of God had brought about the prospect of the reification [make (something abstract) more concrete or real] and commodification [the action or process of treating something as a mere commodity; idolatry], not only of all objects, but of all values (moral, aesthetic, and spiritual). We have produced a culture of fetishes or virtual objects. For now everything is not only measurable and priced, it has an image.”<sup>5</sup> “....commodities: the possession of which represented happiness.”<sup>6</sup>

A Hug

Don’t let Ward’s point slip past unnoticed! A five year old child was asked what love was. The child proudly responded, “Love is a hug.” Perhaps, we might hug someone for another reason? Maybe a hug is not always and only love. If we seek concrete examples of moral principles, of love, of spiritual realities, we run the serious risk of over-simplifying something far more expansive, far more real, than what our description provided. I am reminded of the preacher who was saved at an old fashion mourners bench in a small rural church. When someone asked him about salvation, his inclination was to take them to that bench in that church not realizing at first that God can save anyone anywhere. When our sense of God’s love is tied to some blessing, how do we recognize His presence in times of sorrow? When our pentecostal experience has to be an “in-church” blessing, what happens to our pentecostalism when we leave? We follow our Lord into the church; let’s follow Him out and let God be magnified enhancing our testimony of His love and power beyond our current experience.

Reification is a big word but put simply, we are saying here: happiness to the non-believer, who has relegated God into insignificance in their life, is now invested in some object that pleasures them. Clothing stores for women and electronic stores for men, are more visited than church. Infomercial networks are not without their followers. And when a company already advertised their product as the biggest and best, it now must be new and improved, to lure the public in. And this is all traceable back to carnality.

Pleasure

The problem with seeking happiness in pleasure or in possessions is that our interest in these tends to wane. Only eternal things have eternal value, a truth postmodernism failed to recognize. In this new age, we are rightly labeled ‘consumers’ who are objectifying every aspect of life in an effort to secure a sense of wellbeing. We desire things in order to find

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<sup>5</sup> Graham Ward, *Postmodern Theology* (Manchester: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2008), xiv.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

happiness. We are addicted to ‘things’ that we imagine will define fulfillment, success, significance. This is the context by which we perceive what is moral, aesthetic and spiritual.” But this is a never ending search for utopia.”

### **Desire**

Greed, again, is “having more..wanting more, getting more ...having more, etc.” It is not the thing I desire; the desire becomes the thing. Ward continues, “Desire does not seek its fulfillment, for that would terminate the pleasure of desiring. Desire promotes the allure and attraction of an object that stands in for what it lacks, but its enjoyment lies in not having what it wants. The commodified object then becomes the cause of desire rather than the object of desire itself.”<sup>7</sup>

Has not pleasure been confused with happiness? Solomon scoffed, “A party gives laughter, wine gives happiness, and money gives everything!” (Ecclesiastes 10:19 NLT). “After much thought,” he regretted, “I decided to cheer myself with wine. And while still seeking wisdom, I clutched at foolishness. In this way, I tried to experience the only happiness most people find during their brief life in this world.” (Ecclesiastes 2:3 NLT).

On distant shores ‘cross beckoning seas  
Where lies all youthful dreams,  
Travelers set their vision’s course  
But nothing’s what it seems.  
While seeking exploration’s prize,  
Possessed with driven zeal  
Excited for desired things,  
They boldly set the keel.

Yet distant shores seemed in retreat,  
Though gentle breezes blew,  
Uncharted worlds of greater things  
Just never came in view.  
And finally, they came to rest  
Upon an unmapped shore  
And life reduced to mundane tasks,  
Alas and nothing more.

Utopian dreams of endless bliss  
In some far distant land  
Will never prove far better than  
What God has put at hand.  
Why endless searches far and wide  
To where you’ve never been?  
While treasures of a worthy life  
Are only found “in Him.”

If there is no biblical warning against a given pleasure, it is not to be thought a bad thing. Francis Shaeffer [an American evangelical theologian, philosopher, and pastor best known

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, xx-xxi.

for co-founding the L'Abri community in Switzerland] defined this as “freedom within limits.”

Adam and Eve, for example, on creation day, found themselves taking in deep breaths of the cleanest air. How does it feel to be suddenly “alive!” They—can we doubt it—strolled in the approaching moonlight enjoying the gentle zephyrs of an evening breeze while the sun began to set over the Euphrates sinking mysteriously out of sight. This was Eden. The Hebrew word means “pleasure.” This was God’s Garden. From the Greek word we get our word ‘Paradise.’ This was God’s Paradise of infinite and eternal pleasures. And then God made Eve the missing part that fit Adam’s hormonal surges perfectly.

Oh how Adam’s heart beat, almost out of his chest, on first sight of the beauty God created when He made woman. We know Eve had to be undeniably and irresistibly alluring. God could measure her attractiveness by Adam’s pulsating heart.

When God made Eve, the Master plan  
Was to have her be as a help for man  
So His genius in one master stroke  
Formed her thus. When she awoke

She found her Adam sitting there  
In breathless wonder with but a stare  
Upon his face; her sinless guile  
threw him a kiss and broke a smile.

Perhaps, he dreamt the siren’s lure  
So true of all men everywhere.  
The loudest praise, the fondest prose,  
Was God’s creation while Adam dosed!

The finishing touch to His masterpiece  
Will breathless sighing never cease!

But happiness is more than a synonym for gladness [mirth and merriment]. Happiness is more than a fleeting thrill. It is far more than a elixir for stress. Perhaps, when we think of happiness it is best not to be under a hormonal influence.

### **Contentment**

Is happiness best understood in terms of one’s contentment in life, assuming no physical ailment or domestic discord, or financial worry? Or should contentment be able to mount above these hardships? The dictionary defines happy as “feeling or showing pleasure or contentment.” The biblical word contentment means self-sufficient which sounds quite postmodern, but Paul added, “godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Timothy 6:6). Jesus before him explained, “They are happy who hear God’s Word and follow it” (Luke 11:28 ).

### **The Beatitudes**

I studied the Beatitudes Jesus taught in His “Sermon on the Mount” (Matthew 5:3-12), now, three times. Twice before as I read over these few verses in Matthew’s Gospel, chapter five, I saw applications of Jesus’ truth that suggested to me, in one case, the perfect servant of

God in ministry and in the second, what Heaven is going to be like. But now, I see a third which is even more in evidence when the entire context of Jesus' sermon, chapters five, six, and seven, is taken together. Here is the secret to real happiness, which is what the word "blessed" means.

The greatest benefit of Jesus' words in this section of Scripture is to be acquired in the presence of an open hostility to Christianity. Jesus' wisdom here could be summed in 15 words: "Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:38). As Archbishop Sheen taught, "The Sermon on the Mount is so much at variance with all that our world holds dear that the world will crucify anyone who tries to live up to its values."<sup>8</sup>

Understand, we are not saying that you cannot be happy unless you are being persecuted. We are saying that our happiness in following Christ transcends our circumstances, whether persecution, opposition, illness, grief, any circumstance that denies happiness in pleasure. Our happiness is not found in pleasure or in things. Our happiness, like our peace and joy, and all other sources of God's grace, are always and only associated with His presence. Ezekiel 48:35 ends a beautiful description of an eternal happiness because "The LORD Is There." Or as John put it (1 John 5:11) "And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son."

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