

The Law of Happiness

By Charles Mwewa

“But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that,” (1 Timothy 6:6-12)

Introduction

In English law, under the auspices of equity, there is a rule against unjust enrichment. It happens when a person makes themselves rich at the expense of another's misfortune. The Courts, usually, impose an obligation that the subject of unjust enrichment repays (or restitutes) the victim of the said unjust enrichment. Similarly, in Roman law, there is a similar maxim: *Nemo locupletari potest aliena iactura or nemo locupletari debet cum aliena iactura* or “no-one should be benefited at another's expense.” The Bible gives a warning to those who are discontented in life. In this sermon, three points are discussed in the elucidation on the law of happiness, namely: Godliness with contentment is great gain; we brought nothing into the world; and we can take nothing out of the world. The points will be discussed in that order before a conclusive application is given.

1. Godliness with Contentment is Great Gain

At the heart of human happiness, is the idea that one is contented with who they are, what they have and where they live. The anchoring for more and desire to have more, is, perhaps, the greatest avarice against happiness. The other day, this author was observing animals and birds. They were born with only one set of apparel. They don't change clothes and yet they seem contented. Flowers, however pretty, are born and do die with their original color. Only human beings (and to some extent snakes and chameleons) are born with the ability to change clothes and appearances. However, animals and birds are contented. God has placed within them the ability to self-renewal. In principle, every human being is capable of survival with only one pair of clothes. But experience shows that people are discontented when they have fewer clothes. Some purchase things they don't even need.

Consider food, for example. It does not matter what kind of food one eats; what matters is that they get filled and gain energy to live by. However, we see people going for wantonness and gluttony – buying food for play and pleasure. Meanwhile, the rich and wealthy do throw food while the poor and needy are dying with hunger. And it is the same with accommodation and housing. All a person needs is a place comfortable enough for them to be warm and safe. However, we see people anchoring for mansions (and sometimes they have more empty rooms than they can fill). Meanwhile, there are homeless people and the poor with large families who can only manage a single room.

The rule is, no-one gets happy because they have more clothes, more food or more space. For “the earth is the LORD's, and everything in it.”¹ Imagine, the Lord God owns everything seen and unseen. And He said, “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow....”² Now imagine how gracious God has been. He makes His sun to rise for all – and no matter where you live, there are rivers, grasses, soil and clean air. He has given to all liberally. Even birds with very little intellectual prowess, don't go hungry or unrenewed: “Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you

¹ 1 Corinthians 10:26

² Matthew 6:34

not much more valuable than they?”³ Happiness is knowing who you are in God – the understanding that God has not only provided for everything, but also that, by faith, no matter where you live, God will always supply your daily bread. All you need to do is pray, “And it shall be given to you.”⁴ But also remember that for food, clothes and covering, God will always provide for you, either via nature or the agency of humans. And the good example is in the next point.

2. We Brought Nothing into the World

The author is a proud father of three daughters. Each time one was born, he was present. And there is no better place than the delivery room where this realization hits home. Babies, indeed, are born with nothing – no clothes, no food, and no shelter. What is amazing is the fact that, instinctively, birds, animals and humans prepare for the new-borns. But it is not, in fact, parents doing the preparations. God provides the capacity to care for the young ones – and this is common among all living things. God cares for the young ones through the adults. He never abandons any.

Within a minute or less of its birth, a child will receive clothes, milk and shelter. How did all this happen? Because its creator pre-positioned everything. It was not me or you who got ready; God moved the parents to prepare for the young ones. Now reason with yourself, if God cared for the innocuous and hopeless baby until the time it could fend for itself, how will He abandon you later? God does not change,⁵ and, therefore, none of His creation will perish due to hunger, thirst, or lack of shelter.

What then causes lack or poverty, you may ask? It is chiefly due to people’s selfishness and greed. God has provided sufficient natural resources for all peoples everywhere. But some, due to selfishness and greed, have amassed more than they can possibly utilize. There are many selfish people in our world who have more than an entire nation can own, and yet some people in the same world are dying from hunger, thirst, and lack of covering. Even if those with such large amounts of wealth were to live one hundred more years, they would not exhaust all that they have accumulated. But due to selfishness and greed, they would not as take a small portion and share it with the needy. They will die unhappy, and so will the needy. Had they shared, they would have lived and died happy, and so would have those they shared with. It is just that simple. And the true reality comes, to all, at the time of death – because at this juncture, all, without exception, come to terms with the reality that they would not be taking anything with them, and this leads this preacher to the last point.

3. We Can Take Nothing Out of the World

This author-preacher was driving along a cemetery a day ago. And a thought hit him sharply: “All those graves there, with nothing but dead bones – some of those lying there were wealthy and influential but death had brought them to the same level with those who had little on earth.” Now think about it, tomorrow you may die, and this thinker promises you that you will be lucky to die with an undergarment on you – probably thanks to the kindness of those who are still living. But if all of us should die by nuclear means, it would mean all of us would perish with nothing. Indeed, we can take nothing out of the world. This, by itself is a revelation – that since we cannot take anything from this world, we are, then just custodians of God’s creation. We are born, are given a portion to manage and when we die, we leave it for another to tend. And this is all there is

³ Matthew 6:26

⁴ Luke 11:9

⁵ Malachi 3:6

to life. As the Apostle Paul has educated, “This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed.”⁶ And again, “Yes, each of us will give a personal account to God.”⁷

So, then, we should be wise, and remember always to be who we are, custodians of God’s creation. The sad truth is that we do not control our exist from the earth, just as we did not control our entry. That should be enough to teach us wisdom: “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’”⁸ In his brief lamentations, Solomon mourns, “I hated all for which I had toiled under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who comes after me. And who knows whether that man will be wise or foolish? Yet he will take over all the labor at which I have worked skillfully under the sun. This too is futile.”⁹

True wisdom is investing in Heaven. And how does one invest in Heaven? There are three ways: (a) Give to the poor and the needy – these will appreciate you greatly and say a prayer for you – with thanksgiving. If possible, do not only give to those who will favor you in return. Rather, give to those whose favor will come from their deep-faithed prayers; (b) Be contented. If you have more than you need, it means you have become a conduit for God to bless another – “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”¹⁰ Do not be like those selfish thieves who use this verse for their own enrichment. They tell you that it is more blessed to give than to receive because they are coveting your wealth, money, and resources, but themselves never give even a penny to those in need; and (c) Know that you are a guardian/custodian of God’s interests – do not forget this principle. If you should pray, work hard or inherit great wealth – it is because God has His creation in mind. You are God’s hands here on earth (God’s partners tending to His creation on earth), God’s willing supplier of His graces to others. This balance is what makes, not only individuals, but even nations happier. The UN World Happiness Report conveniently named the Scandinavian countries as the happiest in the world, and the reason given is that of increased social support.

Happiness is partly a spiritual and partly a social construct. No-one is truly happy if they are ungodly, and the same is true, they are not happy if the neighbor is not. Pride, jealousies and competitions in this context are not sanctioned by God – they are devilish mechanism for ramping up unhappiness in the world. Where people truly share in truth, they will be happy, and this includes governments that make available legislations that promote food, clothing and accommodation sufficiency. How blessed the Lord’s words: “The poor you will always have with you,”¹¹ so that, in part, we may always experience the happiness of giving and living for others.

Conclusion & Application

Stated simply, the Law of Happiness reads, living for spiritual and material contentment and the joy of meeting the needs of God’s creatures. In cultures where they emphasize receiving, the majority of the people usually struggle to earn ends meet. To be happy, truly happy, you will learn to live within your means – appreciating that all that you are and have come from God. All we have is short-lived, it remains when we die. Wisdom

⁶ 1 Corinthians 4:1

⁷ Romans 14:12

⁸ Luke 12:20

⁹ Ecclesiastes 2:18-19

¹⁰ Acts 20:35

¹¹ Matthew 26:11

demands that we take good care of all the blessings God has bestowed upon us. Everyone on earth is blessed – if they have clothes on them, have meals and can find a place to sleep. The quality of one’s clothes, food or shelter does not negate this fact. Greed and selfishness parade themselves as fashionistas – provoking and tempting people to despise God’s blessings upon them, because, in comparison to others, they deem their own blessings of inferior nature and quality. Everything God has made is of quality; it is humans who label things more superior to others. If what you have makes you warm, filled and comfortable, you are blessed. Having fifty sets of clothes or seven vehicles or eighteen-roomed house does not make one happy just as one only needs one attire at a time, one room at a time and one meal at a time. God will, and has, already provided all that we need for godliness and health. And last, remember the words of the preacher: “What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun,” (Ecclesiastes 1:9). So, do not enrich yourself at the expense of others, and be happy by being contented.

Related Prayer

Dear heavenly Father,

Give us a spirit of gratitude, so that we may appreciate what we already have;
Give us a peace that surpasses all understanding, that comes from above;
Give us humility, so we can remain true in whatever state we may be found;
Give us contentment, so that pride, greed, and selfishness we may confound;

In Jesus’ name, our Lord,
Amen!