

***Question: I visited a church recently where the atmosphere was almost like a funeral. There was no laughter and few smiles. Shouldn't a church be a place of excitement, encouragement and joy?***

Although Christianity centers on a cross, has been bathed in blood of martyrs and blackened by the fires of persecution, a note of “joy” does ring clearly from beginning to end. The word “gospel” means “good news” or “glad tidings.” The Christians in Philippi were admonished to “rejoice in the Lord always” (Philippians 4:4). From the angel chorus at the birth of Jesus to the throng gathered around the throne of God in Revelation, rejoicing is characteristic of God’s people.

However, with the passing of time even Christian people can be turned inward and become too focused on themselves, thereby losing their God-given sense of mission toward others. When this happens, they begin to lose their joy. Those who are not dedicated to diligently sharing the gospel (good news) with others seldom experience one of the greatest thrills possible, seeing people everywhere experience the joy of salvation in Christ. For example, in the book of Acts, the evangelist Philip went to the city of Samaria and “proclaimed the Christ there.” We are then told, “When the crowds heard . . . they paid close attention to what he said.” Two verses later the writer of Acts added, “So there was great joy in that city” (Acts 8:5-8). Also, Jesus himself said: “There will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent” (Luke 15:7).

But following the crucified Christ is a very serious and sobering reality that should also be reflected in the atmosphere of a church. Those who come to believe in Jesus do find joy in God’s forgiveness, but this joy comes through weeping in repentance for sin. As Jesus said: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” (Matthew 5:4). Truth and knowledge of God also bring a sobering reality into the life of the church. The apostle Paul once said: “I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge” (Romans 10:2). Zeal without knowledge can reek havoc, but knowledge without zeal results in a spiritually stagnant church. But we must also remember that the story of the crucified Christ brought joyous hope through his resurrection.

I pray that you can find a church that is excited by sharing the joy of Jesus with others. May you find this God-intended joy in a loving, Christian fellowship. I pray you will find a church committed to fulfilling the mission of Jesus to make disciples throughout the world (Matthew 28:19-20). May you find in a worship assembly the joy of celebrating the presence and blessings of God. May you find the joy that comes with hearing faith in Jesus confessed as new people are drawn into the presence and love of Jesus. It can and will happen if we refuse to lose faith and refuse to stop rejoicing in Jesus.

[Send questions or comments to University Church of Christ, 801 N. 12<sup>th</sup>, Murray, KY 42071 or phone 270-753-1881. This article is reproduced on the web: [www.nchrist.org](http://www.nchrist.org) ]      2012/10/19