

**Introduction:** There is something in every human soul, no matter how questionable a person's attitudes and actions are, that makes each of us capable of feeling guilty because of who we are and what we do. The word for this in human language is conscience. The Bible tells us in one of the wisdom books that God has put something of eternity in human hearts to know the best way to live in order to rejoice and see what is good in life as a gift of God. (*Ecclesiastes 3:9-14*) \*\*\* The problem every human being must confront is that no one is born with the ability to always do, think and feel what is right. The apostle Paul described this truth in his letter to all who were called to be holy in the churches in Rome using poetic words from a Psalm: no one does good ... their throats are open graves ... the poison of vipers is on their tongues ... they do not know the way of peace ... (*Romans 3:9-18; Psalm 14*, Greek translation). \*\*\* The third Sunday of Advent originally focused on John the Baptist. In recent centuries it has come to focus on the joy God gives to those reconciled to Him through the work of His Son who also became human to save people. \*\*\* In our passage today, John calls those coming to be baptized in water a 'generation of vipers'. He commands them to make fruit worthy of repentance that turns from self-reliance to total dependence on God. Then he tells the crowds that Messiah coming after him will baptize them in The Holy Spirit and fire. Those who do NOT turn to God with all their soul will be burned up in fire; but, those who do fully turn to God will experience the fruit of The Holy Spirit. \*\*\* Let's now look at our passage in light of the New Testament.

**I. John baptizes the crowds and calls them to fruitful repentance with specific results. (Verses 7-14)**

A. Baptizing the crowds, John commands them to make fruit of repentance, or be cut down and burned. (*Verses 7-10*)

1. John was saying to crowds coming to be baptized: 'Generation of vipers, who warned you to flee the coming wrath?' (*Verse 7*)

**Painful truth:** We do not want to be reminded we are sinners capable of poisoning others.

2. So make fruit worthy of repentance. (*Verse 8a*)

**Jesus is vine:** Jesus said all who continue to be branches in His vine will produce fruit that will remain. (*John 15:5-17*)

3. Do not say to yourselves Abraham is our father, because I'm telling you God is able, from these stones, to raise up children to Abraham. (*Verses 8b-c*)

**Not father:** Biological descent from Abraham does not impress God, but Abraham-like faith does. (*Romans 4:9-25*)

**What God can do:** God can take the hardest heart among non-Hebrews and open it to trust Him as His child.

4. But the axe is also appointed to the root of trees, so every tree not making good fruit is being cut down and into fire is being thrown. (*Verse 9*)

**Consequence:** To produce good fruit a person must turn from trust in his or her own efforts to come to God in humble, dependent, child-like faith. Those who fully and sincerely live a life of repentance will be graciously given strength and love to make good fruit.

**Those who repent bear fruit**

5. And the crowds were asking him, 'What then should we do?' (*Verse 10*)

B. Responding to their question, John commands sharing, obedience and contentment. (*Verses 11-14*)

1. A man with two tunics must share with him having none, and the man having food should do the same. (*Verse 11*)

**Generosity:** The 'haves' should and must share generously with the 'have nots'.

2. Tax men came to be baptized and said to him, 'Teacher what should we do?'; but he said, 'nothing more than has been ordained to you, you must be exacting as tax'. (*Verses 12-13*)

**Follow orders:** Almost every tax collector collected more than the amount ordained by the government officials who appointed him. John commanded them to stop this practice by obeying their bosses. (*Romans 13:1-7*)

3. Soldiers were asking him, 'What also should we do?'; and, he said, 'do not extort money or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages'. (*Verse 14*)

**Contentment:** Contentment as a gift from God, enjoyed with Him, is great gain. (*1 Timothy 6:6-10*)

**II. John tells people expecting Messiah he is not The One who will baptize in The Holy Spirit and fire. (Verses 15-18)**

A. The people were watching in hope and reasoning if John was Messiah, and he said no. (*Verses 15-16b*)

1. But, the people were waiting expectantly and all of them reasoning in their hearts about John, perhaps he might be The Messiah. (*Verse 15*)

**Expectation:** It had been over 450 years since the last Bible prophet Malachi had spoken of one who would precede the sudden coming to the Temple of The One whose coming they were seeking and delighting to see. (*Malachi 3:1*) By this time many Jews were hoping the long wait was over.

**Reasoning:** The word used by The Holy Spirit is the root of dialog. This reasoning was going on in the core of their being.

2. John answered them, 'I indeed am baptizing you in water'. (*Verse 16a*)

**Prepare way:** His baptism was of repentance, turning to God for cleansing to be ready to meet Him.

3. But The One mightier than me is coming, of whom I am not sufficient to loosen the thongs of His sandals. (*Verse 16b*)

**Power of Jesus:** Using figures of speech John is saying Jesus is so powerful in comparison to him that John is not even worthy to do the lowliest task assigned to a slave for Jesus.

B. Messiah will baptize with The Holy Spirit and fire, gathering wheat and burning chaff. (*Verses 16c-18*)

1. He will baptize you in Holy Spirit and fire. (*Verse 16c*)

**Jesus baptizes with The Holy Spirit and fire**

2. The winnowing fork in his hand (is) to clear the threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn. (*Verses 17a-b*)

**Micah:** Last week we heard Micah's inspired questions concerning who could endure the day of the coming of The One they were seeking, especially five categories of Covenant breakers. These wicked must be cleared out. (*Micah 3:1-6*)

**Food gathered:** Bread, a food staple, is made from wheat. Threshing separates wheat from chaff.

3. But he will burn the chaff in fire unquenchable. (*Verse 17c*)  
**Chaff burned:** Chaff has no nutritional value. The word for unquenchable is the root of asbestos.
4. Then indeed, many other words exhorting, he was preaching good news to them. (*Verse 18*)  
**Exhort:** The word means either to beseech or comfort. An exhortation is an earnest warning and urging to right action, so it is a plea for people to act in a way so they may receive comfort from God.  
**Gospel:** The Gospel is good news for all people who turn from themselves and their ways to God and His ways. He will enable them to live a life pleasing to Him by bearing fruit with the result of joy.

***Those who repent bear fruit with joy***

**III. New Testament highlights of JOY produced IN The Holy Spirit.**

- A. The joy of new converts. (*Acts 13:13-52*)
  1. Paul and his companions went to a synagogue in Pisidian Antioch on the Sabbath. (*Verses 13-15*)  
**Location:** This city was in the middle of what is now Turkey.
  2. He stood up and preached to the men of Israel and God-fearers. (*Verses 16-41*)  
**Sermon:** He began with how God led His people out of Egypt with mighty power. He gave historical highlights until he came to David. Then he said God has brought the promised Savior to Israel from his descendants. He concludes by saying forgiveness and justification with God comes through Him. (*1 John 1:9*)
  3. They were invited back to speak the following Sabbath. (*Verses 42-48*)  
**Second Sabbath:** After Paul and Barnabas spoke many Jews and non-Jews came to saving faith in The Lord.
  4. There was persecution from the Jews and Paul and Barnabas were run out of town. (*Verses 49-52*)  
**New disciples:** The new disciples were filled with The Holy Spirit and joy. **Application:** May we maintain this joy.
- B. Joy is the result of peace with God and His righteousness. (*Romans 14:13-17*)
  1. Rather than judge each other on disputable matters, as in the food we eat, let us walk conducting our lives in love. (*Verses 13-16*)  
**Love over legalism:** Rather than live by the rules Jesus said no longer apply, we must above all love one another in His Truth.
  2. Because God's Kingdom is righteousness, peace and joy in The Holy Spirit. (*Verse 17*)  
**God's righteousness IN Christ:** We lack righteousness in ourselves, but we receive righteousness IN Christ by grace through faith. **Application:** Let us seek the righteousness of God IN Jesus that results in joy.  
**Peace with God:** This leads to peace with God and results in joy. Joy is not an end or goal to pursue, but is always a gracious result of repentance.

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- C. Those dead to sin IN Christ have the fruit of The Holy Spirit, love that leads to joy. (*Galatians 5:16-26*)
  1. Those who walk in The Spirit, being led by The Spirit, do not succumb to the desires of the body that oppose God's instruction for life given through Moses. (*Verses 16-18*) **Note:** The Torah is NOT 'law' but grace!  
**The Spirit keeps from sinful desires:** The Holy Spirit brings dead spirits to life so they are no longer controlled by sinful desires. **Application:** May all who are still dead in sin receive The Holy Spirit by grace by faith.
  2. Seventeen practices coming from the desires of our bodies are listed. (*Verses 19-21*)  
**Excluded from God's Kingdom:** Practicing these will exclude us from God's Kingdom
  3. The nine-fold fruit of The Holy Spirit is listed, beginning with love, joy and peace. Those who are IN Christ have this fruit in them as they live on this earth. (*Verses 22-26*)  
**Crucify sin IN Christ:** And this fruit enables us to crucify the affections and lusts of our bodily desires.
- D. Imitators of The Lord have joy. (*1 Thessalonians 1:2-7*)
  1. Those in the church in Thessalonica displayed the work of faith, the labor of love and the patience of hope in their Lord Jesus Christ before The Father. (*Verses 2-3*)  
**Faith – hope – love:** The trio of Christian virtues is faith, hope and love. (*1 Corinthians 13:13*)
  2. The Gospel came to them in word and the power of The Holy Spirit. (*Verses 4-5*)  
**Disciple makers:** Paul and his team were used by God to make them disciples of Jesus.
  3. They also became imitators of The Lord, having received The Word in much tribulation with the joy of The Holy Spirit. (*Verses 6-7*)  
**Imitators – models:** All who follow Jesus as His Spirit filled disciples become His imitators to be an example to those who do not yet follow Him.  
**Suffer:** However, they were in much tribulation when they became followers of Jesus. Many times those who become followers of Jesus experience more suffering than when they were still dead in sin.  
**Paradox:** This is the paradox of faith. God gives JOY to all who come to Him in continual repentance, even in great suffering! **Application:** May we turn to The Lord and seek His JOY even in this unprecedented pandemic!

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**Conclusion:** As John is baptizing crowds, he commands them to make fruit worthy of repentance, giving specific examples while warning of judgment from the coming Messiah to those not making good fruit. He concludes by preaching The Good News of The Holy Spirit whom Messiah will give to those who continually and fully turn to Him: they will have joy in God's LOVE.

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