

Publishing Editor's column

THE BIBLE is generally supposed to be out-of-date and largely irrelevant for today, reflecting what people thought two thousand and more years ago, and superseded by the scientific discoveries of modern times. We know that this is not so, and in some aspects it has shown itself to be well ahead of its time. It was not until the nineteenth century that the kinds of provisions for cleanliness and hygiene found in the Law of Moses were adopted by the medical profession, to take one example, and when they were adopted there was an enormous reduction in deaths from infections of various kinds.

Even today men are catching up with what is taught in the Bible, something that struck me on reading a special section in *Time* magazine entitled, "The new science of happiness", and subtitled, "What makes the human heart sing? Researchers are taking a closer look. What they've found may surprise you". It didn't surprise me, for often the conclusions they came up with are already to be found in the Bible.

The origin of this research lies in a decision by the president of the American Psychological Association in 1998 to promote the study of human happiness rather than the study of mental ailments like depression and anxiety. The result has been an explosion of research into the subject across the world. Here are some of the things the experts came up with, together with some Biblical teaching which would have saved them a lot of work if they had been prepared to take notice of it.

Many think that money and possessions bring happiness, and this message is continually thrust upon us by the media, with skilful marketing and advertising being directed at making us discontented with what we have. Opinion polls taken over the past fifty years in the USA have consistently shown that, despite the dramatic increase in people's prosperity over that time, levels of happiness have not altered. Research shows that however much people have they want more, and many people are driven by envy of what others have. It is just as the wise man said: "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity" (Eccl. 5:10).

According to one professor, "The secret of happiness is liking the life you have". This too

strikes a chord with the Bible believer. The Apostle Paul stated: "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content" (Phil. 4:11); and he exhorts us that "godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Tim. 6:6).

Perhaps the strongest positive factor for achieving happiness that came out of the research was its connection with having strong ties with friends and family. This accords with Bible teaching. God made it clear from the beginning that man and woman should live together in a permanent relationship of mutual love, and respect for each other's God-ordained positions, with children being brought up with love and discipline in a stable environment. In the wider field of the ecclesia, Scripture says that brethren and sisters should meet together as regularly as possible, and form friendships with those of like beliefs and aims in life.

One factor which was found not to make people happy was watching television, especially 'soap operas'. No reason is given, but the conclusion is not surprising. Firstly, watching television is a solitary occupation, not involving the interaction with others which is so important to true happiness. Secondly, much of what is put forward on television as entertainment is sordid and evil, and it is not surprising that it should tend to make people depressed. The Apostle Paul urges us, "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Phil. 4:8), and there is very little which fits into these categories to be found in the media today.

We all live in different circumstances and have different genetic make-ups, and it is easier for some than others to follow the principles which lead to happiness. True and complete contentment will only come when the burden of mortality and sin is finally lifted from us, and man's misrule of the earth is brought to an end. However, the Apostle Paul teaches us that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come" (1 Tim. 4:8), so if we seek to follow lives that are in accordance with God's principles we will both benefit in this life and have a certain hope for the future.

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