

Elements of Joy, Part 3

Scripture: Philippians 1:7–8

Code: 50-4

INTRODUCTION

One of the most astounding thoughts in Scripture is that God's people have the ability to produce joy in God. There are a number of things that cause Him to rejoice over you and me.

A. Repentance

1. Luke 15:7--"There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."

2. Luke 15:10--"There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." That verse describes the joy of God in the presence of the angels when sinners repent.

B. Faith

Hebrews 11:5-6 says, "By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God. And without faith it is impossible to please [God]." Faith in God brings Him joy.

C. Adoration

Psalms 147:11 says, "The Lord favors those who fear Him." The Lord has a special delight in those who worship Him in the truest and purest sense--reverent and profound adoration.

D. Prayer

Proverbs 15:8 says, "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is His delight." God is joyous when we commune with Him.

E. Righteousness

David said, "I know, O my God, that Thou triest the heart and delightest in uprightness" (1 Chron. 29:17).

F. Blamelessness

Proverbs 11:20 says, "The blameless in their walk are [God's] delight."

G. Faithfulness

In Matthew 25:21, 23 a master says to his faithful servant, "Enter into the joy of your master."

Those are all the more reason for us, who are sinful, weak, and frail, to rejoice in the God who delights in us.

REVIEW

I. THE JOY OF RECOLLECTION (v. 3)

II. THE JOY OF INTERCESSION (v. 4)

III. THE JOY OF PARTICIPATION (v. 5)

IV. THE JOY OF ANTICIPATION (v. 6)

LESSON

V. THE JOY OF AFFECTION (vv. 7-8)

"It is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with

me. For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus."

A. Paul's Obligation

The Greek word translated "right" (dikaion) means that Paul felt more than appreciation towards the Philippians. His feelings were more than what protocol required in response to the Philippian's love and generosity. His joy was morally right. It was an expression of gratitude and honor to God. Paul responded the same way any godly pastor responds to his people. He was deeply compelled by what he knew was right before God. He didn't base his affection on rewards he expected or because the Philippians had given him a pat on the back. He was not being self-serving or condescending. Paul's gratitude sprang out of a sense of humble obligation.

B. Paul's Attitude

Paul's attitude toward the Philippians was one of thanksgiving (v. 3), joy (v. 4), and confidence (v. 6). The Greek word translated "feel" (phroneo) means "to think." It was an expression of one's mindset or attitude. Paul used the word often in Philippians--twice in 2:2, once in 2:5, twice in 3:15, once in 3:16, once in 3:19, once in 4:2, and twice in 4:10. It expresses an action of the intellect that touches the feelings, and might best be translated "concern."

C. Paul's Heart

Paul was concerned about the Philippians because he had them in his heart. He loved them. In 2 Corinthians 7:3 he says, "You [Corinthians] are in our hearts to die together and to live together." Like the Corinthians, the Philippians were part of the warp and woof of Paul's deepest being. The Philippian church had weaknesses--they were human. But even though they weren't perfect, Paul's deep love for them covered over all their imperfections.

In almost every person's life there are special people who come to mind frequently. Our affection for them leads us to remember and pray for them. We may not be able to see or speak with them for long periods of time, yet they are carried with us in our hearts. That's how Paul regarded the Philippians.

"Heart" is used a number of different ways in Scripture. Its usage in Philippians 1:7 is similar to Proverbs 4:23: "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life." Both verses speak of the heart as the center of thought and feeling.

1. Acts 8:37--Baptism is appropriate "if you believe with all your heart . . . that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."
2. Deuteronomy 11:13--Israel was instructed "to love the Lord [their] God and to serve Him with all [their] heart."
3. Deuteronomy 26:16--"You shall . . . be careful to [obey God's commands] with all your heart."
4. 1 Kings 2:4--Solomon was instructed by David to walk before God "in truth with all [his] heart."
5. Proverbs 3:5--"Trust in the Lord with all your heart."
6. Ephesians 6:6--Paul instructed slaves to do "the will of God from the heart."
7. 1 Peter 3:15--"Sanctify Christ as Lord in your heart"--worship Him with all your heart.
8. Psalm 51:10--Because the heart is the center of being David pleaded, "Create in me a clean heart, O God."
9. Psalm 119:36--The psalmist prayed, "Incline my heart to Thy testimonies, and not to dishonest gain."
10. Psalm 86:11--"Teach me Thy way, O Lord; I will walk in Thy truth; unite my heart to fear Thy name."
11. Matthew 22:37--"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart."

D. Paul's Rationale

The Philippians were so dear to Paul because of the ways in which they had participated in his ministry. While he was a prisoner in Rome they sent money as well as the services of Epaphroditus. In fact Epaphroditus worked so hard he almost died (Phil. 2:30). Their deep commitment brought great joy to Paul.

People who love like that find a place in one's heart. During Paul's imprisonment he had defended (Gk., apologia) and confirmed (Gk., bebaiosis, "guarantee") the gospel. Those terms refer to judicial proceedings Paul had been a part of--either the first phase of his trial in Rome resulting in his incarceration or, in a more general sense, the defense and confirmation of the gospel that was at the heart of Paul's ministry. In either case Paul could affirm that the Philippians had stood by him and partaken of the same enabling grace he had. They were not ashamed of him and not afraid of the cost of that partnership.

E. Paul's Witness

Paul used the phrase, "God is my witness" (Phil. 1:8) on several occasions when he wanted to confirm what he was saying beyond question (cf. Rom. 1:9; 2 Cor. 1:23; 1 Thess. 2:5, 10). The Philippians couldn't see Paul's heart and affection for them, and Paul wanted them to understand the genuineness of his feeling for them. He was calling on God to attest to the truth of his affection for the Philippians.

F. Paul's Longing

By saying, "I long for you all" (Phil. 1:8), Paul meant he eagerly yearned for the Philippians. Philippians 2:26 uses the same word to refer to Epaphroditus's longing for the Philippians because of their distress in hearing he was sick. Paul, Epaphroditus, and the whole Philippian church were closely tied by affection for each other.

We also find the term in Philippians 4:1. There Paul referred to the Philippians as "my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown." Paul and the Philippians had a wonderful love relationship.

G. Paul's Affection

Paul's longing was with the "affection of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:8). It was not a natural human attraction, but the love that is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22), given by Christ to those who are Christ's.

The word translated "affection" (Gk., splanchnon) in the New American Standard Bible is translated "the bowels" in the King James Version. It refers to the internal organs. In Greek it's the strongest word to express compassionate love. It refers to the parts of the body that react to emotion. When a person becomes highly emotional he becomes short of breath, his heart begins to beat more quickly, and his stomach may react. Paul meant that his affection for the Philippians involved his whole being.

That affection led Paul to pray for the Philippians continually (Phil. 1:4). It also brought him great joy.

CONCLUSION

A. The Source of Joy

Since joy comes from God, the fellowship of God's people should be a fellowship of joy. The Spirit-given joy of recollection, intercession for others, participation in ministry, anticipation of what the church will become, and fervent affection is something negative circumstances can't touch. Non-Christians rely on their own resources and circumstances for joy, while for Christians joy wells up from the indwelling Holy Spirit.

B. The Loss of Joy

What can steal the Christian's joy?

1. False salvation

False salvation steals joy because it is an attempt to seek inner joy without the indwelling Holy Spirit. People who seek spiritual joy apart from the Holy Spirit will find it elusive. They will become immensely frustrated and unhappy. Often they become part of a church and try to experience joy through religious activities, but it never comes because it is the work of the Spirit. Because they do not belong to Christ they do not obtain the joy that comes only by the Holy Spirit.

If joy seems consistently elusive to you, you need to take Paul's advice: "Test yourselves to see if

you are in the faith; examine yourselves!" (2 Cor. 13:5). You may be seeking something you will never find because you do not possess God's Holy Spirit. Be sure you're saved.

2. Satan and demons

Satan and demons will do all they can to steal your joy. First Peter 5:8 says, "Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." We need to be alert to discern Satan's efforts to rob us of our joy.

3. An inadequate understanding of God's sovereignty

People often act as if God is not in control. They worry and are anxious about the threat of others controlling their lives. As a result, they ignore the reality that God is sovereign and that no matter what is happening, God is in control--all things are working together according to His purposes for the benefit of believers (Rom. 8:28). An understanding of God's sovereignty keeps everything in perspective. Failure to understand that will rob a Christian of joy.

The prophet Habakkuk cried out, "How long, O Lord, will I call for help, and Thou wilt not hear?" (Hab. 1:2). Yet by the time he came to the end of his prophecy, though his circumstances hadn't changed, his understanding (and thus his attitude) had. His understanding of God's sovereignty was so changed that he said, "I will rejoice in the God of my salvation" (Hab. 3:18).

4. Prayerlessness

Failure to commit yourself to the Lord in prayer will result in worry and frustration. When you try to orchestrate all of life's elements instead of resorting to prayer, you will breed frustration with yourself rather than dependence on God. That vital truth is often replaced in today's church by counseling that emphasizes human insight rather than divine assistance. James 5:14-15 instructs Christians suffering from spiritual weakness to ask the elders of the church to pray for them. The fervent prayers of a righteous man have a tremendous effect (James 5:16).

Believers are to commit whatever they do to the Lord (Prov. 16:3) and trust in Him (Prov. 3:5). Take your problems to God and make Him your focus. Philippians 4:6 says, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." Prayerlessness steals joy because the world has no answers to dilemmas that only God can solve.

5. Spiritual lows after spiritual highs

Picture Sunday: you're in church and it's a glorious experience. You leave spiritually enriched and encouraged. Then on Monday you return to the humdrum of everyday living--to work or the routine of cleaning the clothes, the kitchen, and whatever else is dirty. You go from a spiritual high to a spiritual low.

Or you may go from a great spiritual experience to a severe spiritual trial as Elijah did. Elijah withstood the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel. God had sent fire from heaven to burn up Elijah's sacrifice--an incredible supernatural event in response to Elijah's prayer (cf. 1 Kings 18:20-46). That spiritual high on Mount Carmel has had few equals in the history of the prophets. Yet soon after that experience Elijah wanted to die because he found out Jezebel was after him (1 Kings 19:1-4). He quickly went from the height of spiritual victory to the depths of spiritual depression. Unless we're careful, spiritual trial immediately after an uplifting spiritual experience may cause us to lose our joy because of the contrast.

6. A focus on circumstances

Some Christians will know very little joy in this life because they let their emotions be controlled by their circumstances. If their spouse treats them the way they like to be treated they have joy, but if they aren't treated that way they become unhappy. If their kids do what they want them to do they have joy, but if the kids don't behave they lose their joy. If they have enough money to buy what they want they have joy, but if they can't they're miserable. They get all their signals from the material world, which is the essence of being materialistic. They find no contentment in God and fail to see God at work. Their joy rises and falls depending on whether they get something new, whether they're part of a special event, or whether they're going on a trip. Focusing on your circumstances will rob

you of your joy and put you on a roller coaster that's unrelated to true spiritual joy.

7. Ingratitude

There are few things in life uglier than ingratitude. If I were a parent again and raising the children I've already raised, I would spank them more often, longer, and harder for ingratitude more than anything else. Ingratitude is far more worthy of discipline than spilled milk, dumped paint, or whatever other things children are often disciplined for. Children need to be trained to be grateful. A thankless child is sharper than a serpent's tooth. A failure to focus on the blessings we've received from the Lord and in everything giving thanks (whatever the circumstances) results in people who are never thankful because they are never satisfied. They don't see life's trials as blessings from God that will conform them to Christ (James 1:2-4). Ingratitude is a trademark of pride.

8. Forgetfulness

Many fail to remember what they were saved from. Many times you will find that new Christians are full of joy but those who have been saved for a number of years seem to look sour. It is rare for church splits major church conflicts to be caused by new babes in Christ. Apparently you have to be a longtime Christian to cause those problems! That's because at times we forget what we were saved from. We lose the freshness new Christians have and fail to exhort ourselves like the psalmist in Psalm 103:2: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits." We must cultivate memories of good things. Joyless Christians are a poor advertisement of fulfillment in Christ.

9. Dissatisfaction

Some believers lose their joy because they don't like the way they look. Others don't like where they live. They may not like the spiritual gifts they have or wish they had others. They may feel they're getting less than they deserve. But Paul said, "I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity" (Phil. 4:11-12).

We all have disabilities of one sort or another. Some lose their joy because they're in a wheelchair and others because they can't get the job they will lift them to the level of their abilities. Some don't have joy because they feel they ought to be more appreciated. They may not like where they fit in to the church structure and wish they could be doing something more significant or visible. They wish they were prettier, more handsome, or more capable in athletics, mathematics, or some other area. But those disabilities need not affect spiritual joy.

10. Fear of the future

Some people always imagine the worse possible thing happening on all occasions. They go around in fear continually. They fear failure, loss of possessions, loss of power, loss of reputation, illness, or death. But Jesus told us not to be anxious because He will take care of our needs (Matt. 6:31-33). He also said, "Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me" (John 14:1).

11. Uncontrolled feelings

Christians are to control their feelings rather than let their feelings control them. Living according to uncontrolled feelings means living as a victim of the flesh. The British expositor Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote in his book Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cures, "I suggest that the main trouble in this whole matter of spiritual depression is this, that we allow ourself to talk to us instead of talking to ourself. . . . Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself?" ([Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965], p. 20).

The art of spiritual living is knowing how to handle yourself. In Psalm 42 the psalmist handled his distress by talking to himself. People who merely listen to themselves are victimized by their emotions. But Christians who talk to themselves in the power of the Holy Spirit bring themselves into submission to God's Word and experience Spirit-produced joy.

12. Morbid self-analysis

To me psychology seems unnecessary because the Scriptures give us all we need for life and godliness. Psychology tends to make a person morbid, self-centered, and self-analytical. It causes

people to focus on their failures, negative attitudes, and negative actions. They come to worry that somewhere deep down inside of them there's something that needs to be uncovered. So they poke around in their minds trying to uncover some secret that will supposedly release them from their problems.

Psychology produces a heavy burden of self-analytical baggage that doesn't help people at all. It's fine to recognize we're inadequate, but that's not what we're to dwell on. We are not to pull out all our past experiences and blame our behavior on them. That kind of morbid self-analysis will steal your joy. We need to take Paul's advice: "Forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead . . . press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13-14).

13. Self-centeredness

Self-centered people are always unhappy because they're always unsatisfied. Unselfish people are always satisfied because they don't demand anything. Only they can experience true joy.

14. Unwillingness to accept forgiveness

Unwillingness to accept forgiveness will steal your joy. Many people hold fast to their guilt and will not give it up. Even though God has forgiven them, many people act as if their standards of forgiveness are higher than God's. In effect, they put themselves in God's place. Many focus on one sin or short period of sin and won't forgive themselves for it. As a result they limp through life dwelling on something that's not an issue with God (cf. Micah 7:19).

Unwillingness to accept forgiveness is a needless waste of energy. God's forgiveness means there is no virtue in introspective poking around to discover sin. When God is at work in the life of a believer, He makes sin evident. The problem isn't discovery of sin but dealing with it. We don't need to poke around to discover something the Lord has already forgiven. When we dwell on forgiven sin it steals our joy.

In 1 Samuel 2:1-2 Hannah prayed, "My heart exalts in the Lord; My horn is exalted in the Lord, my mouth speaks boldly against my enemies, because I rejoice in Thy salvation. There is no one holy like the Lord, indeed there is no one besides Thee, not is there any rock like our God."

That's the kind of attitude we need to have. Our joy ought to spill out in our relationships and allow us to see people the way Paul saw the beloved Philippians.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What causes God to rejoice in believers?
2. Paul's gratitude sprang out of a sense of _____ .
3. What was Paul's attitude toward the Philippians?
4. What did Paul mean by his use of "heart" in Philippians 1:7?
5. Why were the Philippians so dear to Paul?
6. What did the phrase, "God is my witness" (Phil. 1:8) attest to?
7. How did Paul express the wonderful love relationship he had for the Philippians?
8. What does Paul's use of the Greek word splanchnon convey? Explain.
9. Why should the fellowship of God's people be a fellowship of joy?
10. How will false salvation steal spiritual joy?
11. _____ and _____ will do all they can to steal your joy.
12. How can understanding the sovereignty of God lead us to rejoice?
13. What vital truth is often replaced in today's church by counseling that emphasizes human insight rather than divine assistance?
14. What may a spiritual trial immediately after an uplifting spiritual experience cause?
15. _____ is a trademark of a person controlled by pride.
16. Do disabilities necessarily effect spiritual joy? Why or why not?
17. What is one chief reason for spiritual depression according to Martyn Lloyd-Jones?

18. _____ tends to make a person morbid, self-centered, and self-analytical.

Pondering the Principles

1. Dissatisfaction--the failure to be content with what God has given you--is often what causes a lack of joy in the life of a believer (see pp. 8-9). Thomas Watson listed five causes for discontent: pride, envy, covetousness, jealousy, and distrust (The Art of Divine Contentment [Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, n. d.], pp. 68-69). Scripture condemns all those attitudes (see Prov. 8:13; 14:30; Ex. 20:17; 2 Cor. 12:20; Prov. 28:26) and the discontent they cause (James 4:1-2). The apostle Paul wrote, "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances" (Phil. 4:11, NIV), and "godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Tim. 6:6, NIV). If you find spiritual joy missing from your life, examine yourself: are you content with what God has given you? Do as Paul did and learn to be content.

2. In 1620 Dr. John Preston outlined a test for discovering whether you possess spiritual joy: 1) Do you have joy in the midst of trials? 2) Is that joy greater than any other joy you have in life? 3) Does that joy result in lasting spiritual maturity or only temporary earthly satisfaction? (The Breast-plate of Faith and Love [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1979], pp. 233-36. Taken together, Preston's test emphasizes that spiritual joy is not a passing feeling but an enduring companion to faith in Christ. Pray that the Spirit, who is the source of spiritual joy, will produce in you the joy that endures trials, surpasses all other joys, and will result in your maturing in Christ.

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