

GALATIANS - SERMON 29

GALATIANS 5:22 — THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT - JOY - χαρά - Philippians 4:4

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INTRODUCTION: Read Galatians 5:22-23

Christians should, of all the people in the world, be the most joyful. We should not be complainers, whiners, and grumblers. We are to be filled with peace, joy, and contentment in every circumstance. This fact should be a testimony to others. Christian lives should be attractive lives to others because they are happy lives. Unhappy spirits do not attract the attention of others favorably. We are not to be passive in the pursuit of joy in our lives. We have a duty and responsibility to cultivate this particular fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

Philippians 4:4

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!

OUTLINE:

- I THE DUTY OF REJOICING: Philippians 4:4
- II THE BASIS OF REJOICING: Philippians 4:4
- III THE CONTINUOUS NATURE OF REJOICING: Philippians 4:4
- IV REASONS WE FAIL TO REJOICE.
- V THREE STEPS TO REJOICING

I THE DUTY OF REJOICING: Philippians 4:4

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!

- A First we should note that *rejoicing* is not an option for the Christian. It is a command. It is recorded in this verse as an imperative mood verb, expressing a commandment. This is not a suggestion from God, but rather a commandment from Him. To fail to rejoice is as much a sin as to fail to honor one's father and mother.
- B Secondly, this command applies to every Christian without exception. This epistle was written to the church at Philippi which was made up of all kinds of people. It was not an assembly of only naturally up-beat personalities. No, this command is written to the entire spectrum of the whole church. It is as applicable to those of sanguine personality as it is to those of a melancholy disposition.
- C A question raised: This raises the question which is based upon the assumption that joy is a feeling. The question is 'how can we rejoice when we do not feel like rejoicing?' To a certain extent our feelings do come and go, but they do not come and go of their own volition. There is always a reason why we feel the way we do. It is because of the state of our mind. What we are thinking effects how we feel emotionally. The general rule is that it is the state of mind, either conscious or sub-conscious that controls our feelings. If we are thinking good and positive thoughts we will feel good and happy. Negative thinking promotes negative feelings. Man, as a rational being, has his feelings governed by his reason and thoughts.

Psalm 42:5-9,11

Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance. O my God, my soul is cast down within me; therefore I will remember You from the land of the Jordan, and from the heights of Hermon, from the Hill Mizar. Deep calls unto deep at the noise of Your waterfalls; all Your waves and billows have gone over me. The LORD will command His lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me; a prayer to the God of my life. I will say to God my Rock, "Why have You forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?" . . . Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God.

The psalmist combats his feelings of depression by counseling himself to focus upon God (His character), to remember God's goodness, and to pray to God. By changing his thoughts, the direction and focus of his thoughts, he begins to get a perspective on himself and his condition. His feelings begin to change. Setting one's mind upon God does positively affect one's feelings.

The point is that we are not to give into our feelings and be controlled by them. Rather we are to command and control our feelings by consciously cultivating a proper state of mind. Ours is to be a state of mind that is focused upon the person of God, the character of God, the promises of God, the past performances of God, the covenant of God, and the commands of God. This kind of focus will produce peace and joy in the emotions. Getting our thoughts and perspectives straight will direct our emotions and feelings into a proper state. Meditating upon the things listed above cannot produce anything other than joy and peace. (E.g. Our feelings quite often do not encourage us to get out of bed in the morning, however our mind warns us of the difficulties that would arise if we did not get up. Once we are up and at our work we are always glad to have obeyed our mind rather than our feelings.)

Feelings do not come and go irrationally and of their own volition. Our feelings are an expression and result of the state of our mind. If the state of our mind is straight then our feelings will follow.

- D Definition of joy: Furthermore, while joy involves feelings, joy is not exclusively or primarily a feeling. Joy by definition is a delight of the mind that arises from the consideration of the present good that we have or an anticipation of the good that we shall have in the future. This delight of the mind which produces feelings of excitement, exaltation, and exhilaration is the result of joy, not the essence or cause of it. Feelings are the result of joy, not the cause of it. The cause of joy is an awareness and consideration of some good thing that we have now or that we shall have in the future.
- E Definition of rejoicing: Joy (rejoice) is a verb. Rejoice is something that we do, more than merely something we feel. We can rejoice irrespective of our feelings because rejoicing is an activity. Rejoicing is the activity of generating a spirit of gladness and joy by reflecting upon the goodness of God to His people in general and to ourselves in particular. When we are told to *rejoice in the Lord* it is something that we are supposed to do. How do we do that? We do it by bringing to our minds considerations

of the present good that we have or anticipation of the good that we shall have in the future. These thoughts produce in us a spirit of gladness and joy, then the feelings of excitement, exhilaration, and exaltation follow.

II THE BASIS OF REJOICING: Philippians 4:4

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!

That basis is the good things that God has done and will do for His people. As the verse says, *rejoice in the Lord*. The point is that it is God Himself that provides the basis for us to rejoice (person, character, works, salvation, goodness, promises). It is as the psalmist wrote in Psalm 42:11 . . . *Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God*.

- Paul does not counsel us to rejoice in our circumstances. Circumstances often produce little cause for rejoicing. Paul was in jail when he wrote this.
- Paul, likewise, does not counsel us to rejoice in our friends.
- We are not counseled to rejoice in our possessions which can evaporate overnight.
- We are not to rejoice in our accomplishments which fade and become empty as soon as they are achieved.

Rather we are to rejoice in God [who changes not].

God the Father

We can rejoice in the Father who chose us to be blessed with every spiritual blessing and sent His only begotten Son to die for us and is conforming us to the image of His Son, working all things together for the good. Is there not ground for joy in merely contemplating those four things concerning the Father?

God the Son

We can rejoice in the Lord Jesus Christ who humbled Himself to become a man, who lived and died to save us from sin and Satan, who saves us from hell, who has promised to always be with us, and who will come again to receive us to Himself to be in heaven with Him. These things should certainly stimulate joy in us.

God the Holy Spirit

We can rejoice in the Holy Spirit who indwells us, who give us wisdom and guidance, who imparts strength to us, who blesses us with spiritual gifts, who illuminates our minds, and who comforts us in every circumstance.

These are the grounds of our rejoicing, hence we are to rejoice *in the Lord*. These cannot be taken from us by circumstances. These are permanent and unchangeable things God has done to us and for us. These are the foundations of our happiness irrespective of our present circumstances. God always has and always will deal with us in all our affairs as a loving Father toward a beloved son.

Dwelling on these things in our minds will produce the joy that will redirect and direct our feelings. This is what Mary was doing when she was pregnant and single.

Luke 1:46-47

And Mary said: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior."

Her prayer which follows gives tribute to all the good that God is doing in her life and for Israel in the provision of a Savior.

Romans 5:11

And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

It is the Lord and what He has done that we fix our mind upon and rejoice thereby.

III THE CONTINUOUS NATURE OF REJOICING: Philippians 4:4

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!

The verb *rejoice* is a present tense imperative. By itself it means 'go on rejoicing continuously.' However, to make it even more emphatic the Apostle repeats the command - *again I will say, go on rejoicing*. Paul is clear. Rejoicing is not a temporary or occasional activity, but a continual one. At every hour of every day we ought to generate the mental condition that leads to joy.

Are we to rejoice in times of sickness, betrayal, loneliness, temptation, economic difficulty, or political strife? Rejoicing is to be independent of the circumstances in which we find ourselves. If rejoicing is based upon our circumstances, then we will be no different than the people of the world. The lost are slaves to their circumstances for the source and inspiration of their joy. The problem is that man cannot fully control his circumstances. Paul was in jail and in very unpleasant circumstances, yet he rejoiced and counseled us to do so as well.

Paul kept his eyes on the unchangeables - the triune God. Those things related to the character of God cannot change. They are the basis of joy and rejoicing. The things flowing out from the character of God are certain and dependable and fade not. When circumstances change or degenerate our God does not. If He has been favorable to us in salvation He will always be.

Hebrews 10:32-34

But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.

In spite of miserable circumstances and the loss of possessions, the Hebrews experienced joy based upon the hope of a better inheritance.

Matthew Henry writes; "there is enough in God to furnish us with joy in the worst circumstances on earth."

In a sense afflictions increase our joy as they draw us closer to God. In the context of the afflictions among the Hebrews their joy was actually increased. Afflictions and trials dissuade us from relying upon things and turn our attention to God instead. They also form Christ in us.

Romans 5:3-5

And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

James 1:2-3

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

IV REASONS WE FAIL TO REJOICE.

A Unbelief: Despair and self-pity grows out of unbelief. When we blame our circumstances or other people for our lack of joy we are affirming that they are our source of joy, not the Lord. By blaming others or other things we are actually complaining against God and calling Him unfaithful - unbelief.

1 Peter 1:3-8

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory . . .

This is not to say that there cannot and will not be heaviness in our lives. The joy and rejoicing of these Peter speaks about was in the midst of being *grieved* (vs 6). There is a place for sorrow, but not sorrow as those without hope. In the midst of such grief the contemplation of God lifts them out with joy.

B A lack of discipline: we must constantly and daily remind ourselves of the great things God has done for us. We are so quick to forget what He has done for us. Daily reminders are necessary. The great truths, works, and promises of God must never fade from our memory. We must search them out daily.

C A lack of thankfulness: to fail to rejoice is an act of unthankfulness. We actually have many circumstantial things for which we are to be thankful (though they are not the basis of our joy).

Deuteronomy 28:47-48

"Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and gladness of heart, for the abundance of everything, therefore you shall serve your enemies, whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in need of everything; and He will put a yoke of iron on your neck until He has destroyed you."

God is saying that the lack of joy and gladness over what God has given His people has provoked Him to discipline and judge them. This only strengthens the imperative to rejoice.

(Acts 16:32f) Paul and Silas, in the jail at Philippi having been beaten and placed in stocks, were found singing hymns and praises. What a testimony they soon had with the jailor after the earthquake.

John 16:22

"Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you."

V THREE STEPS TO REJOICING

Though not exhaustive these three steps are biblical in the road to joy and rejoicing.

A Meditate upon the teachings of Christ and the apostles.

John 15:11

"These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full."

What was the recommendation of the Lord here? It was *these things He had spoken*. All that Christ had taught, meditated upon, will make one's joy full.

John 17:13

"But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves."

The apostle John speaks in a similar way.

1 John 1:4

And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.

By taking heed to the things that Christ spoke and the apostles wrote we shall have joy in this world. The happy Christian is the Bible reading and Bible contemplating Christian.

B The second step to increased joy and rejoicing is to engage in faithful prayer.

John 16:24

"Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full."

Prayer is to be productive of joy in us.

- C The third step leading to joy and rejoicing is the confession of our sins. A guilty conscience robs us of our joy.

Psalm 51:7-8, 12

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones You have broken may rejoice.

. . . Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit.

Returning to the Lord is a return to the very basis of joy.

More time in the Word, in prayer, and in confession would lead to more time in joy and rejoicing.

Hymn # 226