

## **Rejoicing In The Lord— Not Because Of All Circumstances, But In All Circumstances**

Galatians 5:22; Philippians 4:4

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Rev. Greg L. Price

Would you characterize your life as being joyful? Does joy seem to be just beyond your reach, like a fluttering, elusive butterfly? Perhaps you have grasped for joy in your job, your career, or a promotion at work, but an abiding joy has eluded you in each case. Perhaps you have reached out for joy in a new house, a new car, a vacation, financial security, or good health, but the joy was short-lived even when you reached your goals. Or perhaps you have determined that joy must be found in family relationships/friends, but the moment a crises arose (or a loved one died), joy went fluttering out of your life.

Dear ones, lasting joy cannot be based upon that which can be lost, upon that which perishes, or upon that which is of this world. Solomon, the wisest mere man that ever lived, set out to conduct a thorough examination of everything “under the sun” that might bring an abiding joy and delight. He was not limited in power, money, or resources in his quest to find what upon earth (“under the sun”) would satisfy the deepest longing and desire for a fullness of joy. There was no one richer, there was no one with greater authority and power to test every pleasure this world offered (whether a pursuit of knowledge and learning, whether the best food and drink, whether the greatest homes and building projects, whether the grandest gardens and parks, whether the most comely and well-trained servants, whether the wealthiest stores of gold and silver, whether the most talented musicians, or whether the most wives and concubines). Whatever his eye desired, he says he grasped it, but he did not find a lasting joy (Ecclesiastes 2:10-11).

Dear ones, have you (like Solomon) been looking for joy in all the wrong places? Well, let's hear from the God who created us and has redeemed us, His people, through the loving and joyful obedience of Christ, where that abiding joy is to be found.

Our main points from the sermon this Lord's Day are the following: (1) Joy Is A Fruit Of The Spirit (Galatians 5:22); and (2) Joy Is In The Lord (Philippians 4:4).

## I. Joy Is A Fruit Of The Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

A. Having spent a few weeks considering that first listed fruit of the Spirit, love (a sacrificial love that reaches out to the undeserving, as supremely revealed in Christ's love for ungodly sinners chosen in Christ Jesus before the world began and redeemed by Christ from the curse of the Law), we now take up a study of the next fruit of the Spirit: joy.

1. Like love, joy is a fruit of the Spirit implanted in the life of every Christian at the time of regeneration. Joy is nor more optional in the life of a Christian than is love. Every Christian (to one degree or another) has the fruit of joy hanging from his/her branch.

2. Like love, joy is a badge of our freedom in Christ (that we are no longer bound by the works of the flesh, but are free to bear the likeness and the DNA of Jesus Christ, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame—Hebrews 12:2). The very joy of Christ is not out of your reach, dear Christian, it is the very character of Christ which every Christian (who trusts alone in Christ alone) has been graciously given, and which every Christian by God's grace produces (to varying degrees). Though God receives all of the glory and credit for the fruit of joy in our lives (1 Corinthians 1:31), we must not be negligent, forgetful, apathetic, or procrastinate in working that fruit out which the Holy Spirit has worked within (Philippians 2:12-13). It

is, therefore, not a question of the Christian having joy (he/she has it), it is a question of the Christian bearing more and more joy and growing in joy according to the Lord Jesus in John 15:11.

3. Like love, joy is not a natural personality trait or a mere temperament with which we are born, but is a fruit OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. It is supernatural fruit implanted and produced by the Holy Spirit, and not by the mere efforts and determination of natural men. Although the natural man may have an optimistic attitude or even a cheerful disposition, the joy that is implanted, watered, and produced by the Holy Spirit is not a common grace, but is a supernatural grace enjoyed by those who are justified by faith alone in Christ alone.

B. Dear ones, please note that the fruit of joy follows the fruit of love, for there is only joy in the life of a Christian because of the sacrificial love of God for the undeserving Christian. What is there to be joyful about if there is no love of God or if we are not abiding and consciously living in the eternal, infinite love of God for us, His dear children? Joy is the response of love received and a love given.

1. A marriage will have little or no joy where there is little or no love. Such a marriage will be a heavy burden rather than a delight, for *agape* love received and given makes it a joy and delight to serve one's wife/husband. Thus, if joy is missing in your marital relationship, it is very likely that *agape* love is also missing in your marital relationship.

2. But you say, "I cannot force my wife/husband to love me with that self-sacrificial *agape* love. Does that mean that I can have no joy in my marriage?" It is true that you cannot force anyone to love you, but you can still know the joy of the Lord, because you can shower the love of Christ shown to you (an undeserving sinner) upon your spouse in willingly and cheerfully serving her/him. And as you become consumed with showing the love of Christ (rather than seeking joy), what the Lord will stir up in your own heart will be a joy in serving the Lord and in serving

your spouse. Like a train car that follows the engine of a train, joy and delight follow *agape* love.

3. Likewise, when we find little joy and delight in our Christian life (which we all experience at various times), and when obedience to the Lord and worship of our great and glorious God become routine, dull, boring, a drudgery, or a heavy burden, I submit to you that we will likely need to confess and overcome is that of having left our first love, Jesus Christ. That is why we spent a number of sermons highlighting the love of God in this series covering the Fruit of the Spirit—for without a correct understanding of God’s love for sinners, chosen in Christ Jesus before the world began, and without a daily abiding in that love through the Word, prayer, meditation, and thankful obedience, our work and service will become a burden to us rather than a delight to us. A heart melted by the love of God for underserving sinners is a heart that will find great joy in pleasing that God of love and in serving others in His name. The joy of the Lord is our strength (Nehemiah 8:10), but it will evaporate where it has become detached from the love of God (“Let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee” Psalm 5:11).

## **II. Joy Is In The Lord (Philippians 4:4).**

A. The inspired Letter to the Philippians is a letter of joy (15 times a form of the Greek word for joy, *chara*, is used in this little letter). The words we find here in Philippians 4:4 summarize the primary admonition of Paul to the Philippian Church.

1. Paul practiced what he preached. For he had learned to rejoice not only in times of blessing and comfort brought by the Holy Spirit, but also in times of trial, suffering, heartache, and affliction brought by the Holy Spirit (as means used by the Holy Spirit to produce even more fruit in Paul’s life).

2. At the time Paul established the Church in Philippi (Acts

16), he was unjustly imprisoned by the Roman authorities because he had delivered a girl possessed by a spirit of divination, who was not only enslaved by Satan but was also enslaved by masters that used and abused her for their own profit. Seeing their money-making scheme had vanished with the healing of this poor girl, the masters brought Paul and Silas before the magistrates, who had them unjustly beaten and cast into prison. What was their response to such tyranny and abuse of authority? They sang psalms and rejoiced in God their Savior. The rejoicing of Paul and Silas and an earthquake from the Lord became the occasion in which the jailer and his family were brought to saving faith in Christ.

3. Paul was what you might call an expert on the subject of suffering. For over 25 years he had been chased, mobbed, beaten, scourged, stoned, imprisoned, slandered, and forsaken by friends (brethren in Christ)—enough to make anyone sour on life (2 Corinthians 4:7-11). If any of us think we have had a hard and difficult life, let us think again.

4. And even as Paul writes this inspired Letter to the Philippians exhorting them to rejoice in the Lord, he writes not from a comfortable home (with family and friends surrounding him). He writes not from comfortable, sandy beach, basking in the Mediterranean sun about the joy of the Lord. To the contrary, the Apostle Paul writes a letter about joy from a dark, drafty, dirty prison cell chained, not for some evil he committed. But rather imprisoned and chained for faithfully proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ, imprisoned and chained for his abiding love for Christ, who loved him and gave His life for him. Many in Paul's circumstances might have questioned the love of God (How could God love me?), questioned the wisdom of God (What is God doing?), or questioned the justice of God (After all that I have suffered for God, how could He treat me this way?). Even John the Baptist was tempted to doubt while he was in prison (Matthew 11:3).

5. Dear ones, have you been overcome with anger,

bitterness, a sense of self-righteousness, or self-pity because of what you have suffered in your life? Beloved, there is no benefit or blessing to yourselves or others in suffering for what is right, if we suffer in anger, bitterness, self-righteousness, or self-pity. The faithful witnesses and martyrs of Christ have been used by the Lord as a powerful means to draw sinners to Christ by rejoicing because they were counted worthy to suffer for Christ's name (Acts 5:41-42). How did they do that? Let's continue in our study of joy.

B. As we briefly consider the words of Paul in Philippians 4:4, let us make three observations.

1. First, the word, "rejoice" means delight, and "to rejoice" means to take delight in, to take pleasure in. This is not necessarily laughter (though joy may certainly issue forth in laughter at times). It is certainly not a laughing revival (as we have heard and read by some, where people supposedly under the control of the Holy Spirit cannot stop laughing in public meetings, or begin barking like dogs etc.). It is a holy delight "in the Lord" (in which God and His revealed will is the delight of the Christian). It is not rejoicing in that which is evil or is contrary to the commandments of God, but is rejoicing in the truth and righteousness of God (as revealed in the commandments of God). Though this joy may not issue forth in outward laughter or outward tears of joy, it will be manifested inwardly in delighting in the Lord for His great love wherewith He has loved us, delighting in His salvation, delighting in His incommunicable attributes (infinite, immense, omnipresent, eternal, omniscient and unchangeable), delighting in His moral character (infinite wisdom, infinite grace and mercy, infinite holiness and righteousness, infinite truth and faithfulness), delighting in His promises, in His gifts, and graces (Psalm 1:2; Psalm 37:4; Psalm 119:35). This delight in the Lord will also reveal itself in the way in which we obey the Lord—the Lord loveth a cheerful giver and a joyful servant.

2. The word, “rejoice”, is in the present, continuous tense (“Be *continually* rejoicing in the Lord always: and again I say, Be *continually* rejoicing”). The emphasis of the continuing present tense is that rejoicing is not a sporadic, once-in-a-while-when- we-feel-like-it fruit of the Spirit that we are to produce in our Christian life, but is rather that which should characterize our Christian life. Although a sincere mourning over sin is a spiritual grace of the Spirit that everyone who trusts alone in Christ alone will manifest, even when we sorrow over our own sin (or the sin of others), a joy and delighting in the Lord is not cast away while we mourn. For a mourning that does not have joy and delight in the mercy of God in Christ Jesus is a mourning that will become a mere end in itself (and lead to despair) rather than a means to the end of making our joy full and complete in the comfort of Christ’s forgiveness of our sin (Matthew 5:4).

3. Finally, Paul commands us in Philippians 4:4 by the authority of Christ to continually rejoice “always”, which is not redundantly saying what is conveyed by the Greek present tense (“continually”), but is commanding us to continually rejoice “at all times” or “in all circumstances”. Paul is not commanding us to rejoice continually in all pleasant, agreeable, and comfortable situations and circumstances in which we find ourselves, but is rather commanding us to rejoice continually in ALL situations and circumstances (whether in sickness or in health, in poverty or in prosperity, in bondage or in freedom, in estrangement or in fellowship, in being ill-spoken of or in being well-spoken of, in persecution or in reformation, in death or in life). Paul doesn’t command that we rejoice in suffering for suffering’s sake, but rather that we rejoice in the Lord (knowing the love of God and the power of God, and the wisdom of God are at work for the good of all those who love Him and are called according to His purpose, Romans 8:28). Consider the words of Christ in Matthew 5:11-12. Consider the situation Paul was in when he penned this inspired Letter to the

Philippians. He was writing from prison, possibly facing death. Why? Not for some wrong or evil, but for being faithful to Christ. He was attacked by fellow brethren (ministers), when it would have been nice to have their encouragement.

a. However, Paul chose (by God's grace) to rejoice in the Lord in all these trials, hardships, afflictions, and tears, because the joy of the Lord raised him above those circumstances to see His loving God in action, working out His eternal plan in all that Paul suffered (Romans 8:28).

b. Because Paul was not overcome by anger, bitterness, or self-pity, he was able to see God's almighty hand of everlasting love in his circumstances and rejoice that he had a captive audience in the soldiers to whom he was chained (he was not their prisoner, but they were his prisoner)—Philippians 1:12-13. Because Paul was not cast away into discouragement and despair over his unfair treatment, he was able to see God's sovereign plan and infinite love in even the false accusations brought against him by fellow Christians (and even ministers)—Philippians 1:15-16. Even before exposing the false teachers that were introducing their lies into the Church at Philippi (Philippians 3), he began with the command, "Finally, brethren, rejoice in the Lord" (Philippians 3:1). Paul rejoiced in the Lord and delighting in the God of His salvation, because He ate, drank, and slept in the love of God for Him an unworthy sinner. God's powerful love had a most holy reason and a most wise purpose for all Paul's suffering, and in that He could rejoice. He did not rejoice because of His suffering, but in His suffering, because God was always up to something good through the trials and suffering that came his way.

C. Dear ones, in conclusion, let me suggest to you why the joy of the Lord or delighting in the Lord may be missing in our lives to varying degrees.

1. Turn with me to Philippians 1:21, where Paul summarizes what life is to him. What would you say is presently your conscious reason for living? Is your life Christ or is it something else? What gives meaning and purpose to your life—Christ or something else? For whatever you must honestly put in that blank (“for to me to live is . . . my job, my financial security, my health, my wealth, my family/friends, my house, my freedom, my reputation and the applause of others, my dreams, my education/degrees, or my gifts and talents) other than Christ, will explain why we are missing the joy of the Lord. For all of the things of this world (even the good blessings of this world) are temporary, finite, and can only satisfy briefly, because they change and because we can lose them. Our gripping them all the more tightly only causes us to see how like sand they pass through our fingers.

2. Dear ones, **only Jesus Christ** never changes (Hebrews 13:8). **Only Jesus Christ** has remedied the real problem depriving man of an everlasting joy: sin. It is sin that brings misery, death, and hell. **Only Jesus Christ** demonstrated His love for sinful, rebellious people chosen in Christ Jesus before the world began by becoming the most lowly servant in the words of Paul in Philippians 2:5-11. **Only Jesus Christ** can take a broken, shattered life and make something beautiful out of it by His amazing grace. **Only Jesus Christ** can give everlasting life, so that the fear of death no longer shackles you, for only He has conquered death through His glorious resurrection, and reigns victorious over all His creation. Therefore, dear ones, **only Jesus Christ** can give meaning and purpose to life, for only Jesus can never be taken from you and has prepared a place for you in heaven (“I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” Hebrews 13:5).

3. When the joy we have is a joy in the Lord Jesus Christ (in His everlasting love, in His almighty sovereignty, in His infinite wisdom, and in His absolute faithfulness to His promises made to us, His people), the trials and tribulations of this world will only have the effect of making

our joy full and complete, rather than depriving us of our joy. For the trials, suffering, and tribulation of life will only make Christ more real to us and cause us to long all the more for the glorious heaven He has prepared for all that trust Him and love Him.

4. Let us take a reality check each day by asking, “What is it for to live today”? Is it for me to live, if my day goes the way that I have planned? Is it for to live, if my husband loves me the way that he should? Is it for me to live, if my wife supports me and submits to me the way that she should? Is it for me to live, if I feel well, pay my bills, and reach my dreams in life? Or is it, for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain? Only when Christ is our life and our conscious reason for living will we find joy (and being growing in that fruit of the Holy Spirit) in all the circumstances of life that we face. When Christ is our life, we have everything we need, and can face anything that comes our way. Amen.

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