

THE JOY OF MINISTRY
Dealing With Difficulties
Philippians 1:12-18

Joy is a *gift* from God to believers through the *presence* and *work* of the Holy Spirit. The main thing that can cause the loss of **joy** in a believer's life is **sin**...which *grieves* the Holy Spirit and *corrupts* the believer's *fellowship* with the Lord. Such sinful attitudes as *bitterness*, *doubt*, *fear*, and *negativity* causes joy to be *forfeited*. Consequently, the only way to restore lost joy is to *repent* and *return* to *worship* of...and *obedience* to...God.

Anything other than **sin**...no matter how *difficult*, *painful*, or *disappointing*...need not take away the believer's **joy**. Scripture makes it clear that *trouble* in this life is certain to come. Believers *aren't exempt* from any of the *problems* and *difficulties* every other person faces in this world.

"...We exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

~Romans 5:2b-5

"Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

~James 1:2-4

But remember...God *can* and *does use* even the most *difficult of trials* for *our good* and for *His glory (two-fold purpose)*.

"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

~Romans 8:28

Paul is a great example of one who doesn't let *trials* and *circumstances rob* him of his *joy*...or *question* his *calling*. He faced *opposition* from both...those *outside* the church...and from those *within* the church who sought to *misrepresent* his intentions. But this didn't *dissuade* or *distract* him from fulfilling God's *call*.

Through it all, Christ was being *preached*, which brought **Paul great delight**. So his *bonds*...instead of *hindering his outreach*, resulted in a *greater spreading* of the Gospel of Christ.

Paul's friends back in **Philippi** were apparently *quite concerned* about him, thinking he was *discouraged* and that God's plan had gone *awry*. Not so, **Paul** responded.

The Gospel was being proclaimed...

I. IN SPITE OF CIRCUMSTANCES: (vs. 12-14)

One of the surest measures of a Christian's *spiritual maturity* is what it takes to *rob* him of his Spirit-bestowed **joy**. *Difficult*, *unpleasant*, and even *life-threatening circumstances* cannot rob a *spiritually mature believer* of their **joy**...and again, **Paul** is a great *example* of this.

Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear (vs. 12-14)...

From his own experiences, **Paul** wanted the believers at **Philippi** to *learn an important truth*...that **there are no accidents with God**. Instead of Paul's ministry being *curtailed* because of his bondage...it was being *advanced*. **Greater progress**...Gk. *prokope*, describes *not merely moving ahead*...but *doing so against major obstacles*. It describes an *explorer* or a *military advance team* hacking a path through *dense underbrush* or *trees* and *moving ahead* slowly and with *considerable effort*. *Resistance* is inherent to that sort of *progress*.

“Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel, for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the word of God is not imprisoned. For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory.”

~II Timothy 2:8-10

The *advance* came partly because **the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else (vs. 13)**...

Praetorian guard...Gk. *praitorio*, describes *the Roman guards for the Roman governor's residence*...and they were *composed of elite, handpicked soldiers*.

And to everyone else...the news of **Paul** and the *Gospel spread throughout* the city of **Rome**. Everyone in **Rome** who came in contact with **Paul** *heard* about Christ.

It became well known that he wasn't *incarcerated* and *under guard* for *breaking the law*...but for **the cause of Christ**. It was an effort to *silence the truth*...yet the authorities had only incarcerated the one who *spoke it*.

And that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear (vs. 14)...

Paul's incarceration had another effect...it *encouraged* those who had been *reluctant* about *speaking for Christ* to begin *speaking the word of God without fear*...and with **courage**.

Paul's confinement was doing what his *circumstances outside of prison* could never do. Large numbers of believers became **bold** for Christ when they saw how God was spreading the Gospel through **Paul**.

John Bunyan's preaching was so popular and powerful, and so unacceptable to leaders in the *17th Century Church of England*, that he was jailed in order to silence him. Refusing to be silent, he began to preach in the jail courtyard. He not only had a large audience of prisoners, but also hundreds of citizens from **Bedford** and the surrounding area that would come to the prison daily and stand outside to hear him expound Scripture. In response, they silenced him verbally by placing him deep inside the jail and forbid him to preach at all. Yet in that silence, he spoke loudest of all and to more people than he could have imagined. It was during that time that he wrote [The Pilgrim's Progress](#), the great Christian classic that has ministered the Gospel to millions throughout the world. For several centuries, it was the most widely read and translated book in the world...only after the Bible. **Bunyan's** opponents were able to stop his preaching for a few years, but they were not able to stop his ministry. Instead, they actually provided an opportunity for it to be extended from deep within a jail in the small town of **Bedford** to the ends of the earth.

It's like **Joseph** said to *his brothers*...

“As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result...”

~Genesis 50:20a

II. IN SPITE OF DETRACTORS: (vs. 15-17)

Like the Lord during His earthly ministry, **Paul** had more than his share of *detractors*...most of whom were the *Jewish* and *pagan religious establishment*.

Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; 17 the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment (vs. 15-17)...

Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will (vs. 15)...

The people who were *emboldened* to speak God’s Word were of *two kinds*. Some *preached* Christ out of *envy and strife*...others *preached* Christ out of *good will*.

To be sure...emphasizes that **Paul** *realized fully* and *completely* that there were *factions*...that everything *wasn’t as it should be* in the church.

Envy...Gk. *phthonos*, describes *the desire to deprive others of what is rightfully theirs...to wish that they didn’t have something or had it to a lesser degree*. It’s the same word used to describe the *motivation* of the *Jewish multitude* and of the *chief priests* when they handed Jesus over to **Pilate** for *crucifixion*.

Strife...Gk. *eris*, refers to *contention*...especially with a *spirit of enmity* and *animosity*.

The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel (vs. 16)...

Those who *preached* Christ out of *good will* were *motivated* out of *love*...knowing that they were *called* to *proclaim* and *defend* the **Gospel**.

Good will...Gk. *eudokia*, means to *desire what is best for others*.

Appointed...Gk. *keimai*, describes an *official appointment* or one’s *destiny*. In the *military* it was used when giving a *special assignment* or orders to *defend a strategic position*. Here it describes a *calling*.

Defense...Gk. *apologia*, we get the word *apologetics* from it.

The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment (vs. 17)...

Those who *preached* Christ out of *envy* and *strife* had *selfish ambitions* as their *motive*. They purposely wanted to *stir up trouble* for **Paul** while he was *incarcerated*.

Selfish ambitions...Gk. *eritheia*, means to *look out solely for one’s own interests...regardless of the consequences to others*. It describes the *career professional* who ruthlessly works to climb the ladder to the top of their field in any way possible...or of a *politician* who seeks office at any expense...regardless of what it does to others.

One of the most *discouraging experiences* for a servant of God is that of being *falsely accused* by fellow believers...especially *coworkers* in the church. To be *maligned* or *questioned* by an unbeliever is to be *expected*...but to be *maligned* or *attacked* by another believer is *unexpected*.

The **former** group that *preached* out of **envy** and **strife**... and that were *motivated* by *selfish ambitions*...probably weren't *Judaizers*. *Judaizers* believed that *keeping the Old Testament Law* was a *means of salvation*...and **Paul** had previously *sternly rebuked* them as *preachers* of a *different gospel*. And since he didn't accuse these in **Philippi** of *preaching a different gospel*, it seems that they were probably *believers* who for some unknown reason *didn't love Paul* or *appreciate his work*. Though they were *doctrinally sound*, they *promoted themselves*.

III. IN SPITE OF MOTIVE: (vs. 18)

What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice, yes, and I will rejoice (vs. 18)...

Regardless of the *motivation*...what caused **Paul's heart** to **rejoice** was that Christ was being *preached*. Since the *content of the preaching* was the same for both groups, **Paul** could still **rejoice**.

In other words...if the *cause* of **Christ** was *being served*, even in **pretense** by those *envious detractors*, he was glad.

It was the *preaching* of Christ that brought him **joy**.

LESSONS WE CAN LEARN:

- **Don't ever underestimate the POWER OF THE GOSPEL**. Regardless of the *motivation* of the one preaching the Gospel, *people get saved* (ie. *televangelists*). God's Word is always *powerful*...no matter what the *motives* of the one who *proclaims it*.
- **Paul is an example of SELFLESS HUMILITY**. He shows that the worse the CIRCUMSTANCES are...the greater your JOY can be.

- **When the seemingly secure things in life begin to COLLAPSE, when suffering and sorrow increase, believers should be drawn into an ever-deeper FELLOWSHIP with the Lord**. It's then that you will most fully *experience* the *enduring joy* that **Paul** knew so well. This *joy* is *far greater* and *more satisfying* than any *fleeting circumstantial happiness*. This *genuine joy* comes *not because of circumstances*...but *in spite of them* and *through them*.