

JOY: The Backbone of Christian Living

A Study of Philippians 1

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Lesson No. 3

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for *correction*, for *training* in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17 NASB).

Introduction

In our previous studies, lessons 1 & 2 we took ample time to examine the historicity of the city of Philippi, and the Apostle Paul's first missionary work on European soil. We identified Paul's three converts, namely, Lydia, the slave girl and the Roman jailer. How clear it was to us that these three unique individuals, from all walks of life, and their family members were the nucleus of this extraordinary church, or better -- the Amazing Church of Philippi. Think of it! Only three in the whole city! Humanly we could infer that Paul's ministry at Philippi was a total failure in terms of number! But in God's viewpoint, it was a TOTAL SUCCESS! Get this: God rewarded His servant Paul based on his faithful proclamation of the gospel, and not on the basis of the number of his converts! That's should be a source of encouragement to ministers with fewer members in their congregation. We shall now embark on examining the conditions in the land when this Epistle was written, not just for the author, but also the recipients. Let us also take a closer look at the brethren's mental attitude toward God. Our introduction concludes as we examine the desire of the Philippian brethren to participate in furthering the gospel and supporting the apostle Paul and his colleagues, even in the midst of their great suffering. Without wasting time, let us begin with the first increment.

Conditions for the Author

The apostle Paul was believed to have authored the book of Philippians. No question about it, the conditions at the time of his writing were anything but hospitable. He was in a Roman jail. Prior to that, the apostle had repeatedly gone through hell on earth as a result of his sufferings as catalogued in his epistle to the Corinthians. There we read,

Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned [to death Acts 14:19], three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches (2 Corinthians 11:24-28 NIV).

Before then he had written,

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed (2 Corinthians 4:8, 9 NIV).

This is just to name a few of the apostle Paul's missionary experiences and yet at the time of his writing he was bold to command the Philippians,

Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, rejoice! (Philippians 4:4 NASB).

Paul could say to them "Rejoice" in the midst of their suffering in that he too was basked in the pool of joy even as he suffered

I am filled with comfort. I am overflowing with joy in all our affliction (2 Corinthians 7:4b NASB).

At this juncture we ask, what is the secret of Paul's joy? We shall answer this question as our study progresses. The truth of the matter is that you and I can share Christ's joy in every circumstance of our lives. That's God's plan for our lives! This is noted on Dr. Robert Gromacki's commentary on Philippians: Constant rejoicing should be an integral part of the believer's inner response to life's pleasant and difficult situations. The repetition of the imperative twice ("Rejoice") and the use of the adverb ("always") (Philippians 4:4) prove that principle.¹ This unique experience is what sets a believer apart from his counterpart—a non-Christian! This brings us to examine Paul's source of joy.

¹ Robert Gromacki, Stand United in Joy (An Exposition of Philippians) p. 176

Paul's Source of Joy

We know that joy is one of the *fruit* of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22). This joy, as a monopoly of the Holy Spirit, can permeate and glow through the heat of suffering. When present, the potency of this joy will neutralize the acidity and poison of suffering in our lives. When such joy, fills the soul of a believer it insulates him from fear, anxieties and worries of what the future will bring. What's more, this joy does not increase nor decrease. However, the capacity to experiencing it to the maximum is contingent upon reflection on the Word of God under the Filling of the Holy Spirit. The joy is intensified as we meditate on the many facets of God's grace upon our lives. To this effect, Paul's joy intensified as he thought of his union with Christ and the sufficiency of God's providential care:

What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ... I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 3:8; 4:12-13 NIV).

His joy intensified as he thought of his rapport with his brethren at Philippi:

In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with **joy** because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now... It is right for me to feel this way about you all, since I have you in my heart, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God' grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:4-5, 7-8 NIV) cf. Galatians 6:2.

Paul's joy intensified when, in the midst of his suffering, he thought of his eternal state:

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body (Philippians 3:20-21 NIV).

It is this glorious expectation that the apostle had in mind when he wrote these encouraging words,

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18 NIV).

In light of all this, the apostle looked beyond himself as the object of vituperation, ridicule and maligning. He looked beyond his heartbreaking experiences, his disappointments, injustices in the hands of ill-mannered people and realized that there is an end to all this! I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us (Romans 8:18). He realized that one day; he would be ushered in the presence of His Savior forever and ever! This thought caused him to be animated with joy! That should be true of you too!

It goes without saying that *it's not where one came from, but where one is going that matters!* Your present circumstance ought not to weigh you down in light of what the future holds for you (Hebrews 12:2). Our Lord beautifully puts it this way:

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am (John 14:1-3 NIV).

It's Paul's saturation of his soul with the infallible Word of God that kept him fenced in the pool of joy! That clears the table for us to examine the state of the Philippian brethren to whom the Apostle wrote this Epistle. This is also where we shall begin lesson 4 next time, God willing!

- Question: What is the main thing God rewards in our daily ministries?
- Question: Was Paul's rewarded based on the number of his converts at Philippi?
- Question: Can a believer truly experience joy even when things fall apart in his life?
- Question: Where does Biblical joy come from?
- Question: State in your own words, how this lesson has benefited you today.

Log in for a continuation of our introduction. Until then, our beloved, may God richly bless you as you seek to deepen your relationship with Him through study, understanding and application of His Word.

Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen (Ephesians 3:20-21).

End Lesson #3