

7. Rejoice instead of worry

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If anybody had an excuse for worrying, it was the apostle Paul. His beloved Christian friends at Philippi were disagreeing with one another, and he was not there to help them. Along with the potential division at Philippi, Paul had to face division among the believers at Rome. Added to these burdens was the possibility of his own death. But he did not! Instead, he took time to explain to us the secret of victory over worry.

But before the Lord teaches us how to rejoicing instead of worrying, He had to deal with the situation that involved a couple of ladies in the church of Philippi.

A. NO MORE SQUABBLE

Philippians 4:1-3 Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved. 2 I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life.

Standing firm in the Lord means following Christ's teachings, respecting His Word, modeling His priorities, loving His people and carrying out His will. When believers commit themselves to goals such as these instead of their own selfish pursuits, they will have little difficulty relating well to other members of God's family.

However, church squabbles aren't simply a twenty first-century problem. Believers have bickered since the church's beginning, which is what prompted James to ask in his usual direct way.

James 4:1-3 Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.

More often than not, quarrels and conflicts in the church manifest themselves in personal power plays, political maneuvering, strong-arm tactics, stubborn deafness, rumors and back-biting.

Occasionally, a dispute is so deep and long-standing that it takes the help of a third party – an objective mediator, in this case at the church of Philippi was Clement – to resolve matters and restore the relationship.

B. REJOICE? HOW?

Philippians 4:4-7 Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Many years I wondered in my puny brain, "Why did God allow us to have our own free will to choose between sin and righteousness as well as the Lord and Satan?" The reason is because He doesn't want to force His way to us with row power, but He wants us to love Him by our own choice.

While the Lord tells us, "Rejoice", we often worry instead of rejoicing.

Let's think about this worry. The Old English root from which we get our word "worry" means "to strangle." Isn't that a great description for that word? It strangles us physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Worry is the greatest thief of joy. It is not enough for us, however, to tell ourselves to "quit worrying" because that will never capture the thief. Worry is an "inside job," and it takes more than good intentions to get the victory.

The antidote to worry is rejoicing in the Lord. How can we rejoice while we are in a neck deep horrible situation? It is the faith in the Lord makes us rejoice – faith in His attribute, promises and character.

Then what happens? When you have joy of the Lord in our hearts, the peace of God guards us and guides us. With that kind of protection – why worry?

The peace of God not only guards us, but it also takes us a step further into His blessings. This does not mean the absence of trials on the outside, but it does mean a quiet confidence in God, regardless of circumstances, people or things.

We need to stop worrying about the things we can't change or control and start praying about them instead. Let's turn our worry list into a prayer list, and commit each one of those issues that agitate, frighten or burden us into God's hands.

Once we start to rejoice in the Lord and trust Him, we get to have a lot of time left over, because we spent all that time worrying. Now it is ours again and we need to fill that time with something helpful that worrying doesn't come back.

C. FILL OUR HEARTS WITH WHAT IS RIGHT

Philippians 4:8-9 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy--meditate on these things. 9 The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

No matter what we're dealing with or how bad things get or why God may be permitting them, we deliberately need to keep our minds focused on true, noble, just, pure lovely good report, virtue and praiseworthy things. Worry will starve on such food for thought. So we need to refuse to feed ourselves on negative junk foods like shame, fear or guilt, which strengthen worry and strangle peace.

Worry not only steals our joy, it also blinds us to God's peace. It forces us to focus on the wrong things. As recovering anxiety addicts, we must always remember to give our mental burdens to the Lord in every circumstance. Only then will our eyes be opened to find God's peace.

D. THE SECRET OF CONTENTMENT

Philippians 4:10-13 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. 11 Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: 12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to

abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. 13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Spiritual maturity is often revealed in contentment. Paul, for example, wouldn't allow circumstances to control his attitude. Even in prison, even with the threat of death, he could remain centered in Christ.

Many of us, though, are controlled by whatever is going on around us. If the pressure is high and things are tense, we're tight and irritable. If life is stormy, we become worried and afraid. If things are calm and relaxed, we are peaceful and quiet. How much more stable we would be if we determined to trust God and sought to develop a mature faith in spite of life's highs and lows.

Contentment is not complacency, nor is it a false peace based on ignorance. Contentment is not escape from the battle, but rather an abiding peace and confidence in God in the midst of the battle.

1 Timothy 6:6 Now godliness with contentment is great gain.

Prosperity has done more damage to believers than has adversity. During the time of adversity, our life becomes simpler and we get to hang on to the Lord for our dear lives. But when prosperity comes into our lives, if we are not careful, more often than not people walk away from the Lord.

We must remember that whether we have much or little, we have to abide in the Lord Jesus, not in the things we can do or have.

Jesus teaches this same lesson in the sermon on the vine and branches in John 15. A branch is good only for bearing fruit. Otherwise we may as well burn it. The branch does not bear fruit through its own self-effort, but by drawing on the life of the Vine.

John 15:5 I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

E. THE UNCHANGING PROMISE OF GOD

Philippians 4:14-23 Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress. 15 Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. 16 For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. 17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. 18 Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. 19 And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. 20 Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. 21 Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. 22 All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household. 23 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Some people are so concerned about taking care of themselves by hoarding their financial resources for that possible rainy day instead of giving to the Lord as tithe. But in reality, what they are doing is a deliberate action against the faithfulness of God.

In other words, when the believers of Jesus Christ do not tithe, it is the same thing for them to say to God that they don't trust Him to take care of their needs, so they are going to take care of their possible future financial problems with their own feeble effort.

The Lord is been giving those people all this time to repent and make it right with Him. But if that person continuously disobeys and does not trust God, He will send stormy days to blow away those people's rainy day funds and teach them a lesson.

Malachi 3:9 You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation.

God has not promised to supply all our "greed", but all our "needs". When the child of God is in the will of God, serving for the glory of God, then he will have every need met.

Contentment comes from the providence of God, the power of God, and the promises of God. These made Paul sufficient for every demand of life, and they can make us sufficient too.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) Let's surrender our minds to the Lord at the beginning of each day.

We need to give God our bodies, minds and will by faith as we start each day.

2) Let the Holy Spirit renew our minds through the Word.

Daily systematic reading of the Bible is a must if we are going to have victory and joy.

3) As we pray, let's ask God to give us a single mind, a submissive mind, a spiritual mind, a secure mind.

As we contemplate the next day's schedule, let's be sure that nothing we have planned robs us of the joy God wants us to have.

4) We need to keep a short account with the Lord.

If we discover we have sinned, then we immediately need to confess it to the Lord.

5) We need to guard the gates of our minds.

When an impure thought enters our minds, we should deal with it instantly. If we cultivate it, it will take root and grow – and rob us of our joy. The best ways to defeat the wrong kinds of thoughts is to fill our mind with Scripture. So let's take time to memorize the Word of God.

6) Remember that our joy is not meant to be a selfish thing.

It is God's way of glorifying Christ and helping others through you. Jesus first, Others second, Yourself last. The result is JOY.