

Joy from the Book of Philippians

1. Introduction

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You may disagree with me when I say, "The idea of joy in the Lord for the majority of the born-again Christians in America is relatively shallow and unstable." But when you think through, you will eventually agree with me. Here are some of the evidences:

- As long as everything goes our ways, we praise God and are grateful for what He is doing in our lives. But when difficulties come in our ways or the things don't go the way we want, we think that God hates us and we no longer have joy in Him.
- Rather than being grateful for what we have, we often look at the things we cannot have or don't have and complain to God about why we cannot have them.
- We complain more often than thanking God.
- They don't see it as the spiritual attacks from the satanic force against them and they allow the enemy to rob their joy in the Lord and go through despair or disappointments.

In other words, our idea of joy of the Lord is pretty much depend on what we can have or what we do rather than knowing who God is and what we are in Christ Jesus. Oh, how much we need to grow in Him! I hope and pray that we all need to learn from this aging apostle Paul's letter.

A. AUTHOR

As Paul was writing this letter around A.D. 62 to the church in Philippi which was located in present-day Greece and was a capital city. He was in prison in Rome, waiting for his final appeal. He had already had his preliminary hearing, and he was waiting for his appeal before Caesar. He was in the Mamartine Prison, down in the lower dungeon, and was chained to a prison guard.

Epaphroditus and Timothy were both with him, helping with his writings, and waiting to carry his letters to the various churches. Epaphroditus would deliver the letter to the church in Philippi, and Tychicus would take another letter to Ephesus.

For a letter to express such joy, we would be tempted to think that the author wrote it while enjoying himself on the polished deck of a Mediterranean luxury cruise ship with all the comfort around him. But nothing could be further from the truth. Paul was an aging apostle who went through beating, being tortured, shipwrecked, starved and being ridiculed at every turn.

Now he was in the lower part of dungeon waiting for a decision by the mad emperor Nero. By the way, nobody names their sons 'Nero', but many name 'Paul.'

B. THEME

Sometimes it's difficult to capture the theme of a letter of the New Testament in one word, but as you've probably already guessed, the heart of Philippians is "Joy".

Paul didn't write to answer any profound questions or to solve knotty problems or even to deal with a particular sin. Instead, he wrote to express joy and encourage the believers in Philippi.

The secret of his joy was the single mind. He lived for Christ and the Gospel. Christ is named eighteen times in Philippians 1, and the Gospel is mentioned six times.

It was appropriate that Paul would write to them from prison, exhorting them to have the joy of the Lord, since he had been in prison in Philippi and was singing while in chains there years earlier. These Christians had seen firsthand how joy can come while in the most difficult of circumstances, and Paul was encouraging them so they would know that nothing had changed and that God was still in charge.

C. THE PURPOSE OF THE LETTER

I find three reasons why apostle Paul wrote this letter that filled with joy in the Lord to the believers in Philippi.

Paul had founded the church in Philippi on his second missionary journey. He and Silas had been thrown into jail there and were miraculously delivered by the Lord, which led to the conversion of the jailer. Acts 16 tells this story, as well as of Paul's encounter with Lydia and of the girl who was delivered from demons. These people comprised the early church in Philippi, and the church grew into a healthy body in ten years that supported Paul more than any other church.

1) To thank the Philippians for their faithful support.

Philippians 4:14-16 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.

2) To warn them of unbending enemies

Philippians 3:2 Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation!

Philippians 3:17-19 Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. 18 For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: 19 whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame--who set their mind on earthly things.

3) To encourage them

Philippians 1:27-28 Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, 28 and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God.

Too many Christians are living defeated lives when they should remember that they are the victors in Christ, not victims in life.

Philippians is a special book that shows us how to live above the present circumstances, rising above adversity not just by surviving, but by thriving in the joy of the Lord.

D. ONE OF THE MOST FREQUENTLY QUOTED BOOKS IN THE BIBLE

In my opinion, many believers in the Lord quote the verses or hear somebody quoting out of this Book.

1:6, 1:21, 2:5-8, 2:10-11, 2:12, 3:7, 3:10-11, 3:13-14, 4:4, 4:6-7, 4:8, 4:13, 4:19 to name a few. This little book is packed with a great stuff.

E. THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

In a way, the joy reflected in Philippians is like a gem. And with each chapter, Paul reveals a different facet of that joy.

In chapter 1 we will learn there is "Joy in living", even when we don't get what we want, when there are difficult circumstances, or when there are conflicts. To find joy in living, there has to be something more than good feelings and comfortable settings. And that something, Paul points out, is Someone – Jesus Christ!

The people who are looking for joy, peace and happiness don't realize is that they really cannot find anything real outside of Jesus. They can have temporary joy, peace and happiness, but soon it becomes empty. They have to look for more in some other person or places.

In chapter 2, we will learn there is "Joy in serving".

It starts with the right attitude: humility. Joy is maintained through right theology and is encouraged by the right models, such as Christ.

How can anyone really understand joy in serving unless the person is in Christ? They can not. Without Christ, serving becomes either just another job or despises that they have to do that and despises the people whom they serve.

In chapter 3, we will learn there is "Joy in sharing".

Paul shares a warning, his testimony, a goal for living, and a command to follow his example.

He was so confident in the Lord that he could tell others to follow his example as he follow the Lord. Now that is a legacy we all would love to leave behind as we depart this world.

Last, in chapter 4 we will learn there is "Joy in resting".

In one of the finest pieces ever written on contentment, Paul explains how to find a joy in resting that is not controlled by circumstances.

How many people search for that peace which cannot be found any other places than in Christ Jesus? They cannot. That is why they don't have joy, peace and hope in their lives.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) Our joy in the Lord is not depend on what is around us or the circumstances we are in, but our faith in Him.

2) Too many Christians are living defeated lives when they should remember that they are the victors in Christ, not victims in life.