

2. Fellowship in mind, heart and prayer

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It's been said that if you were to trace Paul's journeys in the first century, it would be like tracking the path of a wounded deer running from a hunter, leaving one bloody trail after another. In 2 Corinthians 11, Paul made his own bloodstained trails.

2 Corinthians 11:24-28 From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; 26 in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; 27 in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness-- 28 besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.

Everywhere he traveled he carried on his body a shocking diary of scars that visibly testified to the murderous hatred and hardships he had endured.

How could this man, writing as a prisoner from deep inside of dungeon of a Roman prison, express such a deep, rich joy from such bitter circumstances, past and present? Because he was confident that God was at work, that God was in control, and that God allowed all things to occur for one ultimate purpose – His greater glory!

Paul understood that joy doesn't depend upon circumstances, people, or possessions. It is an attitude that's determined by confidence in God. And regardless of how difficult the path, how bloody the trail, Paul continually chose to put his confidence in God.

This brings a question to ourselves. "Am I the kind of Christian who brings joy to my fellow believers' mind when they think of me or a disgusted groaning?" We will go over that question tonight from a different angle.

A. FROM SERVANTS TO SAINTS

Philippians 1:1-2 Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I can think of a handful of people in our church whom I believe they have such a joy in the Lord that the devil is having hard time getting his filthy hands against them. They are upbeat and filled with the joy in the Lord in the midst of their difficult situations, because they've learned to trust in the Lord.

The church of Philippi was the first church established by apostle Paul on the continent of Europe.

Paul mentions Timothy not because he coauthored the letter but because Timothy was known and loved by the Philippians and because Paul hoped to send this trusted disciple to visit them again soon.

We already know that the bondservant means that a slave who voluntarily chose to stay with his master after his seven year slave period was over. Of course in spiritual sense, the Lord Jesus set us from the bondage of satan with His atoning sacrifice.

Even though we became free, we who are born-again chose to be servants of the Most High God at our own will. That is what we are – the bondservants of Jesus Christ.

Even though in the eyes of the Philippians believers, apostle Paul and Timothy were larger-than-the-life-heroes, they called themselves as bondservants in Christ. Not celebrities, not prima donnas to be handled with kid gloves – slaves! Paul was not only confident in God, he was also confident of his role as a bondservant, which was another reason for his joy.

But for the Philippians, Paul calls them ‘saints.’ The title means “to set apart.” The Philippian believers were living, vibrant witnesses set apart from the slavery of sin to a life of holiness and service to God.

“Grace and peace,” you will find this form of address in all of Paul’s epistles. Grace and peace were both common words of Paul’s day.

Grace was the word of greeting in the Greek world. In the Greek language it is ‘charis’. If you had walked down the street in that day, you would have heard folks greeting each other with, “Charis.” In fact, this greeting is still used in modern Greece.

“Peace” always follows grace. It never precedes it. While ‘charis’ comes out of the Greek world, “peace” – shalom – comes out of the Hebrew world. It is the Hebrew form of greeting. Actually, the name Jerusalem means “the city of peace.” However, it has never been that. It has been a city of war. Right now it is a thorn in the flesh of the world. No one knows what to do with it. There will never be peace in Jerusalem or in the world until the Prince of Peace comes to rule.

The grace Paul extends to the Philippians means God’s free, unmerited favor toward all undeserving sinners. This grace is something that comes to us. Peace, on the other hand, is something that transpires in us as a result of receiving God’s grace.

Paul uses three thoughts in Philippians 1:1–11 that describe true Christian fellowship: “I have you in my mind” in Philippians 1:3-6, “I have you in my heart” in Philippians 1:7-8, “I have you in my prayers” in Philippians 1:9-11.

B. FELLOWSHIP IN MIND

Philippians 1:3-6 I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, 5 for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;

The memories that fill Paul’s mind from his stay in Philippi ten years earlier are all happy ones even though he was thrown in a prison and beaten up. He harbors no regrets, no ill feelings and no unresolved conflicts. Just a joy that christens his every memory and makes his every prayer a delight.

No right minded preacher wants his congregation to grow cold toward God as the time goes by. The church at Philippi wasn’t one of those that started out hot only to turn cold as soon as the apostle left. They were consistent, alive and actively participating in the Gospel on their own.

Although the word 'joy' appears nineteen times in this epistle, it is not about having just joy in our lives. Rather if we are going to pick out the word that occurs more than any other word, we must take the name of Jesus Christ. His name appears over forty times in this epistle. He is the center of the epistle. He is the One who is the very source of joy. As we have learned last time, joy is a mere side product of faith and confidence in God.

In my opinion, v6 should be a memory verse for those who have a tendency to get disappointed easily. And who doesn't?

Christian life is a continuing progress. God nurtures us from the birth to the glory in heaven. He grooms us, prunes us, prepares us to be used by Him and He even prizes us with the privilege of witnessing the results of His work. He is not like us who have a garage or room full of unfinished projects. Once He starts to work on a person's life, He sees to it that it gets finished. We can bank on Him. He is faithful.

Perhaps the easiest way to summarize Paul's reasons for joy is with the two words 'began' and 'perfect'. The word for 'perfect' that Paul uses here shares the same root term used by the disciple John when he recorded Jesus' final words on the cross, "It is finished!". The One who had begun the work would stay at it, perfect it, finish it. That's what gave Paul confidence.

C. FELLOWSHIP IN HEART

Philippians 1:7-8 just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. 8 For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.

Is it possible to have others in our minds without really having them in our hearts? Yes, we can have someone in our minds and not caring at all. This is a very important verse for all the pastors and ministry leaders and even any born-again Christians. Because we can say, "I love you in Christ," as a lip service only.

But to this aging apostle, the Philippian believers were the apple in his eye. Even though he was in chains, he lifted them up in his prayer all the way to the throne of Grace. How often do you pray for those whom you don't care a whole lot in our church? How often do you pray for those people whom we support in the mission fields? How often do you sincerely pray for those who are ministered by our missionaries?

Paul's love was not something he merely talked about. But it was something he practiced. It was not Paul's love channeled through Christ. Rather it was Christ's love channeled through Paul. When we permit God to perform His "good work" in us, then we grow in our love for one another.

Paul not only had great confidence in the Philippians, he also held a warm affection for them. The Greek word used here for 'affection' is 'splanchnon', meaning "bowels." In the first century it was believed that the seat of our deepest emotions was in the intestines rather than the heart to which the western minds refer. And though it may seem odd to us, to the Philippians Paul was conveying the tenderest of emotions.

D. FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

Philippians 1:9-11 And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, 10 that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, 11 being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Since the apostle cannot be there with the Philippians, he did something better than being there. Praying for them.

The high priest in the Old Testament wore a special garment, the breastplate, over his heart. On it were twelve stones with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel engraved on them, a jewel for each tribe as we studied in Ex. 28. He carried the people over his heart in love, and so did Paul. Perhaps the deepest Christian fellowship and joy we can experience in this life is at the throne of grace, praying with and for one another.

This is a prayer for maturity, and Paul begins with love. Like a river, however, their love needed banks to keep it within its proper boundaries. Otherwise they might pour out their love on the wrong things.

To guide their love, Paul prays for two things: “knowledge” and “discernment.” These are the banks. Full and complete knowledge on one side and a keen awareness of right and wrong on the other.

I am sure that all of us have seen what the flood can do a region. A good example would be New Orleans. Because the bank was not high enough to hold the sea water back, the whole region was flooded. In a similar way, unchecked love can cause its own kind of damage and desolation. Without discernment, love blindly donates to whatever cause comes to the door. With it, love learns to spot the phony, the wrong, the evil.

Our church, like many others, have the benevolence fund for those who are in needs. Nothing wrong with asking for help from the church. That is why we have it for. However, in last four years we found out that there are people who abuse this system.

We regularly get phone calls from the people who do not attend our church and asking for help. Since we don't know them, we have a benevolence policy that tells us we don't help those who are outside of the church family. Can you believe that there are people who try to cheat God?

The English word “sincere” comes from the Latin word ‘sincerus,’ which means “without wax.”

Some Roman sculptors worked on their statues, while it is being made, a little piece of stone would break off. Rather than throwing away a statue just because the tip of the nose broke off, they became very adept at mixing marble powder with wax and then patching the statue. This worked fine until the statue was exposed to heat. On a hot day, the wax would just melt right down the side of statue. The more expensive statues would have a signs on them that said, “sincerus.”

The Greek word used here for “sincere” means tested by sunlight”. Paul prays that his friends will have the kind of character that can pass the test.

Here are two good tests for us to follow as we exercise spiritual discernment:

- 1) **Will it make others stumble?**
- 2) **Will I be ashamed if Jesus should return right now?**

Paul also prays that they might have mature Christian service. Too many Christians try to “produce results” in their own efforts instead of abiding in Christ and allowing God to produce the fruit in them.

The difference between spiritual fruit and human “religious activity” is that the fruit brings glory to Jesus Christ. Whenever we do anything in our own strength, we have a tendency to boast about it. True spiritual fruit is so beautiful and wonderful that no man can claim credit for it. The glory must go to God alone.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) Joy doesn't depend upon circumstances, people, or possessions. It is an attitude that's determined by confidence in God.

2) Christian life is a continuing progress. Once God starts to work on a person's life, He sees to it that it gets finished. We can bank on Him. He is faithful.

3) When we permit God to perform His “good work” in us, then we grow in our love for one another.

4) Without discernment, love blindly donates to whatever cause comes to the door. With it, love learns to spot the phony, the wrong, the evil.

5) True spiritual fruit is so beautiful and wonderful that no man can claim credit for it. The glory must go to God alone.