



Ministry of Biblical Studies

THE
J **JOY** **Y**
OF LIVING IN CHRIST

July Bible Study Series

July 10th: The Source of Joy in Christ

"Understanding the Foundation of Our Joy in Christ" | Philippians 4:4-7



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Welcome to the Metropolitan Community Church
Ministry of Biblical Study Classes
July 10, 2024

**“The Source of Joy in Christ:
Understanding the Foundation of Our Joy in Christ”**
Philippians 4:4-7

Opening Prayer

Dear Lord, as we come together to study your Word, open our hearts and minds to understand the true foundation of our joy in you. May your Spirit guide us into deeper relationship with you and fill us with your everlasting joy. Amen.

Introduction

True joy is not dependent on our circumstances, but is rooted in our relationship with Jesus Christ. This lesson will explore the biblical foundation of our joy in Christ, helping us to understand how we can maintain joy in every season of life.

If you want to build something of lasting value, you need to make sure that your foundation is solid. You could have an architect draw the most creative plans for a spacious dwelling. Order the finest construction materials available. Hire the most skilled craftsmen to build your home. Install the latest appliances and electronic systems throughout the house. Decorate it with the finest furniture. But if it's all resting on a faulty foundation, you're wasting your money.

It's the same spiritually. You can be a member of a church. You can even serve in that church. Outwardly, you can look like a good Christian by doing all the right things. But genuine Christianity is a matter of the heart before the God who knows our every hidden motive and thought. The joy He offers is not

outward, superficial happiness based on good circumstances. It's a deep, abiding contentment that is restricted to those who are, to use Paul's frequent phrase, "in Christ Jesus." To be in Christ is to be in a vital, organic, indissoluble union with Him through faith.

The foundation for joy is to be a slave of Christ and a saint in Christ in the fellowship of a local church by God's grace.

1. The foundation for joy is to be a slave of Christ.

"Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus." Timothy did not write this letter with Paul, as seen by the fact that Paul consistently refers to himself in the first person and to Timothy in the third person. But Timothy may have been Paul's secretary, taking down his words as he spoke.

Timothy had been with Paul, Silas, and Luke in the founding of the church in Philippi, some ten years earlier. Paul hoped to send Timothy from Rome to Philippi soon (2:19), so he wanted to give his backing to Timothy's ministry. So he included him in his opening greeting. This greeting, by the way, follows the common pattern of that day, in which the sender identifies himself, then states to whom he is writing, then sends a cordial wish such as "grace".

Scripture Readings

1. John 15:9-11 - "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."

2. Romans 15:13 - "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

3. 1 Peter 1:8-9 - "Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls."

Immediately Paul identifies himself and Timothy as "bond-servants of Christ Jesus." It's the same word the demon-possessed servant-girl used to identify Paul and his companions when they first visited Philippi: "These men are bond-servants of the most high God" (Acts 16:17).

The word means a slave and has its roots in Israel's servitude to Egypt. When Paul refers to himself as the slave of Christ Jesus, the emphasis is on "the subordinate, obligatory and responsible nature of his service in his exclusive relation to his Lord".

So Paul identifies himself and Timothy right from the outset in the manner that all Christians must view themselves: "Do you not know that ... you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body" (1 Cor. 6:19-20). To be a Christian is to be a slave, not to your own lusts, but to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The foundation for knowing the abiding joy of the Lord is to recognize and submit to Jesus as your owner and Master, who has the right to command how and where you should live, how you should spend your time and money, and even how you should think. Your entire life must be focused on pleasing Him and doing His will as His slave.

James Boice points out (Philippians, An Expository Commentary [Zondervan], p. 21) that in antiquity there were three ways a person could become a slave: by conquest; by birth; or, because of debt. He goes on to observe that we all are slaves of sin by the same three causes. Sin has conquered us, so that we are not free to do what we know is right.

We are sinners by debt, having run up an unpayable debt toward God who states that the wages of our sin is death.

But--and this is crucial--many people are not even aware of their condition as slaves to sin. Having been born in sin, living all their lives to gratify the selfish desires of their corrupt nature, and being unaware of the huge, unpayable debt they have run up before the holy God, they're like the Jews who argued with Jesus that they had never been enslaved to anyone (John 8:33).

But Jesus replied, "Everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.... If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:34, 36). Only Jesus Christ, by His substitutionary death, can set us free from bondage to sin. But He only does it when we recognize our need and call out to Him for deliverance. Then, having been freed from sin through faith in Christ, we become enslaved to God and begin to grow in holiness (Rom. 6:22).

You may not like the idea of being enslaved to anyone. But the fact is, you are enslaved to someone or something. As Bob Dylan sang, "You gotta serve somebody." Either you are enslaved to sin or you're enslaved to Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:16). But, while sin is a terrible master, because it destroys and leads to death, Jesus is a kind, gracious, and loving Master. Serving Him leads to eternal life.

So the question you need to ask yourself is, "Whom am I serving?" Slaves' lives were consumed with serving their masters.

A slave didn't clock in at 8 in the morning, put in his eight hours, and clock out for the night. He was the property of his master. He didn't have a life of his own. He was on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, always ready to do what his master commanded, even if it was unpleasant or inconvenient. In Paul's case, his Master's will when he wrote Philippians was that he be in chains in prison in Rome. He could have chafed under that, complaining, "Is this any way to treat a faithful apostle?" But instead, Paul was content because he was in total submission as the slave of Christ Jesus.

Many people call themselves Christians, but the truth is, they live every day for themselves. They do not yield themselves each morning and say, "Master, I'm your slave. I'll do your bidding at work, at home, or at play." The starting place for experiencing God's joy is to yield yourself daily as a slave to Jesus as your Master; and to view yourself as being on duty for Him, listening for His voice, quick to obey His commands.

2. The foundation for joy is to be a saint in Christ.

Paul writes "to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi." Maybe you're thinking, "There must have been a few outstanding Christians there who had already earned the reputation of being saints." The idea that sainthood is the state of a few exemplary believers comes to us from the Catholic Church, but it is contrary to the New Testament usage, which applies the word to every true Christian. Paul writes to the saints in Rome, Ephesus, and even Corinth, referring to the whole church.

The word literally is "holy ones." The basic meaning of "holy" is to be set apart, especially, to be set apart unto God. It looks at the standing of every believer before God by virtue of the fact that when a person believes in Christ's sacrifice for his sin, God forgives all his sin and sets that person apart unto Himself. We are set apart from this evil world; we are set apart from serving ourselves; we belong to God, set apart by Him to do His will.

The late, well-known Bible teacher, Harry Ironside, in the days before airplane travel, used to spend many hours traveling by train. On one such trip, a four-day ride from the west to Chicago, he found himself in the company of a group of nuns. They liked him for his kind manner and for his interesting insights on the Bible. One day, Dr. Ironside began a discussion by asking the nuns if any of them had ever seen a saint.

None of them had. He then asked if they would like to see a saint. They all said, yes, they would like to see one. Then Ironside surprised them greatly by saying, "I am a saint; I am Saint Harry." He took them to verses in the Bible, such as this one, to show that every Christian is a saint. (Told by Boice, p. 24.)

You may laugh at the idea of Saint Harry or Saint whatever-your-name-is. But it's an important New Testament truth that you view yourself as Saint whoever-you-are! As a saint, a person set apart unto God, you are not to withdraw into a monastery, or to withdraw from our culture, as the Amish folks do. You are to live in the culture, but to live distinctly from the culture, as one set apart unto God.

Just as it would be odd for a wealthy man to live homeless on the streets, or it would be strange for an adult to spend great amounts of time playing as a child, because such behavior is opposed to their true identity, so it should be odd for a Christian, a saint, to live in the same manner as those who are not set apart unto God. Your attitudes, your values, your speech, your selfless focus, your humility, your love, your commitment to truth, should mark you as a saint in Christ Jesus.

Did you note the centrality and significance of Jesus Christ to the apostle Paul? He uses the name of Christ three times in these opening two verses, and 18 times in the first chapter. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote (*The Life of Joy* [Baker], p. 31), Paul has no gospel apart from Jesus Christ. The gospel is not some vague general offer, nor is it a mere exhortation to people to live a good life; rather it tells of the things that have happened in Christ, because without Christ there is no salvation.

And if Christ is not essential to your position, then according to Paul you are not a Christian. You may be very good, you may even be religious, but you cannot be a Christian. If Christ is not absolutely the core and center, it is not Christianity, whatever else it may be.

To be “in Christ” means that all that is true of Christ is true of you. When Christ died to sin, you died. When He was raised, you were raised to newness of life in Him. Is He presently enthroned at the right hand of the Father, over all rule and authority? Then you are there in Him (Eph. 1:20-23).

Just as the branch is organically connected to the vine and draws its life from it, so we are in Christ (John 15:1-6). We are to abide or live in Christ by keeping His commandments (John 15:10). After teaching this truth, Jesus said, “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full” (John 15:11). To be a saint in Christ Jesus is foundational for true joy.

3. The foundation for joy is to be in the fellowship of a local church.

Paul writes “to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons.” Being a Christian is an individual matter, in that you must personally trust in Christ as your Savior. But it is also a corporate matter, because you become a member, not only of Christ, but also of His body, the church. The church worldwide consists spiritually of all who have trusted Christ, but it gathers locally in congregations organized under the godly leadership of overseers and deacons.

If you are not vitally connected to a local fellowship of Christians, you are lacking a crucial part of the foundation for joy in the Lord, because you are isolated from those who can stimulate you to love and good deeds, who can encourage you to godly living as the day of the Lord draws near (Heb. 10:24-25).

Relationships among believers can be a source of great joy, but, frankly, they can also be a source of great pain. If you’ve been a Christian for any length

of time, I can predict with 100 percent accuracy that you have been hurt by fellow believers. Getting hurt, of course, makes you want to draw back from the church for fear of it happening again. But if you do that, you rob yourself of joy, because God doesn't call us to live in isolation, but in relation with other saints.

Remember, there were only two kinds of people in Philippi: the saints and the "non-saints." While it can be painful to relate to the saints, it's really tough to be cut off from the saints, surrounded by people who don't care about the things of God.

There were tensions in the flock in Philippi, and Paul subtly begins to address those tensions even in this opening greeting with the little word "all" ("to all the saints"). He repeats the phrase "you all" in 1:4, 7 (twice), 8, and 25. In a gentle way he seems to be saying, "What I write, I write to all who are in Christ. What I pray, I pray for you all. What I think and feel, I think and feel towards all, because you all share in God's grace with me. You all must progress in God's joy together."

In the local church, God has ordained for leaders to have oversight and to serve. Two types of church officers are mentioned: overseers ("bishops"); and, deacons (the Greek word means "servants"). We don't know for sure why Paul singles them out, but perhaps it was because the gift he had received had been sent from the church through the overseers and deacons. Or, perhaps Paul wanted to call attention to their office so that the church would submit to their role in resolving the squabbles that were threatening their unity (Heb. 13:17; 1 Thess. 5:12-13).

Overseers are the same as elders (Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7). "Overseer" looks at the work, to watch over God's flock; "elder" looks at the man, that he must be a man of spiritual maturity. The qualifications for this office are given in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, and are primarily godly character and the ability to exhort in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict.

The primary task that the overseer/elder does is to shepherd God's flock, which involves protecting the flock from danger, leading by example, and feeding the flock from God's Word (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). Some elders are to devote themselves to the ministry of the Word and are thus worthy of financial support. Others concentrate more on oversight and administration ("rule well," 1 Tim. 5:17-18), and may also work in outside jobs.

The office of deacon arose in the early church because the apostles were being drawn away from their primary ministry of prayer and the Word into administering the distribution of food to the poor among the church (Acts 6:1-6).

Thus the ministry of deacons is to serve the body in practical and administrative ways that free up the elders for the work of shepherding, teaching, and prayer. The qualifications for deacons are just as high as for elders, namely, that they must be men and women of godly character (Acts 6:3; 1 Tim. 3:8-13).

But the point is, you won't know God's joy unless you are part of a local fellowship, under the oversight of godly men who shepherd and serve the flock under Christ.

Thus, God's joy is based on being a slave of Christ and a saint in Christ, in fellowship with the church of Christ. Finally,

4. The foundation for joy is to be the recipient of God's grace and peace in Christ.

"Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:2). As mentioned, this was a standard greeting, but it is far more than just a greeting. Perhaps Paul combined the Greek and Hebrew greetings to show that in Christ there is no distinction between Gentile or Jew. We are all one in Christ. This greeting also shows that God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (His deity is implicit in the equal association of Him with the Father) are the source of both grace and peace.

Grace is, quite simply, God's unmerited favor, shown to those who deserve His judgment. If you earn it, it's not grace, but a wage that is due. God's grace is extended to the ungodly who know it, not to those who think they're deserving (Rom. 4:4-5).

God's grace is the only way to be reconciled to God. If you think you deserve a place in God's kingdom because you're a pretty good person, you don't understand and have not laid hold of God's grace. If you think things are right between you and God because you do good things for others and try to live a clean life, you have not grasped God's grace; you are, in fact, alienated from God. God resists the proud (those who think they're deserving), but He gives grace to the humble (James 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5).

The only way to receive God's unmerited favor is to see yourself rightly as an undeserving sinner and call out for His grace. If you don't know grace, you don't know God!

Peace is the result of experiencing God's grace. The order is important: You cannot know God's peace without first appropriating His grace. Where God's grace is lacking, peace will also be in short supply. Peace points to the inner well-being that comes from being reconciled to God through what He provided in Christ. Both grace and peace operate first vertically, but also horizontally. If you know God's grace and peace, you will become a gracious, peaceable person toward others. You will show grace to them because God's grace is real in your life. You will seek peace with them because God's peace floods your heart, and He commands you to live at peace with others, as much as it depends on you (Rom. 12:18).

Conclusion

If you're lacking God's joy, I encourage you to examine your foundation. Are you a slave of Christ Jesus, in total submission to Him, seeking at all times to please Him by doing His will? If you're living for self, you'll lack God's joy. Do you see yourself as a saint in Christ Jesus, set apart from this evil world unto

Christ, living in union with Him? If you blend in with the world, you'll lack God's joy. Are you linked in fellowship with the church of Christ Jesus, serving together in the great cause of Christ? If you are isolated from the church, you will lack God's joy.

Have you received and do you live daily in the grace of Christ Jesus? Does the thought of God's unmerited favor, shown to you, cause you at times to well up in gratitude and love toward God? Because of His grace, does His peace flood into your soul, even in the midst of trials? If so, you're laying a solid foundation for lasting joy in the Lord. "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:13). Amen!

Discussion Questions

1. Is there such a thing as knowing Christ as Savior, but not as Master? Can a Christian be a slave of sin (Rom. 6:16-22)?
2. Why is it crucial to view yourself as a saint? What if you aren't perfect? Are you still a saint?
3. Why is being connected to a local church not optional for the Christian?
4. Some say, "Christ died for you because you're worthy." Why is this totally contrary to God's Word?

Practical Application

1. Daily Devotion - Spend time daily in prayer and Bible reading to deepen your relationship with Christ and remain in His love.
2. Trust in God's Promises - Memorize key scriptures about joy and trust in God's promises during challenging times.
3. Share Your Joy - Look for opportunities to share the joy of Christ with others through acts of kindness, words of encouragement, and sharing your faith.

Reflection

Reflect on your current understanding of joy in Christ. How does your relationship with Jesus influence your joy? What steps can you take to deepen your joy in Him?

Closing Prayer

Gracious Father, thank you for the gift of joy that comes from knowing and trusting in your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us to remain in your love, to trust in your promises, and to be filled with your Holy Spirit. May our lives reflect the joy that comes from you, and may we share this joy with others. Amen.

