

Philippians 2:12–18 (NKJV)

12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. 14 Do all things without complaining and disputing, 15 that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, 16 holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.

17 Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. 18 For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me.

Focus on 17 and 18

This will probably be the final sermon on verses 12-18

There is so much crammed into this little passage that we could spend years learning **how to do** all that is commanded and taught in these verses.

In verse 12 the Philippians, and by extension we, were commanded to obey by **working out our salvation with fear and trembling**. We have fear and trembling because it is so **vitaly important**. We are doing this before the holiness of God. And why should we do that? **Why should we never give up?** Because God is doing the **heavy lifting**. God is doing the things that we, in our flesh, could never do. It is God who keeps making us want to and making us do it.

Now part of the working out our salvation involves approaching things with the proper perspective **together** as a body. We should be doing all this without complaining and disputing.

When we talk with each other about our church, what does it consist of? How much is complaining and disputing? When we talk about our lives, what do we say? Grumbling and complaining? If so, Paul is directly speaking to us.

Why?

So we can live in a way that makes an impact in the world we live in. They should be able to see that we actually **believe** what scripture says. We can actually face hard times with joy.

The other benefit is that it **thrills Paul**, in this case. But in **our cases**, it thrills those who are ministering to you in whatever service that may be. It allows the ministers to know that all their efforts are paying off. They are going to have a return on their investment.

That brings us to verse 17.

17 Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. 18 For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me.

Most of the guys I usually trust to help me with my study are not **real sure** how to take this verse. A drink offering was normally poured on a burnt sacrifice about to be offered. It made it smell better. In idol worship, it was normally used to appease the gods.

There is also a drink offering in the Old Testament as well. It was to be a sweet smelling sacrifice to please the true God.

It seems to be a bit of mixed metaphor so it gives some trouble in the interpretation of it.

The “if I am being poured out” really means more like, “If I am being poured out, **and I am...**” It is something that is happening and it is happening **present tense**. So Paul is probably talking about his **house arrest** in Rome. That is how he is being **poured out** as an offering to God. And it is being done, maybe maintained, by the gift that the Philippians sent to enable it. That is the only way I can figure it that makes any sense.

So Paul is suffering, and he is allowed and enabled to **keep suffering** due to the faithful suffering of the Philippians. And the Philippians are suffering as well.

OK that is what is going on. We have talked several times about how just inconvenient it would be for Paul to be in this situation. He is being robbed of many things we take for granted.

Now how does Paul react to the sacrifice he is being and paying?

I am glad and rejoice with you all

If I were Paul, I could see how I might start getting the idea that I was being a **superior** Christian. At times we see that he does defend himself from attacks when others try to rob him of his authority. He defends himself for their sakes and lays out his accomplishments and sufferings.

If you and I were suffering like Paul, might we not want to **make much** of what a **valiant Christian** we were being? Might we not complain a little at our severe discomfort when there are others out there not suffering at all?

But Paul clearly has a “We are all in this together” mindset.

But not only that, look what he says.

I am glad.

Was he lying? Did he really mean he was glad? How could he be glad? How is that possible? Look at this. He is not saying, well this joy thing is something you

have but it really never makes its way from your **deep understanding** to your **face**. No. Paul is saying, I am **legitimately** and **emotionally** glad about this. I am glad to be in **this spot at this time** for the Lord's service.

I am glad and I rejoice with you. I share this rejoicing with you in our mutual sufferings. I am not grumbling and disputing. I have learned better than that. We serve a God who **knows what He is doing**. I do not know why. I do not know how. I don't know all the ifs and buts. But I am legitimately and heartfelt glad to be part of something this important in the work of God.

I have joy in this situation. You might think it would normally make a person miserable. But it does not make me miserable because I see it for what it is. And he says

18 For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me.

Basically, I believe Paul is saying to the Philippians that we are in the same boat. You too are suffering for your faith. So there is no reason for **you** to not experience the same things I am experiencing. There is no reason for you not to view my experiences and your experiences in the same light. There is no reason for us not to **both** have a **fellowship in this joy** as we have a **fellowship in these sufferings**.

Isn't this such an odd thing he talks about. He is talking about joy and sufferings as if they are directly related. The more the suffering, the more the joy. I can understand this rationally. But I am not so sure I can relate experientially. Can you? If so maybe you should be preaching this sermon.

I understand bearing up under suffering. I understand thinking right about it so I can face difficult things in my life. But I would not be able to write what Paul writes.

Could it be that I have suffered so little for the cause of the gospel. We need to remember that the suffering Paul was facing and the suffering that the Philippians were facing could all have been avoided if they were just to deny Christ. Really, how big of a deal would it be to just say "Nero is lord" if you knew in your heart you did not mean it.

But they were standing fast.

We are going to first look at passages that speak of joy and suffering for the sake of the Gospel. I think that is a little easier to understand. I am not sure how much we experience it, but I think it is far easier to see **reasons for rejoicing** when the **only reason we are suffering** is because we are making a stand for our Savior. Maybe it is easier because it is subject to **our choice**. We know we are causing

the suffering willingly to honor Christ. Maybe it is easier because there is a direct correlation between **our choice** and the **value of our Savior**.

Jesus made no bones about this. This is the reaction he expects when we are persecuted.

Matthew 5:10–12 (NKJV)

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. 12 Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Let's look at some other places where Paul mixes joy and suffering.

2 Corinthians 7:4 (NKJV)

4 Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my boasting on your behalf. I am filled with comfort. I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation.

Here it is again. Paul is joyful in his shared tribulations. Could it be that when our suffering is directly related to our stand for the gospel, it is easier to rejoice? We can be affirmed that what we suffer is directly related to the name of Christ being exalted.

Paul was tickled that the Corinthians were standing up for Christ and paying a cost. It looks like they may not have always paid the costs that they should have. But where they did, Paul rejoiced.

Ephesians 3:13 (NKJV)

13 Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.

Here Paul wants to make sure the Ephesians do not have the opposite response from Joy. He does not want the Ephesians **to lose heart**. He wants them to understand that suffering for the Gospel is not a sign of Gods **discontentment**. It is a sign that God is **being glorified**. Tribulations are to be expected.

Colossians 1:24–25 (NKJV)

24 I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, 25 of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God,

Carla and I have been memorizing this verse. And not matter how many times we quote it, it is confusing. Rejoicing in suffering is no new thing. And we can see

how Paul would rejoice when He is suffering because of His ministry. This verse appears to be in the context of suffering for the sake of the Gospel. God is doing stuff and Paul is having an opportunity to suffer for the sake of Christ.

But filling up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ... that is a bit more difficult.

Scripture tells us that people rejected Christ because they loved darkness and hated Christ. We also know that Christ was resurrected and ascended to the Father's throne. We also know that the time for Christ's return has not come yet. It could come at any time. But it has not yet happened.

So could it be that the **hatred of the world** requires **an outlet**. And since Christ is not here, and there is still **hatred to be expressed**, we have the privilege of **receiving** that hatred of theirs. And we get to **fill up** that which was not completed when Christ ascended to heaven. That could be what it means about "what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ".

But we see clearly how rejoicing and sufferings are intertwined again. Paul says, "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you."

1 Thes 3:7-9

7 therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith. 8 For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord. 9 For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God,

It just keeps going. We can see very clearly that **affliction** and **distress** are directly related to rejoicing. Do we, in our heart of hearts think that this is **impossible** or that is **not true** or that it is **not realistic**? If so this is a place where we need to allow the word of God to inform our seer. Because our seer is not right. In all our affliction and distress we were comforted. So Paul was very concerned about the believers in Thessalonica. And at the same time he was experiencing affliction. But Paul received comfort by news of their thriving faith. So even though Paul was still experiencing affliction, he was also experiencing joy that was springing into thanksgiving.

1 Peter 4:13 (NKJV)

13 but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

We are back to a verse about Christ's sufferings. And again we see rejoicing and suffering intermingled. And again it is in the context of standing firm for the gospel. It is suffering we could avoid by renouncing Christ.

What an odd existence we have. It is counter intuitive. With the suffering we experience we are called to rejoice. And it is not some masochistic command we are urged to obey counter to our own self interest. It is exactly **because** it **aligns** with our **ultimate self interest**. We rejoice because we aligning ourselves with a temporary good that God will do in our lives and a permanent reward that we will be grateful for forever.

James 1:2–4 (NKJV)

2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

This passage is different than the rest. This passage is talking about hard things that happen to us. It is not directly related to the gospel. Even renouncing the gospel would not make these trials go away.

I think this is a harder thing to rejoice in. When we suffer persecution, there is a sense that we have decided this. It was in our power and we said “yes”, I will stand for Christ no matter what. It was suffering we chose. And we have at least a general idea this could happen to us when we choose it.

The trials that come to us in this life do not usually happen the same way. We are just minding our own business and they happen. We did not get to choose whether or not we would accept it. We had no choice in the matter.

It is so hard to maintain an **eternal perspective**. It is hard to accept that our **momentary trials**, or even **lifelong difficulties** are not **horrible things**. And while they may be terribly difficult, they can still be met with joy. Why? The testing is producing exactly the eternal stuff that God wants to accomplish.

Suppose you knew the outcome from God’s perspective? Suppose you knew **EXACTLY** what He was accomplishing with this hard thing in your life? Suppose you could see the eternal good He was working out in your life and in others? Suppose you had the chance to choose the trials from a menu. Suppose the event on the menu listed after it all the things that would be accomplished by that trial for the good of **God’s kingdom** and for the **pleasure of Christ** and for your **eternal benefit**.

Think about this. Would we not **choose it**? Would we not **volunteer for it**?

Would we not say, yes Lord, this trial will be brutally hard. Going through it is the last thing on this world that I want. But I see what **You** want now. I see the good you have in mind. I see the love for me and for others that runs behind the scenes in this test, in this trial, in this catastrophe.

Would we not choose it?

I ask this, but I am not sure what our answer is. Do you really **trust** that what God says about His love for you is **really** that true? It is. Do you **really** trust it? Do you still think you have a legitimate gripe for anything He allowed in your life? Can you believe that no matter how difficult the trial, it came from a God who **loves you more deeply** than you have **ever been loved** in this life?

Faith is the thing that makes it ok that we do not **get a choice** in the matter. Faith says I trust God. Faith says it is ok that God chooses for us. Faith makes it ok that we don't get to choose. Faith fully trusts **God's ability** to choose for us. Faith believes that God would not have chosen this thing if what **it produces** is not more valuable than what **it costs**. So when we receive the testing, we receive it as if it was something God knew we would want **the outcome of**. We trust God. We trust His character. We trust His decision making.

Faith never reads life's trials as evidence that God is anything but who He says He is. Faith may look for evidence that an event may be a discipline, but it never reads the event as punishment from a God who hates us. **Faith** never thinks it knows more than God. Sometimes we do think that in our flesh. But **faith** does not.

And instead of resisting it, instead of blaming God, instead of questioning God, instead of insulting God by telling Him what we can and cannot handle, we say "thank you". Thank you that you know what is good for me and I do not. Thank you for withholding all those **seemingly good things** that would do me harm. Thank you for giving me those hard things that **do me good** and allow me to participate in what you are doing on this planet. Thank you.

We may need to say, I do not have the wisdom right now to understand how this can be used for my good. I do not know how it can benefit me or your kingdom. But I know you. I know you intend all good for me. And I will thank you.

Often joy does not just happen to us. We must do the counting. We must **count it all joy** We must calculate in what God says. We must calculate in who God is. We must believe there is a win in it for us somewhere, even if we cannot see where for the moment.

There is no trial we will experience in this life that we will not be eternally grateful for in the next. And the greatest regret we will have regarding our trials is **how long it took for us** to trust Gods sovereign loving hand in arranging that trial in our lives, no matter how it appears at first glance.

You might be thinking, Jon, you have no idea what you are talking about. You don't know what it is like. What you are saying is impossible. Well I might agree with you except that it is God who tells us these things. I am not making it up. And I might fail miserably if I were put in your shoes. But that does not undo the eternal truths of God's word.

I say all this knowing that I have my limits as to what I could truly be thankful for. None of us have a perfect faith or an inexhaustible faith. We all could be tested in ways that would vex our souls. But that does not change the facts. All things work to the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose. That is a promise, and since it comes from God it is also a fact. Our joy is often not zapped upon us. It comes from beliefs about God. It comes from a steadfast belief in the reliability of God's word and the unchangeable character of our wonderful God.

Rejoicing and suffering are not opposites. They are actually close friends in the Christian life. Whether we believe it or not does not determine the truth of the matter. That is what scripture says. Will we rise to the occasion? That is the question. Will we trust the character of God and the promises of God? That is the question. It does not matter what our **experience** has taught us. What does the **word of God** teach us? Can we look back on the trials and rejoice? If we can, we are learning from the hand of Jesus. If we cannot, we need to go back to the word of God with hearts willing to be taught by Him.

Are you in the midst of a difficult trial? One you are having trouble facing by faith?

Be comforted in knowing that you are deeply loved by God. That trial has meaning. Whatever it is, there is a value received at the other end that is worth what it costs you. God never rips off His children. He cannot do such a thing. It is not at all like Him. Flesh will tell you He does. The Bible will tell you he doesn't. I can assure you by the strength of God's word that if you could see everything, if you could see behind the veil, if you could see the love God has for you, if you could see what He wants to accomplish in you and those around you, if you could see it all, you would say like Mary said to the angel, "May it be with me according to your word."

Faith takes what God says and believes it in spite of every competing voice and every apparent evidence. God loves you.