

Broomfield



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Rejoice!

The Steadfast Christian Part 4

The Disciplines of Peace

Many of us have read the book of Proverbs. Some have studied Proverbs. But have you ever tried to outline the book of Proverbs?

There are portions of Scripture that just beg to be outlined. Acts is a good example. Luke clearly patterns his treatment of the Acts of the Apostles according to Christ's command, "and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Accordingly one can outline the book of Acts after this manner: The Church's witness to Jerusalem in Acts 1-8.; the Church's witness to Judea and Samaria in Acts 9-11.; and the Church's witness to the remotest part of the earth in Acts 12-28.

But when one tries to outline Proverbs, for example chapter 14, it is rather difficult. Listen to the flow from the first seven verses: Verse 1, the wise woman; verse 2, he who walks; verse 3, in the mouth of the foolish; verse 4, where no oxen are; verse 5, a faithful witness; verse 6, a scoffer seeks wisdom and finds none; verse 7, leave the presence of a fool.

It is clear that Proverbs 14, and for that matter most of the book of Proverbs, defies any attempt at outlining. This is because the book is a series of seemingly unconnected statements. It is wise sayings from the hand of the Lord.

Philippians 4:4-9, also has this reputation. It appears to be a passage in which Paul seemingly bounces from one topic to the next as he exhorts the Philippian church. He discusses rejoicing in verse 4, forbearing in verse 5, prayer in verse 6, our thought life in verse 8, and our practice in verse 9. These all appear to be a series of unconnected exhortations!

And that may be all that this section is!

However, there is another possibility, which if adopted, unifies this entire section. At the close of this letter Paul addresses head-on the division that was potentially ripping this church apart. In verse 2 he

exhorts Euodias and Syntyche to “have the same mind¹.” This we learned instructed them to cultivate the same world view.

Now it is assumed that because Paul doesn't specify what he means by this the “mindset” exhorted here is that which has been preached throughout this letter. However, there is another possibility, and that is that Paul does address the “mindset” exhorted in verse 2. And that verses 4-9 (far from being disjointed exhortations) represent that mindset that Euodias and Syntyche were to cultivate. This is the world view that leads to peace.

And this is exactly what Philippians 4 is all about. Philippians 4:4-9 represents the “mind of Christ.” The mindset that Euodias and Syntyche and all God’s children are to pursue if they are to live in harmony in the Lord.

Rejoice

Philippians 4:4, “**Rejoice**² in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.”

The root of the word *rejoice* is *joy* — a fruit of the Spirit rooted in the deepest part of our being. In Scripture the environment of joy is the compound realization that on account of our sin, we rightly deserve the wrath of God, hell. And yet, on account of God's grace, Christ stood in our place on the cross and suffered for us the wages of our sin. Thus in Christ, we stand before God forgiven — white as snow!

Now when we come to the realization that we are forgiven — that we stand before God not guilty of sin — the result is the deep-seated emotion of joy!

Rejoicing is defined simply as joy expressed, and thus speaks of the pervasion of joy in every part of our life. Speaking of those trusting in Christ, Peter said, “Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:8).

Philippians 2:17-18, “Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all. For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me.”

Thus the call to rejoice is the call at all times to live in light of your joy! And so, when Paul exhorts the Philippians to rejoice, he is calling on them to have the joy of the Lord pervade their workplace, home, relationships, lying down, rising up, and everything in-between.

That is what rejoicing is all about. It is living at all times in light of the knowledge that God has forgiven you; your life has been spared His wrath!

The Gladiator

In Rome the gladiator was a special kind of slave captured and trained to fight. They were placed in a stadium, a type of arena, where they fought to the death. Accordingly, like all slaves, they existed for the amusement of their owners. Yet unlike all slaves, the particular way they amused their owners was by killing an individual, an animal or being killed.

Now in the arena, there was only one of three ways to get out. As we said, you either killed your

1 φρονεω phroneo

2 χαίρω chairo

opponent. Or you were killed by your opponent. Or you were you were given Quarter.

Quarter was when a gladiator was injured so severely that he couldn't go on. At this point he could throw his weapons down, lay on his back, and extend his left arm in an appeal for "The Quarter." It was the right of the victor to either grant it or deny it. However, in the presence of the emperor, the victor renounced his right. The Emperor then consulted with the crowds. If the beaten man was thought to have defended himself bravely, the spectators waved their handkerchiefs, raised their thumbs, and cried, "Let him go!" However, if the conquered man was thought to have deserved defeat on account of weakness, the spectators turned their thumbs down and cried, "Slay him!" The final decision rested with the Emperor. Thumbs up meant, "Let him go." Thumbs down meant, "Slay him."³

Imagine being the wounded gladiator. You would be lying on the ground, vulnerable, with your left arm raised in the air. With terrible pain and agony on account of your injuries, you waited to hear your fate from the crowds. After a long silence you would hear the cheering of the crowd and the precious words of the Emperor, "Let him go!"

Your life was spared!

Regardless of how much your wounds hurt, those precious words, "Let him go!" would make you rejoice and forget all the pain and suffering! In fact, you would live the rest of your life ever mindful that you who once were a dead man, now alive.

Family of God that is what rejoicing is all about. Every one of us is as it were that gladiator appealing for Quarter. We are lying on our backs vulnerable. We have our left arm raised. We are fully aware that we deserve death. We haven't fought the good fight. We haven't been courageous when it comes to warring against sin. In fact, we at time have even flirted with sin. We ache from the injuries we have incurred in this life. And we know that Satan's sword is raised above us ready to strike.

Yet, when we hear those glorious words — "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Romans 8:1) — we fully appreciate the favorable relationship we have been given with God. All fears of death, our pains from injuries past or present, fear of Satan's death sword turn into "rejoicing with joy inexpressible!" regardless of our circumstances! This is the relief you and I have this day.

If we allow this truth to weigh heavily upon our minds, the result will be a "rejoicing with joy in expressible and full of glory!"

With this, notice the qualification.

Philippians 4:4, "**Rejoice in the Lord**⁴ always: and again I say, Rejoice."

This is an important statement for today we "rejoice" over so many things. We rejoice over prosperity. We rejoice over personal accomplishments. We rejoice over a loved one. We rejoice over a sweet providence. We rejoice over the affections and approval of man. We rejoice over our reputations. Rarely if ever is the cause of our joy the person and work of Christ!

³ Taken from Carcopino's Daily Life in Ancient Rome, pages 239-244

⁴ κυριος kurios

Yet it ought not to be this way. We must strive to hold Christ ever and always as that which only gives us joy. For to do otherwise, is to set ourselves up for all manner of grief and misery.

Such was the case for Euodias and Syntyche. The reason that they were at odds and not getting along was because they had slipped in their walk with Christ such that their joy in life was no longer in God's approbation of them. They were not reflecting on the Lord's love and affection. They were not viewing Christ's declaration that they were without sin. They were looking on the love and affections of others.

Thus when it came to getting along with one another there was friction. There was alienation. There was a distance. Neither was giving what each other thought they deserved. Both were looking out for their own interests!

Listen; there can be no personality conflict if the source of all rejoicing is Christ! And thus we see the first discipline of peace is rejoicing in the Lord.

This brings us to the standard.

Rejoice Always

Philippians 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord **always**⁵: and again I say, Rejoice."

This is such an important qualification. The word *always* means, at all times, in every circumstance of life. It carries the idea of consistency. Now it is not that we rejoice over the loss of our well-being, trials, difficulties, or neglect. Rather, the call here is to "rejoice in the Lord always."

Thus we rejoice **IN** all things, not **FOR** all things. And so, when life gets hard we do not faint, because the greatest burden of our life has been lifted in Christ — the burden of our obligation to God.

Such was the example Paul gave to the Philippians. When Paul came to Macedonia he came because of a vision.⁶ When he arrived in the city he went down to the river to preach the gospel. (There obviously wasn't a synagogue in this largely Gentile town).⁷ And with this the Philippian church was begun.

Persecution

And then the persecution followed.⁸

Following the founding of this church, Paul cast a demon out of the slave-girl. Soon a riot broke out, and Paul and Silas were cast into prison — yet not before being severely beaten.

Now, Paul was in Macedonia according to the will of God. And yet, far from great crowds coming to the know the Lord, Paul and Silas found themselves beaten, bloodied, rejected, with stocks on their feet cast into prison. There they awaited the fate of a criminal.

⁵ παντοτε pantote

⁶ Compare Acts 16:10

⁷ Compare Acts 16:14

⁸ Compare Acts 16:18-25

How did they respond?

Acts 16:25, “And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.”

Family of God, the call to “rejoice in the Lord always” is not conditioned by circumstances, treatment, life-stage, the favorable prospect of survival, or our standard of living. Rather, it transcends the contingencies of this life for it speaks of a mindset. This is a paradigm by which we process the things of this world.

Yet you say, “How can I cultivate an outlook that rejoices in the Lord always?”

You can by this paradigm. In essence you, “Set your mind on the things above, not the things that are on the earth” (Colossians 3:1). This means that you put down anything and everything in this world that distracts you from Christ. You stop fretting about tomorrow. You give up your claim on the things of this life. You lose your life for Christ's sake!

Thus you fall in love with Christ all over again. Once again become a student of God and His glory. Once again you contemplate the things of the Lord. Once again you begin to meditate upon the word. Once again you begin to see life through the eyes of God!

Walk by the Spirit!

When Paul wrote to the churches of Galatia, he knew he was writing to some pretty worldly people. Thus he gave them this command.

Galatians 5:16, “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.”

Now if the Galatian Christians would do this, notice what would happen.

Galatians 5:22-23, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.”

When a child of God walks by the Spirit (this means he listens to the Spirit speak through the word. He learns of the riches of God's grace in Christ. He sees his sin in all its greatness, and yet knows the love of the Lord.) The fruit of “joy” grows in his life, and they become ones who, “Rejoice in the Lord always!”

This is how one cultivates the paradigm of rejoicing!

When this occurs, do you know what happens to our church relationships?

They become peaceful!

You say, “That's a leap! Where'd you get that?”

First, notice the context of Paul's teaching on the fruit of the Spirit.

Galatians 5:15-16, “But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one

of another. This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.”

Galatians 5:19, “Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness.”

Galatians 5:22, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,”

Amazingly, in Galatians Paul is dealing with a congregation which — like the Philippians — were “biting and devouring one another.”⁹ And what was the solution?

The solution was walking by the Spirit by which they would cultivate the paradigm of joy!

And so it is in our passage. Paul exhorts Euodias and Syntyche — two warring sisters — to cultivate the mindset of rejoicing!

The Urgency

Philippians 4:4, “Rejoice in the Lord alway: and **again I say, Rejoice.**”

This is the 10th time that Paul has exhorted the Philippians unto joy. From this we conclude that either Paul is in a serious rut and needs to get over it, or that the call to rejoice is easily forsaken.

Now I hope you see that the later is the case.

Rejoicing is a fruit of the Spirit and appears in our lives as the gospel becomes more and more precious to us. It is so easy to lose it because our fallen nature still is an enemy of grace. It is easy to lose because our default paradigm would have us relate to God and one another on the basis of our merit. It is easy to lose because our passion for a right standing before man makes us “play the victim” when we don't get our way. Consequently we can lack Biblical joy — and the joy we do have in life often times is the joy of a passing age.

Accordingly, Paul exhorts the Philippians ten times to cultivate a heart that rejoices in Christ. And he does so twice in one verse!

How we need to hear this simple message!

Rejoicing is a delicate fruit, easily destroyed by sin. Our flesh, the longings and craving of this world and fear all rob us of joy. In fact to enjoy it today is no guarantee that we will possess it tomorrow.

Therefore we must guard our hearts. We must watch over what we find ourselves delighting in. We must daily renew our faith! We must do these things lest our hope and confidence drift from our Savior!

Samson

If it were not for Samson's mention in the list of elders of Hebrews 11, he would be one that we would mostly pity. He was a Nazarite which meant that no razor could touch his head nor strong drink his

⁹ Compare Galatians 5:15

mouth. Yet, rather than seeing that these stipulations were instituted as acts of devotion to the Lord, and thus reminders to the Nazarite that the Lord was his strength, Samson placed his faith and confidence in his hair!

It wasn't until the end of his life that he stood before the Philistines, scarred and wounded, that he finally called out to God for the strength to serve God's purpose. And though he died in the process, nevertheless we rejoice in knowing that in the end, the Lord was Samson's strength.

Family of God let us not live on this earth fancying the things of this world and longing for the praises or affections of man. Let us not put our hope in our "hair." Rather let us begin today to understand that the joy of the Lord — a joy arising from the knowledge of God's love for you — is our strength.¹⁰

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on February 8, 2004. Greg is the preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.

¹⁰ Compare Nehemiah 8:10