

TIP TOEING THROUGH THE TOUGH STUFF

Phil. 4:4-9

Lesson One: Background and Introduction

I. This passage is in the midst of a thank you note

- A. Author: The apostle Paul
- B. Time Line: Written from Rome while Paul is in prison, probably around 62 A.D. Epaphroditus had been sent to Rome with a special offering for Paul from the church at Philippi (see Phil. 2:25-30 and 4:10-20). Approximately two years later, Paul writes this thank you letter.
- C. Setting/Occasion: Unlike other letters where Paul addresses doctrinal issues, this is a personal, informal letter. It is rough in style. He explains his circumstances to his beloved church friends. He explains the ministry of Epaphroditus. He thanks them for their generous support. Paul wants to encourage this great church and urges them to find joy in living with Christ as the center of their lives. (At least 19 times in these four chapters, Paul mentions joy, rejoicing or gladness.)
- D. Recipients: The church at Philippi was founded about 50-51 A.D. during Paul's second missionary journey (see Acts 16:11-40). Philippi was a very important city at the northern end of the Aegean Sea (between Greece and Turkey). It was a Roman colony and functioned like a miniature Rome. The citizens enjoyed all the rights of Roman citizens everywhere, including the right to buy and exchange property of all kinds.

The church began in Lydia's house. She is a seller of purple. She sold expensive fine fabrics. (Purple dye was expensive. It came from the shellfish in the waters off Thyatira [her original home]. The throat of each shellfish produced only one drop of dye.) The city provided a great marketplace for her goods.

- E. The specific context: There was a bit of dissention in the church. Two women were having trouble getting along (Euodia, her name means "prosperous journey" and Syntyche whose name means "pleasant acquaintance"). "They were contentious rather than content."

This verse might be translated: Euodia I exhort, please, and Syntyche, I exhort, please, be of the same mind in the Lord.

- F. The Specific Purpose: Paul outlines clearly the secret of contentment. It is the pursuit of joy not happiness.

II. The difference between happiness and joy

- A. Happiness: “The state of well-being and contentment based on good fortune.”

The Greek word for happiness refers to “the freedom of the rich from normal cares and worries. It is the word used to describe a person who has received some form of good fortune, money, health, children and that sort of thing. ...If I am happy, it is because things are going well for me.” (Anne Robertson)

We are happy when our outward situation is all good. We are unhappy when circumstances change.

But note: Nowhere in scripture are we commanded to be happy. There are many examples of times when God’s kids were miserable. Often because of something God did to them or around them! (See I Kings 12:15, Isa. 54:16, II Kings 24:2-4, Job 42:11, Dan. 9:14)

In fact, we are specifically told that trouble is part of the human experience. (See Job 14:1 and James 1:2)

- B. Joy: “Is connected to the source of life within you”

The Greek word for joy is complex. It means to be full of cheer, greatly full of cheer or calm delight. One author called it the ‘good mood of the soul’. It is not an emotion, but rather a state of being. It reflects an intense state of mind that is not controlled by circumstances. It rises above the details of daily life (health, marriage, children, work, and finances) and instead focuses on the eternal relationship we have with God in Christ.

- C. The relationship of happiness and joy to fear.

Happiness has no fear as long as nothing has gone wrong. We are happy because....But as soon as circumstances change, fear takes over.

Joy is not about getting rid of our problems, but rather getting rid of the fear that grips us in the light of those problems. (2 Tim 1:7) Joy doesn’t make the junk go away; it gives us tools with which to deal with the tragedies of life. We are joyful in spite of.....

Paul knew that very difficult days lie ahead for the Christians. Persecution would be severe. He isn’t exhorting them ignore the suffering, but to remember that the suffering has meaning and purpose. Joy cements that perspective into our hearts.

III. Rejoice in the Lord

- A. “Rejoice, Rejoice” –repeated for emphasis

This is a present active imperative (like 3:1). He is harkening back to 1:4. Paul is in essence saying, “I rejoice (in spite of my circumstances), now you rejoice!”

B. "In the Lord"

Paul is not urging Christians to live as grown up Pollyannas. He places our confidence and focus clearly on the face of Christ. Because of Him, through Him and with His help, we rejoice.

iv. Joy requires a re-focusing of our minds and hearts.

In order to embrace the "formula" for joy, we must have:

- A. The cause of Christ as our priority (1:5, 12, 27) - The gospel / the good news must be the center of our lives.

Priorities: What is the primary focus of your life?

- B. The character of Christ as our pattern (2:5-8)-As He gave Himself up sacrificially in the interest of others, so must we.

Pattern: What is the bent to your attitudes? Others oriented? Self Oriented?

- C. The comprehension of Christ as our passion (3:10)-Paul's cry "that I may know Him" must be ours too.

Passion: What do you long to know, long to be, and long to have more than anything else?

- D. If it is Christ, the result is our peace (4:6-7)

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think so many people believe that they have a right to happiness? How does that perspective affect in our daily lives?
2. Do you think it is wrong to want to be happy?
3. Why is joy so elusive?
4. Discuss how the priorities of our lives affect our joy. What could you change this week that would help bring you some peace?