

The Joy Of Spiritual Growth **Philippians 3:13-21**

Intro: The NT teaches that being a Christian brings joy to our lives. Peter reminded the Christians to whom he wrote: "you rejoice with a joy inexpressible and full of glory". If you do not know the deep and glorious joy of being a Christian, I hope that our studies in Philippians will motivate you experience that joy. The key to joy is Christ! Paul believed and taught that joy is the product of God's grace working in our lives through faith in Jesus Christ.

However, grace has two deadly enemies. Legalism makes law a substitute for grace; antinomianism (against law) makes grace a reason to ignore law. This morning we saw how Paul met the challenge of legalism and how that he affirmed that his joy was found in God's grace granted in forgiveness rather than favor based on merited performance of law. However, it is tempting in avoiding legalism to embrace the opposite extreme and affirm that law is irrelevant to the Christian. The antinomian mindset is not only opposed to grace, it is a hindrance to one of the great joys of being a Christian—the joy of spiritual growth.

Listen as Paul describe the proper mindset for the person who would rejoice in spiritual growth (v. 12-21) "I press...."

WE NEED A CONSCIOUSNESS OF IMPERFECTION

"Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead.."

Paul had been a Christian for almost 25 years when he wrote this book. And yet after serving the Lord that long he was not ready to say, "I am perfect now, I have nowhere to go, I cannot advance in faith". Paul recognized that salvation was an on-going process that begins at conversion but continues for as long as we live.

And so like Paul we need to approach our lives as Christians with humility and unworthiness. We need the blessing of daily confession (1 Jn. 1:9). And as we do, we renew in our minds the joy of his forgiveness. Remember the joy you felt when you first obeyed the gospel. We should never lose that joy when we know God has forgiven us.

WE NEED TO MAKE EXCELLENCE A PRIORITY

"This one thing I do..."

This is the language not only of commitment, but of priority. We live under the tyranny of the urgent. Thousands of things scream for our attention and time. "I think God is going to come down and pull civilization over for speeding!"

*We need to slow down and reflect upon what we are doing with our lives!
What is most important to us? What is our ultimate priority? Is it excellence
as a Christian?
When we get focused, we'll experience the joy of knowing our purpose.*

WE NEED TO FORGET THE PAST AND LOOK TO THE GOAL

*"...forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I
press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ
Jesus"*

We need to forget the past.

A part of what was behind Paul was bad. But he did not allow his sins of the past to cause him to wallow in self-pity and inactivity. He wanted to do something about his life.

A part of what was behind Paul was good. He had travel over a great part of the Roman world, taught thousands of people and established dozens of churches. He had suffered astounding persecutions for the sake of Christ. And if anyone could have ever said, "I've done enough" it would be Paul. But even at this late date Paul in chapter one talked of continued "fruitful service" for the Lord.

We need to focus on the goal.

How easy it is to rest on the success and accomplishments of the past! How easy it is to rely upon the strength of yesterday's victories and faith. And before long we will find ourselves running on an empty tank. Preachers, may be the worst. We give ourselves to study and prayer and we grow to a point of influence with others. And then it is so easy to quit studying and praying. We may deceive ourselves into thinking that the approval of the crowds is God's blessing. We begin to lose touch with God and our need for his help; and rely upon our own theatrics. And it looks as if its going to work for a time--and then disaster! We all need to beware.

As spiritual athletes in God's race we cannot be about the business of looking back, but rather like the marathon runner keep our eye upon our destination and press forward toward the goal with determination and enthusiasm.

When we do we'll experience the joy of knowing that we are increasing in holiness.

WE NEED TO LOOK TO GOD FOR FURTHER ENLIGHTENMENT

"Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you"

God reveals himself to man through His word. Paul does not mean to say that God is going to directly put the truth in your mind. He does mean to say that God does indeed speak to his people concerning that which they do not know and when they listen to his voice they experience a "revelation" of truth.

If we want our joy to grow and increase we need to make it a priority to listening to God's voice every way we can. And I know of no better way than to get your Bible out every day. Find a place of quietness and solicitude and

study and reflect and meditate upon the word of God! There is no better antidote for apostasy.

There is no greater joy than to delight in the revelations that God makes to us in study. Our hearts can be lifted again and again, higher and higher by turning our minds to what God has said.

WE NEED PRACTICE WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

“However, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained.”

When we approach the word of God for study, we need to let it have its transforming power in our lives. Real faith doesn't exist where we affirm truth in our minds but will not live it in our lives! In fact, in contrast, such a life is sinful to God (Jas. 4:17).

When we fail to keep our conscience clean by doing as we ought, our joy is taken away. David, in his adultery with Bathsheba, did exactly what Paul urges us not to do. Through his time of impenitence, he was miserable. When he repented, he prayed, "Restore to me the joy of thy salvation". We will enhance our joy in the Lord if we are not fighting the guilt of disobedience.

WE NEED TO MODEL OURSELVES AFTER GODLY PEOPLE

There are those who advocate doing as one pleases, making their own desires god and glorying in sin.

“For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ”

Paul urges us to follow godly mentors. Paul urges the Philippians to make him and those like him mentors in their lives. Follow his example; and take note of others who follow the pattern you have in us.

“Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us”.

As we do this we discover of the joy of partnership with God's people.

WE NEED TO CONSIDER WHERE OUR COURSE IS TAKING US

From time to time we need to stop and ask ourselves, "Where is the course I am taking leading me?"

“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ”

When we follow our own desires and mind earthly things, we are headed for destruction! v. 29

When we live as citizens of heaven, listening to the voice of our king, we can look to the future with hope and optimism. The body that so often serves as a source of temptation will be transformed into the “body of his glory”.

There is a great joy in knowing that day by day you are getting closer to your home with God.

Conclusion: Though salvation does not depend upon our perfect performance, discipleship demands that we allow our faith to be guided by God's law. We must stay focused on the goal. As we grow in knowledge and holiness, we can, like Paul, experience a great joy in our spiritual growth. We can truly "rejoice in the Lord" if we "stand firm in the Lord".