

TEXTS: Ga 5:22-23; Philip 4:4.

## INTRODUCTION:

1. Joy is a choice. We are as happy or unhappy as we choose to be.
2. Sadly, many of us choose unhappiness.
3. If we want to please God, we must choose joy!
4. If we haven't made the choice to rejoice, I hope we will do so by the end of this lesson.
5. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I see no substantial scriptural difference between joy or rejoicing and happiness and will therefore use these terms interchangeably. 2 Ch 7:10; Pr 3:18; 29:18; Ro 14:22.

## DISCUSSION:

### 1. Philippians 4:4 is not a unique text.

- A. **Outside the epistle.** Ps 32:11; 40:16A; 68:3. Exult means "show or feel elation or jubilation." Ps 118:24; 149:2; Ec 3:12; 11:8A; Joel 2:23A; 2 Co 13:11A; 1 Th 5:16; 1 Pe 4:13.
- B. **Inside the epistle.** Philip 1:18, 25; 2:2, 17-18, 28-29; 3:1A.

### 2. We need to wake up and appreciate the seriousness of rejoicing.

Yes, there are times to weep, symptoms of medical conditions sometimes beyond our control, and learning curves, but joy is "the distinguishing atmosphere of the Christian life. We may put it this way—whatever be the ingredients of the Christian life, and in whatever proportions they are mixed together, joy is one of them. In the Christian life joy always remains a constant ... It has been said that 'Rejoice!' is the standing-orders of the Christian ... Every virtue and all knowledge is to be irradiated with joy; even the patience and the endurance which might well be bleak and grim are to be lit with joy ... There is no virtue in the Christian life which is not made radiant with joy; there is no circumstance and no occasion which is not illumined with joy. A joyless life is not a Christian life, for joy is the one constant in the recipe for Christian living" (Barclay).

Joy is not something we seek. Rather, it is something we find as a result of seeking God. Ga 5:22, "Love, joy ..." So, if we are not joyful, we have a very serious problem in our relationship with God.

Do not think for a moment that this is a self-centered feel good lesson. If we are not rejoicing in the Lord always I fully intend to make us miserable until we get on the highway to happiness.

Rejoicing is not an option. It is a command of God. A joyless life is not a Christian life. The "Second Sunday Of The Month illustration." If we are not doing what Philip 4:4 commands, we are sinning and unless we repent, we will lose our soul. Compare Philip 2:12B-13 to Ps 2:11.

We must be joyful, but not primarily for our sake, but for the sake of God and other people. Philip 2:14-15. "Unhappy religious people reflect poorly on their religion and their God ... unhappy religious people pose a real challenge to faith in their religion and their God. If their faith is so impressive, what aren't these devoted adherents happy? There are only two possible reasons: either they are not practicing their faith correctly, or they are practicing their faith correctly but their religion does not make their adherents happy. Most outsiders assume the latter reason. Unhappy religious people should therefore think about how important being happy is – if not for themselves, then for the sake of their religion. Unhappy, let alone angry, religious people provide more persuasive arguments for atheism and secularism than do all the arguments of atheists" (Prager).

To illustrate, the worst thing otherwise faithful parents can do for prodigal children is to be miserable until their children repent. If their children can do something for them God cannot, why would their children want to serve such an impotent God. The best thing faithful parents can do for prodigal children is to rejoice in the Lord always in spite of their children's disobedience.

Philip 3:1A. "Finally," likely "from now on," "in the future." "When are you finally going to ..." Philip 3:1B; 4:4.

### 3. Are we rejoicing in the Lord always?

- A. 1 Pe 1:8. Can we put our name in the following blank and the statement be true? "\_\_\_\_\_ rejoices with joy inexpressible and full of glory?"
- B. Sadly, many ungodly people rejoice more in unrighteousness than we rejoice with the truth.

### 4. Why are we not rejoicing in the Lord always? There are many possible explanations.

- A. **We don't think about happiness.** We desperately need to do so for God, other people, and ourselves.
- B. **We seek happiness in passing pleasures that in the end do not make us happy.** Ec 2:1, 8-11; Pr 23:29-35; etc.
- C. **We make it difficult to be happy.** Debt, procrastination, etc.
- D. **We are violating our consciences.** Ro 14:22.
- E. **We do not think about things that would make us happy.**

- 1) When life is sweet, instead of dwelling on what we have in Christ—things whose presence should fill our with overflowing joy—we dwell on what we do not have in the world—things whose absence should not bother us in the least.
- 2) When life is bitter, instead of focusing on the good in the bad—the silver lining not the cloud, we focus on the bad in the good—the cloud not the silver lining.
- 3) So instead of being thankful and rejoicing, we grumble and make ourselves miserable. 1 Th 5:16-18; Philip 2:13-14; 2 Co 13:11A.
- 4) No wonder so many Christians are miserable!

**F. We do not want to be happy.**

- 1) "In a Peanuts cartoon strip by Charles Schulz, Lucy says to her little brother Linus, 'Boy, do I feel crabby.' 'Maybe I can help you,' Linus responds, always willing to be of assistance. 'Why don't you just take my place here in front of the TV while I go and fix you a nice snack? Sometimes we all need a little pampering to help us feel better.' Linus returns with a sandwich, chocolate chip cookies, and a glass of milk. 'Now,' he asks, 'is there anything else I can get you? Is there anything I haven't thought of?' Lucy takes the tray, saying, 'Yes, there's one thing you haven't thought of.' And then she screams, 'I don't wanna feel better!'"
- 2) Terri Clark's song, I Just Want To Be Mad, "Please don't make me smile, I just want to be mad for awhile."
- 3) 2 Co 13:11A.
- 4) Why do we refuse to be comforted?
  - a. Our ego won't allow it. Es- 5:9-13.
  - b. We don't want to make the effort.
  - c. We find dysfunctional comfort in discomfort.
  - d. Etc.

**G. We do not trust God.**

- 1) We are unhappy because we don't think God is just, we don't leave justice to God, we don't think God will provide, and/or we don't think God's way, His love, is best.
- 2) If we did trust God in all these ways, we would be happy. Ps 33:21; Ro 15:13A.

**5. Happiness is a choice.**

- A. Regardless of why we are not joyful, we can be joyful and if we want to go to heaven we must choose to rejoice. John 16:22B.
- B. How is this possible?

- 1) Happiness comes from our hearts not our circumstances. 2 Co 7:4B.

"The condition of our blessedness, or happiness, is within ourselves. Our happiness does not depend upon what we have, but upon what we are; not upon our position, but upon our disposition; not upon \ state of our circumstances, but upon the state of our soul" (Thomas).

"He who has so little knowledge of human nature as to seek happiness by changing anything but his own disposition will waste his life in fruitless efforts and multiply the grief which he purposes to remove" (Johnson).

"For you to have the gall to stand up there and suggest that ... no one can hurt me without my consent, and that I have chosen my own emotional life of being miserable – well, there was just no way I could buy into that. But I kept thinking about it. I really went inside myself and began to ask, 'Do I have the power to choose my response to the way people treat me?' When I finally realized that I do have that power, when I swallowed that bitter pill and realized that I had chosen to be miserable, I also realized that I could choose not to be miserable. At that moment I stood up. I felt as though I was being let out of San Quentin. I wanted to yell to the whole world, 'I am free! I am let out of prison! No longer am I going to be controlled by the treatment of some person'" (S. R. Covey quoting a woman who attended one of his seminars).

- 2) God teaches us how to rejoice always. John 15:11; Ps 19:8A. The purpose of this lesson is not to discuss everything we must do to be happy. Rest assured, however, that God in His word tells us all we must do to be happy and we can all be happy!

"The word 'blessed' literally means: an inner joy that is untouchable by the world. The word 'happiness' is built on the word 'hap,' and literally means: chance. Human happiness is often dependent on the chances of life, over which so often man has no control. A sudden illness, a deep disappointment, the loss of some material blessing—one of many things can change happiness into sorrow. But when the Christian has God within his soul, nothing on earth can touch him ... Christ ... bring[s] blessedness to human life—a permanent joy" (Allen).

**APPLICATION:** For God, other people, and our ourselves, let's choose to rejoice! Let's repent of our unhappiness, diagnose why we fall short of joy, and change whatever we must so rejoice in the Lord always! Ps 35:9; Is 61:10A; Hab 3:17-18.