

Be Made to Rejoice - Upper Room Discourse Principles found in the New Testament

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Introduction

Christ tells the disciples of several things that will happen over the next few hours. He brings up an interesting contrast between grief and joy. There were going to be two reactions to His departure. The world would rejoice, and the disciples will experience grief. But “in a little while” the disciples will be made to rejoice, and that joy would not be taken away from them (Jn 16:20-22). Jesus is preparing the disciples for not only His departure but for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Just like peace and love, this is the joy of Christ (14:27, 15:9-11). It can also be seen here that it is the characteristic of other members of the Godhead.

Passive or Middle Deponent?

There is a problem with grammarians and commentaries concerning the form of the verb in the NT. There is a variety of ways in which some translate the verb. The form is a middle/passive form. Some consider this to be a deponent verb which is middle by form but translated as an active voice. A few take it as a middle which is reflexive – one does it for himself or his own part. I believe that it is passive as do many other students of the Bible.

“The passive voice emphasizes divine assistance in the believer's having joy in the Dispensation of Grace. In other words, the gracious provision of joy is the work of God that can be actively used by the Christian after it has been produced by the Persons of the Godhead.” (Spurbeck)

Have you ever been in a situation where someone asked you to just “cheer up”? This is usually accomplished by a change of focus, stopping to look at something previously overlooked, or looking away from something right in front of you to see something that is coming soon. But when it is done on our own, it usually is temporary and the frustration tends to come back.

The reason for grief

Jesus tells them in 14:28-29 that they lacked belief and love. This was a weighty accusation and I am sure it did not sit well with the disciples. They were incapable of the type of love that Christ was talking about at this point. They would be capable at Pentecost. There is a connection in the scriptures between faith and love. This is also true of joy. The disciples would experience grief because of Jesus's departure. Christ equates this grief with the pain of childbirth that is replaced with joy.

Paul connects Faith and Joy

In Romans 5, Paul tells the church at Rome that faith gives the believer access to the grace that causes him to stand. In 5:2 the word “rejoice” could be translated as “let us be caused to rejoice”. Paul then gives the sequence that provides the promise for the believer to focus on. Tribulation works (accomplishes or develops fully) patience, patience works experience, experience works hope, and hope produces bold believers filled with love by or through the Holy Spirit. A change of mind must be enacted by the believer when he encounters trials and tribulations. The departure of Christ should not have caused the disciples to grieve, through belief they should have rejoiced. The believer today has a capacity that the disciples did not.

In Romans 12 Paul gives joy as one of the marks of a true Christian. In verses 1-2 he sets out the path to reasonable service to God. In the next few verses, he details the spiritual gifts of the believer. Starting in verse 9, he gives several characteristics of what true discipleship looks like. Joy is mentioned twice in this section. In verse 12 Paul again connects faith with joy. In verses 13-15 he connects the believer with fellow believers allowing for the shared position to encourage each one. This truth is expounded in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul's other treatise on spiritual gifts. In verse 26 he champions the collective mindset. This passage leads into chapter 13, where Paul gets to the heart of the matter, anything done in the flesh is worthless, Spiritual love must be the motive.

In Galatians 5, joy is listed with the full character of Christ, the Fruit of the Spirit. Along with faith and love, these things are not possible outside of a fruitful walk with the Spirit, the believer yielding to the leading of the Spirit in his life.

In the book of Philippians, Paul connects joy with a disconnect with one's circumstances, but a focus on Christ, our Joy.

1. Paul prays for the Philippian believers with joy (*chara*) because of their partnership with him in the gospel. (1:4-5)
2. He rejoices (*chairo*) that Christ is proclaimed – even when Christ is proclaimed with impure motives. (1:18)
3. He rejoices (*chairo*) that his current hardship will turn out for his deliverance, through the prayers of the believers and the help of the Spirit. (1:18-1:19)
4. Paul is convinced that the continuation of his ministry to the Philippians will contribute to their “progress and joy (*chara*) in the faith”. (1:25)
5. Paul has joy (*chara*) when the believers are unified and single-minded. (2:2)
6. Paul would be glad (*chairo*) in his sacrifice for the sake of their faith, so that his ministry was not in vain. (2:17)
7. Paul would rejoice with (*synchairo*) the believers in his sacrifice for the sake of their faith, so that his ministry was not in vain (2:17)
8. Paul encourages the Philippian believers to also be glad (*chairete*) in his life being poured out for them. (2:18)
9. Paul encourages the Philippian believers to also rejoice with (*synchairete*) him in his life being poured out for them. (2:18)
10. Paul is eager to send Epaphroditus back to them, so that they can rejoice (*chairo*) in seeing him again and be less anxious about his health. (2:28)
11. Paul encourages the Philippian church to receive Epaphroditus back with joy (*chara*), since he risked his life for the work of Christ. (2:29)
12. Paul has no problem with frequently repeating the reminder to “rejoice (*chairo*) in the Lord,” because he knows how important it is. (3:1)
13. Paul encourages the Philippians to “rejoice (*chairo*) in the Lord always.” (4:4)
14. For added emphasis, Paul again commands the Philippian believers to rejoice (*chairo*). (4:4)

15. The Philippians' renewed ability to support his ministry caused Paul to rejoice (*chairō*) in the Lord greatly. (4:10)

Comfort to Joy

In 1 Thessalonians, Paul connects belief in the second coming of Christ (the Rapture) to comfort (4:18), to the ability to rejoice evermore (5:16). This is a direct connection to the Upper Room where Christ said his return would bring joy to the disciples.

In Philemon, Paul connects his joy with Philemon's faith in the Lord and love towards the saints (Ph 1:5). This is an interesting construction with an "ABBA" type grammar tool. This type of tool is called a chiasm or cross. The first goes with the last and the two in the middle are connected. In fractions it can be seen as the means and extremes in a proportion. We see here faith, leading to love, leading to joy. This is a pattern that has been evident throughout the New Testament. The bowels of the saints are refreshed, and Paul's own soul will be refreshed by Philemon. He asks that Onesimus's debt be placed on his own account. If Philemon would do this, Paul would profit from it, and have joy of Philemon in the Lord (1:20).

Christ's example

The writer of Hebrews sets up Christ as the example for the believer in chapter 12:1-2. The race of one is run for each believer with the eye upon Christ. Christ's joy was His forward looking to what his crosswork would accomplish. In essence His love for us and for His Father enabled Him to experience joy at the cross. In the practical part of the book, chapter 13, the writer encourages the believer to obey and place himself willingly under the authority of another (13:17). This will enable those who have the rule over us to experience joy and not grief. This joy is profitable for the one who submits. It is not the ruler who experiences the profit here, but the one who obeys and submits.

Joy in suffering

Both Peter and James identify the connection between joy and suffering. In the first chapter James sees temptation as an opportunity for our faith to be demonstrated. (James 1:2,12) In the first chapter of his first epistle, Peter connects the future tense salvation of the believer with his rejoicing (1 Peter 1:6-9). The joy unspeakable and full of glory is being experienced now. The full of glory can be translated "glorified joy" like the glorified face of Moses (1Cor 3:10). When the believer is holy (1:15), or showing the holiness of the indwelling Christ, then those on the outside will see the glorified joy of Christ. This brings us full circle to what Christ said back in the upper room, where he said that "***my joy shall remain (abide) in you, and that your joy may be full.***" 15:11 and in his high priestly prayer "***And these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves.***" 17:13. Peter echos the feelings of the disciples in Acts 5:41 when he connects joy with suffering (1 Peter 4:13). It is the suffering that brings out the glory. This only happens when the believer is abiding and his mind is set on things above.

Conclusion

The connection made in the upper room between grief and joy was Christ's teaching that our joy was not connected to our circumstances. The addition of the Holy Spirit bringing the divine nature into the believer gives the believer the opportunity to have the joy of Christ, as well as his love and peace as we have seen. The activating agent is the faith of the believer. Directing faith in what God has promised concerning our future tense salvation and deliverance in the present.