

Lesson 7

Joy

Introduction

It has been said that *love*, *joy*, and *peace* are like a triplet. They go together. On the night before His death, Jesus linked them together:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid, John 14.27.

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my *love*. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love, John 15.9-10.

I have told you this so that my *joy* may be in you and that your joy may be complete, John 15.11.

It has also been said that *joy* and *peace* are like twins. They come together as a pair even more often than *love*, *joy*, and *peace* come as a triplet. Paul seemed to be particularly fond of the two words:

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, *peace and joy* in the Holy Spirit, Romans 14.17.

May the God of hope fill you with all *joy and peace* as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit, Romans 15.13.

In the New Testament, Paul speaks of *joy* 21 times and *peace* 43 times. They are not just expressing happy feelings. Paul teaches:

- Joy and peace are key signs of the kingdom of God, just as important as righteousness. When God rules in a person's life, true joy and peace are born.
 - Joy and peace are the way we are to serve and please God, not in solemn anxiety.
 - Joy and peace are essential ingredients in our Christian hope - we are to be *filled* with joy and peace.
- Joy and peace are evidence of the power of the Holy Spirit overflowing in our lives.

It is not surprising that Paul includes joy and peace in the fruit of the Spirit. These words are not just describing a cheerful, contented emotional state. This is something profound and at the heart of our Christian life.

Joy is Having a Family

For a moment, let's revisit Romans 14.17. The Christians at Rome were a collection of Jews who had come to believe in Jesus as the Messiah along with Gentiles who had come from a completely "outside," pagan background. In Romans 14-15 Paul encouraged them to accept and welcome one another because Christ had accepted them and made them one. Then Paul quoted Deuteronomy 32 and encouraged the Gentiles to praise and rejoice in what God has done.

For what reason should they be filled with joy? They were now included in a new family - God's family. They were no longer far away. They had a whole new set of relationships because of Jesus and His reconciling death and resurrection. In Ephesians, Paul made this point even more emphatically. In chapter 2, he writes that Gentiles were once separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, *without hope and without God in the world*, Ephesians 2.12. They were alienated in every possible way. Not a very joyful place to be.

Now Paul says things have completely changed. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of his household, Ephesians 2.13, 19. Later Paul will say that they are not only citizens (a political metaphor), but members of God's household (a family metaphor). And in verse 22, they will learn that they have also become the place of God's dwelling through the Spirit. Christians, no matter their background or circumstances, get a whole new family through belonging to Christ.

The concept of family may be troubling for some individuals. Some people have very little or no joy from having a family. There are all sorts of reasons for that: cruel parents, marriage breakups, lonely singleness, bereavement, feuds, hatreds, and even persecution by non-Christian family members. But when people belong to Christ, even if they do not have the joy of a vibrant and loving human family, or even if they endure the pain of a broken and abusive family, or loneliness, or bereavement — when they belong to Christ, they have the joy of a new family among God's people. This does not mean everything is nice and rosy all the time. It doesn't necessarily mend all the brokenness and fix all the problems. But there is a joy in belonging to the family of God through Christ amid all the sorrow and pain and struggle of a dysfunctional or missing human family. It is a joy that comes from knowing that you are part of a family you can never lose, part of the oldest family in history, the largest family on earth, and your family for all eternity. These family relationships are created and shared because Jesus brings the joy that is the fruit of the Spirit.

There are two examples in the New Testament that illustrate this. One is the story of the prodigal son. When he came home, he was embraced and welcomed back into the family by his father — even though he had effectively renounced his family by departing the way he did. The other story is the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. Once he was saved, he went on his way rejoicing. He now was a part of a family. (Read Isaiah 56.5-7 and connect it to the joy the eunuch would have had.)

Joy is Having a Faith

The gospel means *good news*. Good news brings joy. The gospel is the best and greatest news the world has ever heard. The gospel tells us the great truths of what God has done through Christ to save the world, because of his love and grace. God promises us forgiveness, eternal life, and a future filled with hope. These are things that can never be taken away because they are rooted in who God is and what God has done. How can we not be glad when we know the good news and believe it?

The joy that is generated by our faith in these great truths and promises can be present in our lives, even when there is suffering, loss, bereavement, illness, or accident, and even in situations of persecution and

martyrdom. Such things, whether trivial or terrible, cannot and do not take away the inner joy that is the fruit of the Spirit.

A Final Thought

Why is joy so often missing in our lives? Why do some Christians seem to be so acquainted with being miserable? Maybe because we simply *forget*. It's easy to get tired and irritable and then to fall into self-pity. And self-pity is the great enemy of joy. We need to remember the great truths of the gospel from the Bible itself. We need to go over them in our minds until we realize how inconsistent it is to say we *believe* such wonderful gospel truths, and then still go around filled with misery and feeling sorry for ourselves and spreading gloom on all those around us.

Sometimes we are *suspicious* of joy. Life is serious. Christianity is more than just having a laugh. But that doesn't mean we should not have hearts that are filled with joy when our lives are filled with the Holy Spirit. The Bible shows us very clearly that God not only *wants* us to be joyful, but actually *commands* us to be! It sounds strange to say that "joy is a duty," but it is a happy duty! Paul was happy to repeat the command, so let's obey it! *Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again: Rejoice, Philippians 4.4*

For Thought and Reflection

1. What three things were on Jesus' mind the night before His death? What is paradoxical about that when you consider the situation?
2. Why does Paul concentrate so much on joy and peace in Romans 14-15?
3. What is so joyous about being part of God's family?
4. How much is God's family a part of your everyday life?
5. How does the good news of the gospel produce joy?
6. What two things cause us to neglect the joy that we've been given?