

September 16, 2007

## “The Fruit of the Spirit: Joy” Galatians 5:22-23

FCF: Confusion as to what joy is and how it is possible

**PROPOSITION:** (anchor) Because joy is the fruit of the Spirit,  
(magnet) we must look to the Spirit to cultivate joy in our lives.

### **SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

What is this thing called “joy”? “Chariots of Fire” – Eric Liddell, a devout Christian and one of the finest runners in the world, is training for the 1924 Olympics. As the story unfolds, he decides to go to the mission field in China. But not yet. Not until this race is behind him. He tells his sister ([READ quote](#)), “*I’ve got a lot of running to do first. Jennie, you’ve got to understand. I believe that God made me for a purpose – for China. He also made me fast, and when I run, I feel His pleasure.*”

Could that really be? Could such joy be known, felt, and experienced? Apparently so. But how? Let’s look at what the Apostle Paul says in Galatians 5.

**SCRIPTURE READING:** [Galatians 5:16-23](#)

### **PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

### **SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

Some events are so dramatic, some actions so profound, they have but only one reasonable explanation. History records that around 51 A.D. in the city of Philippi, two travelers were thrown into prison by the Roman authorities. Their views had stirred up such hostility among influential people of the city, we read ([READ Acts 16:22-24](#)). And there in that prison, in the middle of the night as the blood of their wounds was drying and the bruises of their beatings were aching, something extraordinary happened ([READ Acts 16:25](#)). How could this be? From everything we know of these men, they were intelligent, rational. How is this possible? How, in the midst of pain, how could a prison block become a concert hall? What had happened? Some events, some actions are so dramatic, so profound, there’s just no other explanation but the Spirit of God at work.

How does this relate to “joy”? Remember where we are in our study through Paul’s letter to the Galatian church. A new teaching had begun to infect the church. Paul’s readers had been enjoying and growing in the gospel, in the freedom of knowing their status and standing before God was secured by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. No longer. To those “alones” were added rules and ceremonies whose time and purpose had passed. The work of Christ was not enough. To grace had been added works. From liberty they had fallen into bondage. And Paul was calling them back.

Back to security in Christ. Back to freedom from sin’s power. Back to life in the Spirit. Beckoning and pleading with them, the empty “works of the flesh” are being contrasted with the beautiful “fruit of the Spirit” – the first of which is love, the second of which is joy. “*Jesus died with this in mind. There is so much more awaiting you, so much more He has in store for you. You need His grace. You need His power. You need the Spirit. For the fulfillment you lack, for the joy you seek, you need the Spirit.*”

### **I. WHAT IS THIS JOY?**

For the joy we seek, we need the Spirit. But what is this joy?

#### *A) Not in Circumstances*

Clearly, the joy the Scriptures describe is not anchored in shifting circumstances in any way – not the good, the bad, or the ugly. Let’s take these in reverse order.

##### 1. The ugly

The ugly – this joy is possible despite conflict, adversity, and deprivation.

## 2. The bad

The bad – this joy is not based in the fleeting pleasures of sin, the desires of the flesh.

## 3. The good

Nor is this joy dependent on the good – our accomplishments, even success in ministry.

### *B) But in Christ*

No, this joy is dependent, anchored in something, someone, else entirely (**READ Philippians 3:1**). True joy is found with a focus upon Christ and flows from Him.

#### 1. Rooted in Christ

Such joy is rooted – rooted in Christ – for He does not change. This is why Paul could write to the suffering churches in Thessalonica (**READ 1 Thessalonians 5:16**).

#### 2. Supplied by Christ

Such joy is rooted in Christ. And more, it is supplied by Christ, through the Holy Spirit. It is the “fruit of the Spirit” – the unfolding of His renewing work in our lives.

All of which is His desire for us – to be a rejoicing people, to know this joy.

### *Illustration:*

This is what lies behind Jesus’ counsel to the 72 as they returned from their first taste of ministry in His name (**READ Luke 10:17-20**). Rejoice but in the right things. Do not make the blessings more significant than their Giver. Success of any kind rises and falls. Assurance in Christ remains the same. And that alone is what matters.

Such is what was behind the Feast of Tabernacles (or Booths) in the Old Testament. (**READ Leviticus 23:39-43**). The timing seems ironic but was intentional – just after harvest – just when, by all appearances, Israel could be tempted to rely upon, to rejoice in, their wealth. Just then God wanted them to remember who was their life.

### *Application:*

The Lord desires for His people to be joyful. But it is a certain kind of joy – a joy in Him. Which then brings a challenge we all have to face. Where is your joy? What is it based upon? Joy in this world is too flimsy, too fleeting. Clearly, it needs to be rooted and supplied outside ourselves. For the joy of Christ we need the Spirit of Christ.

## **II. WHY SHOULD WE BE JOYFUL?**

That said, the question could be asked, “Why should we be joyful?” And here we need to recognize the clear connection between grace and joy. Even sequentially...

### *A) What’s Already Happened*

In terms of the past, in terms of what has already happened.

#### 1. What Jesus has done

That is, what Jesus has done, what He has accomplished (**READ Galatians 3:13-14**). This is the finished work of Christ. Nothing can be taken away from this or added to it.

#### 2. Who we have become

And as a result of this finished work, what Jesus has done, we then can be settled as to who we have become – once orphans, now sons (**READ Galatians 4:4-7**). Why then should we be joyful? Because of the grace already poured out for us in the past.

### *B) What’s Going on Now*

Yet this work continues on into the present in terms of what’s going on now.

#### 1. Change in us

Philippians – the book on the theme of joy – (**READ Philippians 1:6**). In ways we might not perceive, God is working in and upon us, changing us, renewing and remaking us.

#### 2. Place of suffering

Which often comes about in the context and in the process of suffering. Why then should we be joyful? Because we have the confidence that this pain is not wasted or pointless.

C) *What's Yet to Come*

Suffering is then bearable with an eye towards the future – what's yet to come.

1. The return of the King

(**READ Philippians 3:1, 20-21**) The expectation of the return of the King...

2. The renewal of all things

...and the renewing not just of ourselves but of all things – this then is grounds for joy.

The grace of God brings the joy of God. And with transforming effect.

*Illustration:*

I think of Martin Luther in his earlier years as a conscience plagued, guilt ridden monk and then the radical change, a personal reformation, that came as a result of his discovering this joy-giving grace. He used language describing (especially Romans 1:16-17) the very doors of paradise opening to him when he came to understand the gospel.

*Application:*

(**READ Zephaniah 3:14-17**) And we wonder how He feels about us? Listen, we should rejoice in Christ because He rejoices over us! With singing – we sing to Him because He sings over us. We're told in Revelation that He is waiting even now for the wedding to come with His bride – the Church. Waiting – we then wait for Him because He is waiting for us. Jerry Bridges said (and I know this is a startling quote), "*Only Christians have a reason to be joyful.*" That's not meant to denigrate the tastes of joy a non-Christian can experience but to accentuate the point that deep joy is possible only for the Christian and comes only through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

**III. HOW CAN WE BE JOYFUL?**

But this then presses yet another question. "*How then can we be joyful?*"

A) *The Part We Play*

What is the part we play in this? As we said last week, we are to keep in step with the Spirit. In this case, we are to heed the command – "Rejoice in the Lord!"

1. Consider God

Taking time to do what I would call, "considering God" – meditating upon the wonders of His wisdom, His love, and His power – choking out the weeds of much sorrow.

2. Examine our hearts

Considering God. And then examining our hearts. Is there some unconfessed and unrepented sin in my life? Part of joy is the enjoyment of communion with God. Where we are in sin, that closeness is broken. Is there some misplaced confidence, someone or something else I am rejoicing in? Is God taking me through a season of discipline – unpleasant and perhaps unwanted and resisted? Is it perhaps a time of trials, of testing, to strengthen and refine my faith? Here's the thing. Where the joy has been lost, we need to examine our hearts and lives, looking into the Word and to the wisdom of others.

B) *The Joy the Spirit Brings*

Such is the part we play. And as we do so, behind and carrying us through all our labors is the joy the Spirit brings. For Galatians 5 shows us we are not only to keep in step with the Spirit but be led by the Spirit as well. There is the reality of the command to rejoice and the reality of our need of His work in our lives to give us hearts of joy.

1. A holy joy

And what the Holy Spirit gives is a holy joy – not wasted in debauchery.

## 2. A joy of the Spirit

But that said, it is yet still joy, real joy – not wasted in dourness.

*Illustration:*

Some of you may know something of an event recorded in Nehemiah 8. The people were returning from exile. The community was being rebuilt. And the law was read (**READ Nehemiah 8:9-12**). There are times when sorrow is simply inappropriate.

*Application:*

Not all times, obviously. But there are times when the appropriate response is that of rejoicing. The Lord desires for His people to be joyful. Do you know that? Do you believe that? Listen. Maturity in Christ is not best expressed with a sour expression. We've somehow gotten the idea somewhere along the lines that holiness, a heart for God, can only exist where there is a frown, a grimace, and a scowl. Oh, may the Lord deliver us from such foolishness! For the fruit of the Spirit is what? What does Paul say? Joy!

### **CONCLUSION:**

This joy, this fruit of the Spirit, is alone what can explain such extraordinary events as we read in ancient times such as in Acts 16. And that we read of in modern times as well. Case in point, Ugandan bishop Festo Kivengere's account of the 1973 execution by firing squad of three men from his diocese (**READ [750 Illustrations](#), 130**):

*February 10 began as a sad day for us in Kabale. People were commanded to come to the stadium and witness the execution. Death permeated the atmosphere. A silent crowd of about three thousand was there to watch. I had permission from the authorities to speak to the men before they died, and two of my fellow ministers were with me. They brought the men in a truck and unloaded them. They were handcuffed, and their feet were chained. The firing squad stood at attention. As we walked into the center of the stadium, I was wondering what to say. How do you give the gospel to doomed men who are probably seething with rage? We approached them from behind, and as they turned to look at us, what a sight! Their faces were all alight with an unmistakable glow and radiance. Before we could say anything, one of them burst out:*

*“Bishop, thank you for coming! I wanted to tell you. The day I was arrested, in my prison cell, I asked the Lord to come into my heart. He came in and forgave me all my sins! Heaven is now open, and there is nothing between me and my God! Please tell my wife and children that I am going to be with Jesus. Ask them to accept him into their lives as I did.”*

*The other two men told similar stories, excitedly raising their hands which rattled their handcuffs. I felt that what I needed to do was to talk to the soldiers, not to the condemned. So I translated what the men had said into a language the soldiers understood. The military men were standing there with guns cocked and bewilderment on their faces. They were so dumbfounded that they forgot to put the hoods over the men's faces! The three faced the firing squad standing close together. They looked toward the people and began to wave, handcuffs and all. The people waved back. Then shots were fired, and the three men were with Jesus.*

How is this possible? Some events, some actions are so extraordinary, there's just no other explanation but the Spirit of God at work. This is a joy that is so much more solid than whatever vain happiness this world offers. And it comes only by the fruit of the Spirit – not through works but through grace, not by us but by Him.

Do you know what it is to bear such fruit? It will not grow in the soil of self-righteousness or self-dependence. Such soil is too hard and produces only weeds. That said, you were made for this. Jesus died that you might have such joy and has sent the Spirit to cultivate His fruit. The realities of all this have pulled at you, increasing a sense of longing in your heart. And that's good. But it can only come by the Spirit of God. There are things we must consider and carry out. But we look to Him. Let's pray.

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