

"JOY - How to Maintain Your Joy"

Rev. Perry J Fruhling, St. Mark's Faith & Life Center, 28 Sept 08

Grace and Peace...Why is it that so many Christians lose their joy? They start off great. They are so filled with enthusiasm and love. When they first come to know Christ everything is fantastic. But as time goes by they seem to spring a leak and the joy drains out of them. A lot of Christians are just mumbling through life -- no real joy in their life. There are a lot of killjoys in life -- things that will rob you of joy. Today I want us to look at what Paul has to say about "How to Maintain Your Joy". A recurring theme in Philippians, Paul talks about joy seventeen different times in this book. He keeps returning to this point, repeating himself. This is a good teaching tool.

Philippians 3:1: "Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you." In this passage he gives us three safeguards on how to maintain your joy.

1. RESIST LEGALISTIC ATTITUDES - Legalism is a kill joy. It destroys the joy in your Christian life. It can ruin a family, people, churches. Legalism is substituting rules and regulations for my relationship to Christ. It comes in very subtly as a believer. It gets the focus off **what God has done for you** and gets the focus on **what you have to do for God**. When you flip the focus around like that, you're going to lose your joy. This has been a problem for thousands of years. In the early New Testament times the legalizers were called Judaizers. These were a group of people who said, "Yes, believe on Jesus Christ, trust Him with all your heart but there are also some other things you must add onto your faith." Christ plus works. They said they must keep every one of the Jewish laws to be a believer -- the Sabbath laws, circumcision, dietary laws, etc. Whenever Paul heard about the Judaizers, he got furious. He said they were completely wrong. In Philippians 3, Paul is attacking the Judaizers who are trying to steal the joy of the Christians in Philippi. **V. 2-3 "Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh."** When we think of dogs, we think of warm, cuddly pets. In the New Testament times dogs were not pets. They were wild scavengers that would attack human beings. To call somebody a dog was the worst possible thing.

SAFEGUARD #1: LIVE EACH DAY BY GRACE - Grace is the key to joy. The two words go together. They have the same root word in Greek. To realize that everything God does in you and through you is by grace, rather than working for it and earning it. Grace is the secret of joy. Paul uses his life as an example. Paul was the super-star legalist before he became a believer. He had tried the rules and regulations way and it didn't work. **V. 4 "though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless."** Paul says if you want to compare lists, he has them beat by a long shot. He was super legalist. He gives us five examples of legalism we can apply today. How do you know when you're falling into the trap of legalism:

1) **You trust in rituals.** Paul says *"I was circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel."* We have our own rituals today. Baptism, communion, catechism, baby dedicated. If you fall into this trap, trusting these for your salvation, you're in trouble.

2) **Don't trust in race.** *"I was of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin."* Benjamin was the purest tribe. Paul was named after the first king, Saul, who was a Benjaminite. Paul says he used to trust in his heritage. Some say, "Daddy's a Christian... My mom was a believer... My uncle was a pastor." You can get religion by osmosis but you can't get Christ by osmosis.

3) **Don't trust in religion.** *"I was a Hebrew of Hebrews"*. Paul was a religious person. Jesus has nothing to do with religion except He's 100% opposed to it. Religion is man's attempt to get to God. Works. Jesus Christ is God's attempt to get to man. That's a relationship and that's a big difference. No denomination has a copyright on truth or a patent on God.

4) **Don't trust in rules.** *"In regard to the law, I was a Pharisee."* Paul kept all the rules. We think of the Pharisees as hypocrites but there were some genuine, sincere ones. They took the Ten Commandments and expanded them into 619 other commandments. A Pharisee would not even eat an egg if it were laid on the Sabbath, because that was considered work. If he got bit by a mosquito on the Sabbath, he would not scratch because that was considered work. A Pharisee would not allow a woman to look in a mirror on the Sabbath because she might see a grey hair and pull it and that would be considered work.

5) **Don't trust in reputation.** *"As for zeal and legalistic righteousness, I was faultless."* Today we have people saying, "I read the Bible, I serve, I go to church..." That's legalism. The point is there is nothing wrong with any of these things. The problem is thinking that they give me points with God. And they don't. He loves you unconditionally. **Romans 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.** Paul said Christianity is not a matter of rules, rituals and regulations. The Christian life is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

2. REEVALUATE YOUR ACTIVITIES - A lot of people are looking for joy in all the wrong places. This year Men's Fraternity will focus on two areas of a man's life: home and work. And it's all done in the context of our relationship with Christ. Watch as Men's Fraternity founder, Robert Lewis, speaks to these issues... (video approx 1:30). Men I want to encourage you to take the leap into Men's Fraternity this year. Women, kick them out of the house at 6 a.m. so they will focus their lives... all begins October 8th.

Paul compares the value of religion to the value of a relationship to Christ. There is no comparison. He had been a very religious person, but he was lost. **V. 7-8 "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is**

more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ." The word "profit" is used one time. "Loss" or "rubbish" is used three times. This is Paul's Profit and Loss Statement. All the things he talked about he considered complete loss, worthless. Phillips' translation: *"I consider it all mere garbage compared to being able to win Christ..."* The translators here are being polite, delicate. "Garbage" and "rubbish" are not the words. The word in Greek is the word for "dung", "manure".

SAFEGUARD #2: KEEP YOUR PRIORITIES IN PERSPECTIVE - Know what is important, what is profit and loss. Don't lose your joy over things that really don't count. The number one reason people lose their joy is they misplace their priorities. They get too involved in things that really aren't that important. Paul is saying that what matters most is not your prestige, pedigree, possessions, position or power. You can have it all and still be unhappy. **Luke 12:15** ***"Beware! Don't be greedy for what you don't have. Real life is not measured by how much we own."*** In v. 8, Paul points out that life consists of trade-offs. That's an important lesson you must learn in life. He said he gave up something in order to gain something else. He gave up his religion in order to have a relationship. People are afraid that they are going to have to give up something in order to become a Christian. And they're right! When you come to Jesus Christ you give up everything you've got. What I got is worth more than everything I gave up. You give up guilt and gain a clear conscience. You give up worry and gain a power for living. You give up frustration and lack of purpose in life and gain real meaning and purpose in life. That's a pretty good trade-off! Jim Elliot said, "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep for that which he cannot lose." What are you afraid of giving up for God? It's often that very thing that is robbing you of your joy.

3. REFOCUS YOUR AMBITIONS - Lasting joy comes from knowing Christ better and better. **V. 10** ***"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death."*** Paul says his number one goal in life is to know Christ better and better. How well do you know Jesus Christ? There's a difference between **knowing about Christ** and **knowing Christ** personally. The word "know" in the Greek is the word "yada". It means to know intimately, experientially. As the Amplified version of the Bible states it: *"That I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him..."* There is a big difference between knowing and knowing about.

(DRAMA – "MAKING TIME")

SAFEGUARD #3: GET TO KNOW CHRIST BETTER AND BETTER. Never stop growing and developing your relationship with Christ. The moment you stop growing, you're going to lose your joy. So many Christians stay too close to where they "got in" to the Christian life. They haven't grown one bit since they made that initial decision. They don't have any joy. How do you get to know God in a personal way?

1) Time. It takes time to know anybody, to develop a relationship. It takes time to get to know God. You need to spend time alone with God to get to know Him. Set down with your Bible, read it, pray, talking with God about your wants and needs, listening to tapes, spending time with God and letting Him talk with you through His word. You can't develop a relationship in a crowd. The only time many Christians ever think about Jesus Christ is in a crowd, when they are with other Christians. They need to develop the relationship on their own, one on one.

2) Talk. It takes talk. You must talk to God. Pray. Relationships require communication. Listen to Him talk to you as you read His book, the Bible. **John 16:24 "Until now you have not asked for anything in My name. Ask and your joy will be complete."** Much prayer, much joy in your life. Little prayer, little joy. No prayer, no joy.

3) Trust. Relationships are built on trust. God wants you to learn to trust Him. He will allow all kinds of problems in your life so you can learn that He is reliable all the time. God is reliable in every situation. He can be counted on to be faithful. I didn't learn this overnight. That is learned from years of going through problems and seeing God pull me through it and work them out. You only learn this experientially. As you go through problems you learn to trust God because you realize as He pulls you through each one of them that is another area you can trust God.

Paul says that his number one ambition in life is to know Christ at the end of his life. He's in jail in Rome. He's getting ready to die. He knew Christ already, but he wanted to know Him even better. Are you losing your joy? Have you lost it? Has your Christian life become routine, no spark, no original freshness you had when you first met Jesus Christ? If so, which of these three kill joys are the culprit?

1) Legalism? Have you slowly substituted rules and regulations for a relationship to Christ? "Iffy" Christians. If I do this, God will accept me. If I do this, God will love me. Legalism seeps into our lives and chokes the joy.

2) Maybe you've never trusted Christ because you're a religious person. You're trusting religious heritage. Maybe you're trusting in keeping the rules. But Paul says when it comes to knowing Christ none of that really counts.

3) Materialism can take your joy away too. What does your spiritual Profit and Loss sheet look like? What are you really living for? Remember that game called Trivial Pursuit? That name describes how a lot of people live...spending their lives on things that won't last. What do you need to let go of?

A life without purpose is a killjoy. People are looking for joy in all the wrong places. Joy comes from knowing Jesus. It begins with a decision to say, "God, I want to know You personally." Let's pray....