

Week 8 (Oct 29–Nov 4): What Stops You from Choosing Joy?

Philippians 4:2–9

A lot has been said about joy so far in Philippians, but it's as if Paul begins the grand finale. In the middle of our passage, Paul proclaims:

Philippians 4:4

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

Christians are called to be a joyful kind of people! But here's the truth: When we are happy in sin, we can't be happy in Christ. Though every believer is called to be joyful, sin steals our joy. Paul addresses a few of these "joy-stealing sins" in the following verses.

4 Sins That Stop You from Choosing Joy:

1) A Lack of UNITY

Philippians 4:2–3

I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. ³Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

God's people should be marked by unity. In fact, Jesus prays for future believers to be unified so that the world would know His love (John 17:20–26). The focus of unity is all over the Bible. Why? Because a divided church promotes a conflicted gospel and misrepresents a united God.

There are two key ideas in this passage: Paul calls the quarrelsome bunch to be unified and he calls the church to help them be unified. We don't know what these ladies were arguing over but we do know these were two believers were distracted from the gospel.

Too often are the arguments of God's people over non-essentials of the faith. But whatever the case was, the church was called to help in the reconciliation process (see also 2 Corinthians 5:11–21). Whether it is personal or between other parties in the church, Christian disunity reflects poorly on Christ. When we are unified, we represent a united Christ. When we are divided, we represent a divided Christ.

2) A Lack of GRACE

Philippians 4:5

Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.

This verse is closely connected to the previous idea of unity. The word “gentleness” can also mean “graciousness” or “reasonableness.” In other words, God’s people should be marked by grace, gentleness and reasonableness. Harshness, apathy and a contentious spirit stand in opposition to this calling. The root of a lack of grace is selfishness and the result of a lack of grace is anger (see Proverbs 15:1). When things don’t go our way, there is a temptation to show no forgiveness, grace or reasonableness.

But similar to what Paul says in verse 5, listen to what James says, “The wisdom from above is first pure, then peace-loving, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without pretense. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who cultivate peace” (James 3:17–18). The “gentle” used in Philippians 4 is the same word used in James 3. James’s context helps us understand that “gentleness” is related to peace, compliance, mercy and good fruit.

Furthermore, Jesus modeled this gentleness, grace and reasonableness all throughout his life. This did not mean that Jesus was a weak man. Jesus was far more concerned about modeling a life that glorified the Father than having his own selfish ambitions fulfilled. A gracious life models the grace of Jesus. We are called to be gracious as a response to the grace given to us. We are able to forgive because of the Gospel’s effect now and in the future.

3) WORRY and ANXIETY

Philippians 4:6–7

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

God’s people should be marked by an outward peace (unity/graciousness) and also an inward peace. Worry is sin because worry is evidence of a lack of trust that God knows what He is doing. In many ways, worry is an attempt to play God when we don’t have the ability to play God (see Matthew 13:22).

Of all the sins in this session, worry is often the most widely-accepted. But there is only one proper response to worry: prayer. In praying through our worries and anxieties, we admit our inability and declare our dependence upon God. We are called to present all our requests to God through prayer and petition and with thanksgiving, praising the God of the universe for

listening and working on our behalf for His glory. In prayer, God promises to grant us His peace.

There are a variety of passages related to Paul's words in here:

Psalm 94:19

When I am filled with cares, your comfort brings me joy.

Matthew 6:25–27, 33

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?... ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

1 Peter 5:6–7

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you at the proper time, ⁷ casting all your cares on him, because he cares about you.

4) Worldly THINKING

Philippians 4:8–9

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. ⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Finally, God's people should be marked by spiritual thinking. Paul doesn't just say abstain from the bad, but he says focus on the good. Every good thing comes from God (James 1:17). We need to replace our polluted, worldly thoughts with His thoughts.

This is the essence of Ephesians 5:18–21, “And don't get drunk with wine, which leads to reckless living, but be filled by the Spirit: ¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music with your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ giving thanks always for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ submitting to one another in the fear of Christ.” Hence Colossians 3:2, “Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”

But we can't replace these thoughts in our own strength because our flesh can't beat our flesh. We must learn to "take every thought captive to obey Christ" (see 2 Corinthians 10:3–5). Furthermore, we must believe that the Lord will always be faithful to provide a "thought replacement" amid temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13).

We can't be joyful in Christ when we are delighting in sin. We must remember that disunity, gracelessness, worry, anxiety and impure thoughts will steal our joy in Christ.

Discussion Questions:

- What would be the impact if the members of a local church lived lives of constant rejoicing (v. 4)?
- Why is it important for Christians to be unified?
- What are some examples of non-essential doctrines that often cause arguments and distract from the unity we are called to promote in the gospel?
- How can you practice strengthening unity with other Christians you know?
- Do you struggle to give grace to others? Why?
- Do you struggle to give yourself grace? Why?
- How is the statement at the end of v. 5 (The Lord is near) connected to the instructions to rejoice and be gentle? What does Paul mean by "The Lord is near?"
- Why does a healthy prayer life help against a world and mind of worry?
- What are ways that you prioritize prayer in your daily life?
- What are the negative impacts of anxiety? (on yourself as well as others around you) How does Paul tell us to deal with anxiety?
- How do you practice focusing your thoughts on God and the things of Him?
- What are some of the things of God you think about?
- Verses 8-9 end with the promise, "And the God of peace will be with you." What are the preceding criteria and how are they connected to experiencing the peace of God?