

SEEKING A MIND OF JOY (THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS)

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Lesson Two: Joyous Victory In The Midst Of Troubling People (Chapter 2)

Peter the Great made a law in 1722, that if any nobleman beat or ill-treated his slaves he should be looked upon as insane, and a guard should be appointed to take care of his person and his estate. The background of this edict was an incident in his past. This great monarch once struck his gardener, who being a man of great sensibility, took to his bed, and died in a few days. Peter, hearing of this, exclaimed, with tears in his eyes, "Alas! I have civilized my own subjects; I have conquered other nations; yet I have not been able to civilize or conquer myself."



"All of us have lost our joy because of people: what they are, what they say, and what they do" (Wiersbe).

☞ Peanuts the comic strip character Linus said: "I love mankind. It's PEOPLE I cannot stand!"

It is those people who do not act civil that rob us of joy in life. The Psalmist wrote about such people: ☞

- Psalm 28:3, "Do not drag me away with the wicked and with those who work iniquity, who speak peace with their neighbors, while evil is in their hearts."
- Psalm 36:4, "He plans wickedness upon his bed; he sets himself on a path that is not good; he does not despise evil."
- Psalm 43:2, "For You are the God of my strength; why have You rejected me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?"
- Psalm 109:3, "They have also surrounded me with words of hatred, and fought against me without cause."

How often have you been robbed of joy by people who have cheated you, used you, slandered you, stolen from you, cursed you, betrayed you or committed any of the long list of personal offenses that we do not have time to list?

☞ Psalm 39:3, "My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue."
☞ The incident wounds you deeply. Your emotions are rubbed raw. ☞ You suffer physiologically. But it is the cancerous psychological hit that is the hardest to forget. ☞ The wrong done to you sticks in your mind and sours your entire life. You know you should forget but you cannot—the incident just keeps ☞ gnawing at you; emotional pressure builds and finally you explode.

This is not only your problem. It is an emotional struggle all share. When emotional overloads are added the situation often worsens—accusations are hurled, bitterness is nurtured, and barriers are constructed. One's personal joy is exiled.

This is the setting in which Philippians 2 applies. We often become aggravated with people because we are not getting our own way or those people are not doing things the way we suggest (and "my way" is the best). And, sadly it is often found that most conflicts ignite over some absurdity. Look at a few illustrations of this fact...

- October 1, 2020. NEWSWEEK Arkansas Man Shoots Woman Dead Over Botched Fast-Food Order, Police Say a man who shot a woman dead and injured his own brother after they got his fast-food order wrong has been handed a 130-year prison sentence. Andra Crockett killed 37-year-old Priscilla Aldridge and also shot his brother Kevin Thomas when they took the botched order back to his house in Blytheville, Arkansas. Crockett, aged 35, became extremely angry and argued with Aldridge when he was presented with the food on March 5 last year, a Mississippi County Circuit Court was told. According to one neighbor, Crockett looked at the food the duo had just brought back and said: "(EXPLETIVE) you know I don't like mayonnaise on my hamburger". <https://www.newsweek.com/arkansas-man-shoots-woman-dead-over-botched-fast-food-order-1536014>
- We read that in a court, presided over by Judge Ivan Lee Holt, Jr. (A St. Louis Circuit Court judge for 33 years), a twenty-seven-year-old woman drew a three-year prison sentence for a fatal shooting which followed an argument over ownership of a nickel.
- A Church in Dallas was divided. The division became so serious that each faction entered a lawsuit against the other to dispossess it from the Church and to claim the Church property. This litigation came into newspapers, and many watched the court proceedings with interest. The judge finally ruled it was not in the province of the civil court to settle this matter until it had first been aired before the Church courts. So, the matter was referred to the higher authorities in the denomination. Eventually a Church court assembled to hear both sides. Later the court made up its mind and awarded the property to one of the factions. The losers withdrew and formed another Church in the area. It was reported in the newspapers for all Dallas to read that, in tracing this squabble to its sources, the court found the trouble began when a bishop at a Church dinner received a smaller slice of ham than a child seated next to him! (J. Dwight Pentecost. *The Joy of Living: A Study of Philippians*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973, p. 55).

☞ Philippians 2 is an amazing narrative teaching us how to deal with those ornery, irritating, obnoxious people that plague our lives. The chapter offers a simple command and then illustrates with three personalities how that command is to be followed. There are four divisions involved in this strategy to safeguard joy when you face problem people.

☞ *The First: Philippians 2:1-4, the COMMAND—Unity*

Mankind is created as a social being—he NEEDS companionship; he NEEDS other people. As a "social being" man cannot live in isolation. This socialization is recognized and those who are not "socialized" live a dysfunctional life and some are so anti-social they are dangerous (The most extreme are identified as "sociopaths" or "psychopaths." They exhibit extreme antisocial attitudes and behavior and a lack of conscience that is manifested in violence.).

☞ God expects His People to be sociable; to interact with one another; to know and understand each other. In the Church ☞ we share "fellowship" which involves a melding of hopes, ideals and actions moving us toward our mission's objective! Thus, there is camaraderie; a brotherhood; a family unit. This unity accepts each regardless of his flaws. Regardless of personality, talent, visibility or status, each person is valued as a significant part of the whole (☞ 1 Corinthians 12:12-26, "the members may have the same care for one another").

This unity is founded in the Church because four basic truths are accepted by every member:

1. ☞ "Encouragement in Christ"—These people are "in Christ"—they are no longer in the world. This new relationship changes the way each interacts with the other. This new relationship is a wonderful blessing and should cause one to strive for unity.

2. 🕊️ "Consolation of love"—This refers to God's love which gives great comfort. The Greek is literally, "if you know the tender cheer that love gives." This indicates that each member must share "tender" feelings toward the other members. You are neither aloof; indifferent, nor unconcerned toward other members. This tenderness eliminates selfishness, bickering, and strife. We will be focused on using our words for encouragement and cheer! (See John 4:3-4)
3. 🕊️ "Fellowship of the Spirit"—This refers to the fellowship resulting from obedience to God's Will. One in fellowship with the Spirit will surely follow God's desire and do everything to produce unity.
4. 🕊️ "Affection and compassion"—"The old Greek word stands for pity and humanness." As surely as there is compassion when we see one going through some sorrow, weakness, or testing, our hand will immediately go out and strive to help!

This is God's command for socialization within His Church. Christians cannot live in seclusion. The Christian cannot function within his own "cell" but must be connected with others. This is essential if the Lord's Church is to function as God designed!

I am obligated to be a functioning member of this congregation because God commands it! 🕊️ The how to establish this functionality is found by following these steps (verse 2):

1. Christians are to have the "same mind"—Oneness of mind, a common cause, common purpose in regard to the basic principles of God's Word.

1 Corinthians 1:10, "Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment."

"So often disharmony appears in our congregations when agreement is sought on the minor things...The minor things that have little or no bearing on the basic truth of Scripture demand tolerance but not unanimous acceptance" (Blair, 44).

Christ taught that unanimous agreement must be found on doctrine (John 17:17, 20, 21). We must all think alike in doctrine! The Word of God is the sole basis for Christian unity!

2. 🕊️ "Same love"—Christians must have the same love as God. This is not conditional but unconditional love (agape). Such loves even in the face of rejection and criticism.
3. 🕊️ "One accord," "united in spirit." Whenever a congregation is united in spirit all divisive feelings will be put aside!
4. 🕊️ "One mind," "intent on one purpose." Each will show a desire to please Christ as King so that all believing will know Him and bow their knees in obedient confession to Him!

The "how" of unity requires diligent effort and great patience with one another. This unity is possible—even with the most irritating and obnoxious person. 🕊️ The pressing issue is NOT how "impossible" that brother or sister is but HOW ARE YOU following God's commands to make it a reality? This is the emphasis in verses 3-4.

The emphasis focuses upon negatives and positives in relationships. Basically, the counsel is to be thoughtful and considerate in their attitudes toward others (Galatians 6:10). The basic plea is for each of us to be unselfish and humble in all relationships!

Watch how you thoughtlessly and carelessly talk about a fellow Christian! Many times, one speaks bitter and biting words that plant suspicion and charges with suggestive innuendoes, so that another is viewed with a bad opinion. This is contrary to what God commands and will remove joy in life!

Too often the critic's cynicism and innuendoes cause another's value and important role in the congregation to be ignored. Consequently, energy is lost, strife is stirred, suspicion is planted and progress for the Gospel is stopped because the focus is on the irritating personality or the mistakes of the past.

One day William Hunt, the renowned artist, took a class of pupils out to a picturesque countryside. As the sun was setting, it provided a glow of exquisite beauty. Mr. Hunt urged his pupils to seize the opportunity to capture it on canvas. After some time, he noticed one student working with painstaking concentration on the detail of the shingles of a nearby barn. "If you spend so much time painting the shingles on that barn, you'll never get to the remarkable sunset," said Mr. Hunt. How many are there in our churches who are painting shingles when they need to look at the truths in the Scriptures" (Blair, 44-45).

🕊 *The Second:* Philippians 2:5-11, the KEY—imitating Jesus Christ

Inspiration offers the example of One whose life provides a pattern for us so we do not lose joy over irritating people. Verse 5 provides us the key concept—"Mind" is literally "attitude." "Have the exact attitudes of Christ and you will find joy in your unity and harmony!" We need to develop the proper attitude toward others or we will lose joy. How can we do this? By following the example of Jesus Christ!

This passage bluntly speaks to all who think of themselves as "too good" to be servants to others; to be patient with the irritating behavior of others.

If anyone ever had the right to express his own right it was Jesus Christ. BUT He gave up an exalted position to become a Servant to the lowest human! Should we think that we have the right to display a greater intolerance to the irritating person than Christ? IF He gave up such a position to become a Servant, what reason argues that we should do any less?

What traits formed this attitude of Christ which all Christians should possess today?

1. Unselfishness (verse 6). Christ existed as God but was willing to give up a heavenly position to occupy an earthly position! Jesus did not think of Himself but others.
2. 🕊 Humility (verse 7a). Christ willingly lowered Himself in order to save humility! Humility results when one is disciplined to the will of God and says, "not my will but Thine be done."
3. 🕊 Service (v. 7a). We must think how we can serve others. Jesus did not pretend to be a servant but was actually one; He was not an actor playing a role! (Matthew 20:28).
4. 🕊 Sacrificial Attitude (v. 7). This is a significant ingredient for creating unity among Christians. Most of us are willing to serve as long as it does not cost us too much. But we must be willing to serve another even if it means a great sacrifice (Romans 12:18-21; Matthew 5:39, 44).
5. 🕊 Perfect Obedience (v. 8). "Humbled" is literally "to submit to authority." He set aside His own will to submit fully to the Will of God (Hebrews 10:7).
6. 🕊 Glorifies (v.11). This was His goal in life. It is easy to put aside selfish rights when we are concerned about God's glory!

The simplicity of guarding against your joy being stolen by irritating people is stated: "You have this attitude that Christ demonstrated"!

☞ *The Third: Philippians 2:12-18, the CONCEPT—"selfless sacrifice"*

Safeguarding your personal joy so it is not stolen by troubling people is possible ONLY by *your personal choice*.

1. ☞ YOU must "work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (verse 12).

When you are dealing with ornery and irritating people, the burden is upon YOU to deal with the situation.

a. ☞ Do not think THEY have to change to suit your preferences.

b. ☞ Do not think THEY are totally wrong.

c. ☞ Do not think THEY are so much inferior than you are.

d. ☞ Interaction with the irritating and obnoxious involves "work."

2. ☞ You must allow God to "work in you" and change your attitude, actions and comments about the brethren you do not like (verse 13).

3. You must ☞ "prove" your love, consideration and compassion toward those who "get under your skin" (verses 14-16). The way you behave reveals your commitment to God!

4. You must ☞ "share the joy" with others in accepting everyone into the congregation (verses 17-18).

☞ *The Fourth: Philippians 2:19-30, the EXAMPLES—Timothy & Epaphroditus*

Timothy found joy in the midst of troubling people by being...

- A person of commendation (verse 19a). Proverbs 12:8a, "A man will be praised according to his insight."
- ☞ A man of positive nature (verse 19b). Such was like Barnabas (Acts 4:36).
- ☞ A person of strong, sincere concern (verse 20). We are commanded to have concern (Galatians 6:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:11, 14; Hebrews 10:24-25; 1 Peter 3:8).
- ☞ A man of outstanding commitment to Christ (verse 21, cf. verse 20a). May we unite with Job and say the words of Job 5:8! Job 5:8—"But as for me, I would seek God, And I would place my cause before God."

☞ Epaphroditus secured joy in the presence of problematic people by sacrificing in the right attitude. This brought...

- Results in new relationships (verse 25).
- ☞ Results in new responsibilities (verses 26-28).
- ☞ Results in wonderful blessings (verses 29-30).

The Personal Application

There may be some who think this is impossible. They might say, "You just do not know what s/he is like! There is just NO WAY that I can do what you are asking. If s/he is in that group then I am OUT! I'm not the only one who feels toward him/her like this...so-and-so and so-and-so and others refuse to be around him/her."

☞ Self-justification of avoidance only causes you to lose joy.

☞ A decision NOT to accept people that you do not like places you in dramatic contrast with Christ, Timothy and Epaphroditus!

Three personalities are discussed in this chapter. These provide the object lesson on how to live with irritating personalities so we do not lose our joy!

Concluding Thoughts...

☞ The Christian is one who is able to find joy in the presence of irritating people because he anxiously serves not wanting to be served (Philippians 2:3). He is so busy working on items that are essential that he has no time for the items that are frivolous.

☞ A practical reality...Your problem person presents you with a choice on how you will act.

- You can choose to act so that division and disrespect for his/her personal value is evidenced.
- ☞ Or you can choose to act with the same attitude that Christ demonstrated: "a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you" (Colossians 3:12-13).

☞ When you think of the most problematic person plaguing your life, what choice will you make—one choice banishes joy and the other choice provides the environment in which abundant joy will flourish. ☞ **Romans 12:18**, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men."

- Reality—sometimes it is not "possible." The Greek term is δυνατός (dunatos) doo-nat-os' and refers to the power you have yourself. This talks about your power or your capability. Sometimes you can do everything within your power/ability and it is not enough! "IF" highlights the reality that you cannot make everyone "happy"! It is NOT your obligation to make anyone "happy"!
- Limits—"so far." This places limits so you can confidentially know you cannot make everyone like you.
- Action—"depends on you." You are responsible only for your actions.
- Scope—"all men." This action is not reserved for a select group but for "all" people.

A practical tool...Your Weekly To-Do List...Make a list of things that really need your attention; actions in which you will invest your emotions, time, and energy. When you are offended by someone else, put that offense at the end of the list and give it your attention AFTER you have all of the other things finished. It is important to write it down because that gives your psyche justice in the offense being recorded. But with it being at the end of the list you will have ample time to let the simmering anger cool and even die. When you are tempted to think about it, look at your list and tell yourself that "it is not time yet" to deal with it.

☞ Next Lesson—How to have joyous victory over WORLDLY THINGS!